

INTRODUCTION

“Dank-Hymne der Freundschaft, ein Geburtstags-Stück” reads a quite unspectacular entry in the estate catalogue of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (NV 1790, p. 57). The description indicates that the composition was in two parts and that it required a large orchestra including trumpets, timpani, and horns in addition to the usual woodwinds and strings; this was a much larger piece than the other occasional works Bach wrote during his tenure as music director of the free imperial city of Hamburg from 1769 to 1788. The original score and the complete set of parts of this work are preserved in the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. Since this extraordinary music archive was never available for thorough scholarly research,¹ this piece remained unknown until the collection of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin became available in the summer of 1999.²

Composition History

Besides the information given in the entry of NV 1790 almost nothing is known about the origins of the work. Even the text of the work gives few hints as to who was honored by this lavish composition. Since C.P.E. Bach felt uncomfortable when working under pressure of a deadline, the dates of composition given in the autograph score deserve our attention. The first part was begun on 2 January 1785 and already completed by 18 January; the second part was composed within a week between 19 and 25 January. This extremely condensed period of compositional activity was probably due to external causes, in all likelihood the limited time between the date he received the text for this occasional composition and the planned date of performance, most likely on the birthday of the person to be honored. Despite the apparent haste of composition the *Dank-Hymne* is largely an original work. Apparently only the concluding movement of part I contains borrowed

material: the chorale setting on the melody “Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allegleich” had previously been used as the final movement of the oratorio of the *Bürgercapitains-Musik* in 1780; a sketch for reworking this for the *Dank-Hymne* has been preserved among the original materials for the 1785 Passion according to St. Matthew (see commentary). The placement of the sketch on an empty page of the autograph partial score of the 1785 Passion suggests that Bach started the composition after completing the Passion in late 1784, thus confirming the strict time constraints under which he was working.

The *Dank-Hymne* was obviously destined for an important (and probably also a wealthy) patron. The extant musical material gives the names of several singers whom C.P.E. Bach regularly relied on, thus making it clear that the piece was not only composed in Hamburg but was also meant to be performed there. However, a systematic survey of the Hamburg newspapers from Bach’s time reveals no trace of a public announcement of a performance of this large-scale work, and no printed libretto is known to survive.³ The *Dank-Hymne* was certainly not intended for a regular Sunday service because the text—despite its many invocations to God—is only semi-sacred in nature.⁴ The continuo part is labeled “Fundament” instead of the usual “Organo”; it is notated at pitch, thus excluding all the main Hamburg churches except St. Michaelis as potential venues. A brief solo section in the final chorus of part I shows that a harpsichord, not an organ, was used as continuo instrument. This seems to point towards a private venue; as one known example of such a large-scale work performed in a private setting, the premiere of the so-called Brockes-Passion by Reinhard Keiser was given in a private home in Hamburg in 1712 with an audience of five hundred!⁵

1. Heinrich Miesner includes a brief description in his dissertation, *Philipp Emanuel Bach in Hamburg. Beiträge zu seiner Biographie und zur Musikgeschichte seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1929), 91–92.

2. See Christoph Wolff, “Recovered in Kiev: Bach et al. A Preliminary Report on the Music Archive of the Berlin Sing-Akademie,” *Notes* 58/2 (2001): 259–71.

3. Barbara Wiermann, *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Dokumente zu Leben und Wirken aus der zeitgenössischen hamburgischen Presse (1767–1790)*, *Leipziger Beiträge zur Bach-Forschung* 4 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2000).

4. The Holy Trinity is reduced to God the Father, who is addressed in rather unorthodox terms (“Herr Zebaoth” or “Jehova”); Jesus and the Holy Ghost are not referred to at all. The image of God is, however, by no means that of the Old Testament.

5. See *MGG^{II}*, Personenteil, s.v. “Keiser, Reinhard,” 9:1599.

Given the lack of external evidence, the one and only letter known to have been written by Bach in the period of frantic compositional activity in January 1785 gains special importance. It is addressed to Bach's friend Carl Wilhelm Ramler, the famous Berlin poet of odes and oratorio texts. After a passing note on the planned publication of *Die Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu*, Wq 240, whose text stemmed from Ramler, Bach nervously asked: "Tell me openly, for certain reasons: has the Duke of Kurland, with whom you often dined, ever said to you anything about me? And if so, what?"⁶ Unfortunately Ramler's response has not been preserved.

Peter von Biron, Duke of Kurland, was one of the most eminent patrons of the "Hamburg" Bach. When Peter ascended the throne in 1772, C.P.E. Bach dedicated to him the six printed keyboard concertos, Wq 43. Autograph sources now preserved in Hamburg and Vienna contain a note "Mietau" in the composer's hand, a reference to the capital of Peter von Biron's duchy (formerly Mitau, now Jelgava, Latvia).⁷ One of the first public performances of Bach's famous double-choir *Heilig*, Wq 217, was part of the wedding ceremonies of Duke Peter and Dorothea von Medem in 1779.⁸ Peter von Biron's birthday was 15 February, which would perfectly explain the exceptional haste in preparing the score of the *Dank-Hymne* in January 1785. He was an elderly man (born in 1724), who had already lost two wives, facts to which various stanzas of the final movement of the libretto vaguely allude. From C.P.E. Bach's letter to Ramler we learn that the Duke of Kurland was in Berlin in early 1785; from other documents we know that he intended to visit the famous spa of Carlsbad in Bohemia. It remains unclear whether or not he may have intended to celebrate his sixty-first birthday in Hamburg; in any event the Duke turned southwards from Carlsbad to Italy.

The original performance materials indicate a process of revision quite unusual for an occasional oratorio. In several movements the musical text was revised in subtle details. The harpsichord solo in no. 14 (mm. 232–59) was appar-

ently an afterthought, as it was entered on empty staves of the score prior to the copying of the parts. Furthermore, Bach felt a need to reassign some of the soprano solos to new soloists: the recitative, "Und du, Herr Zebaoth" (no. 4), was entrusted to the tenor Johann Heinrich Michel, instead of "Mr. Schum[acher]"; Schumacher's second recitative, "Und doch seh ich zurück auf jene Bahn" (no. 8), was simply written out on a separate piece of paper to be used by a different, though unspecified singer. After the parts had been copied the dynamics in nos. 5 and 14 were refined by Bach, who entered them in the autograph score and in the set of parts in a somewhat darker ink. Interestingly, Bach prepared a list of his changes to guarantee consistency among duplicate parts (see plate 8). The careful and unusually extensive process of revision makes one wonder whether or not the performance originally planned for the spring of 1785 had to be postponed; indeed, it is possible that the first performance did not take place at all in 1785. In the spring of 1786 Peter von Biron visited his possessions in the Netherlands; the usual travel routes would have made a visit to Hamburg on his way back to Kurland easily possible.⁹

The hypothesis that the *Dank-Hymne der Freundschaft* was composed for Peter von Biron is corroborated by another manuscript in the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. A manuscript libretto suggests that the aria "Fürsten sind am Lebensziele," Wq 214 composed in (late) 1785 was destined for a pasticcio cantata celebrating the birthday of Dorothea von Medem, the wife of this noble ruler.¹⁰ It therefore seems likely that Peter von Biron, who is known as the promoter of the most important performance of Handel's *Messiah* in eighteenth-century Germany, also commissioned one of the most ambitious vocal works of the Hamburg Bach.¹¹

6. "Sagen Sie mir doch offenherzig, aus gewissen Ursachen: Hat der Herzog von Curland, bey dem Sie oft gegeben haben, nie etwas gegen Sie von mir versprochen? u. weñ es geschehen ist, was?" See *CPEB-Briefe*, 2:1063; English translation adapted from *CPEB-Letters*, 222.

7. These include copies of some of the sonatinas for harpsichord and orchestra in Hamburg (D-Hs, ND VI 3472^o) and the set of variations for keyboard (commonly known with an accompanying violin part), Wq 79 in Vienna (A-Wgm, XI 36269/A 86).

8. Reported in the *Staats- und gelehrte Zeitung des Hamburgischen unpartheyischen Correspondenten* (8 Jan. 1780), 2; quoted in Wiermann, 459–60.

9. The literature mentions, however, only stays in Hanover and Brunswick. See Ulrich Leisinger, " 'Fürsten sind am Lebensziele' Wq 214. Ein Geburtstagsstück für Dorothea von Medem," in *Die Verbreitung der Werke Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs in Ostmitteleuropa im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ulrich Leisinger and Hans-Günter Ottenberg (Frankfurt/Oder: Konzerthalle "Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach," 2002), 515–22.

10. The manuscript of the libretto refers to 3 February 1784, the twenty-third birthday of Dorothea von Medem. However, NV 1790 gives the date of composition as 1785; indeed, the author of the libretto, Elise von der Recke, visited C.P.E. Bach several times in October and early November 1785. The complete text of the cantata is transcribed in Leisinger, "Fürsten sind am Lebensziele Wq 214," 520–22. The aria, Wq 214, is published in *CPEB:CW*, VI/3.

11. The *Messiah* performance took place with a band of four hundred under the direction of Johann Adam Hiller, the Duke's honorary kapellmeister and later Thomascantor in Leipzig, in the Berlin Cathedral on 19 May 1786. See *MGG^{II}*, Personenteil, s.v. "Hiller, Johann Adam," 8:1563.

Structure of the Work

In its overall structure, orchestration, and mood, the *Dank-Hymne* closely resembles the Hamburg *Bürgercapitains-Musiken* which traditionally consisted of a sacred oratorio and secular serenata. Differences may be noted, however, in the brevity of the second part of the *Dank-Hymne* and the omission of allegorical figures. In contemporary classifications of poetry the hymn forms a genre of its own, using an elevated style as opposed to the style prevalent in cantatas and songs.¹² Sulzer's definition of "Hymne" can easily be applied to the *Dank-Hymne*: "The prevalent affect in a hymn is devotion and adoring admiration; the content is a description of the characteristics and of the works of the Highest Being in accordance with this affect; the tone is solemn and enthusiastic."¹³ Referring to the Psalms as *exempla classica* Sulzer makes it clear that only a few texts properly fit the tone of a hymn: "The most glorious and most solemn hymns are those found in the Davidian collection of Psalms. Of our current songs for the church service or sacred songs there are a few which can be counted among the hymns. But it is extraordinarily difficult to refer to such an elevated topic in a simple manner and at the same time with the highest degree of dignity; it is difficult to express the highest that can be grasped by our imagination and by our sensation in a popular manner. This, however, is required for a hymn."¹⁴

This contemporaneous definition describes better than any modern one the hybrid nature of the *Dank-Hymne*, which is a setting of a semi-sacred poetic text, and which despite its scope is meant for private devotion rather than for public church services. The first and more extended part of the bipartite work is a hymn of praise to God and addresses in general terms the Almighty One who has wisely and mercifully ordered his creation. Biblical verses

12. For a widely-disseminated characterization of the hymn, where it is treated in conjunction with the ode, see Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*, 2d ed. (Leipzig, 1792–94), 2:689–90.

13. "Hymne. (Dichtkunst) Der darin herrschende Affekt ist Andacht und anbethende Bewunderung; der Inhalt eine in diesem Affekt vortragene Beschreibung der Eigenschaften und Werke des göttlichen Wesens; der Ton feierlich und enthusiastisch." Sulzer, 2:689.

14. "Die prächtigsten und erhabensten Hymnen sind die, welche wir in der Sammlung der Psalmen Davids antreffen. Unter unseren heutigen gottesdienstlichen Gesängen oder geistlichen Liedern, kommen auch einige vor, die man zu den Hymnen rechnen kann. Aber es ist höchst schwer von einem so hohen Gegenstand mit Einfachheit und zugleich mit der höchsten Würde zu sprechen; das Höchste, dessen unsere Vorstellungskraft und unsere Empfindung fähig ist, populär auszudrücken. Dieses aber wird zu den Hymnen erfordert." Ibid.

taken from Psalms 107 and 150 and set as choruses serve as a framework for a sequence of recitatives and arias. A discrepancy between the subject matter and the poetical qualities of the text can be observed. The text contains several repetitions of thoughts (see, e.g., no. 4) and many words uncommon even in contemporaneous writings. These objections notwithstanding, it cleverly arranges images of strong theological significance to show that all creation should constantly praise the Lord who commands every being. A closer look reveals the text to be a rich source for musical inspiration; the seraph tuning his harp for song (no. 2) and the sound of the trombones announcing the day of judgment (no. 12) are striking examples. The aria no. 9 evoking the picture of a heavenly Zion is particularly appealing thanks to its allusion to the soft western winds; the text of the arietta culminates in the Angels' song, the Sanctus (no. 10). C.P.E. Bach probably asked for a text of this kind in order to include his famous Heilig for double choir, Wq 217, a movement used in many of his festive compositions of the later Hamburg years.¹⁵ The other aria texts are equally well suited to the demands of a composer. The aria "Der Vogel singt's den Lüften" (no. 5) aptly contrasts the serenity of the birds in the air and the cattle in the meadow on the one hand, and the savagery of the lion and the wild ravens in the desert on the other, providing the composer with an opportunity for "tone-painting," then widely in vogue throughout Germany. A setting of the jubilant Psalm 150 with interspersed chorale stanzas (with the melody "Lobt Gott, ihr Christen allegleich")—some in astonishingly remote keys—concludes the extended first part of the oratorio.

In the second part a serene and joyous mood dominates; the text becomes more personal, alluding to friendship and to the birthday of an unnamed noble person. Like the serenata of the *Bürgercapitains-Musiken* (see CPEB: CW, V/4), the *Dank-Hymne* ends with an extended vaudeville-like strophic song; by means of instrumentation and delicate dynamic changes Bach creates the desired variety in nine stanzas.

The text likely stems from an author living in Hamburg or at least someone well acquainted with the local situation. Similarities to other texts of Bach's late Hamburg years—the St. Matthew Passion (performed in 1789) and most notably the text of the *Musik am Dankfeste wegen*

15. Since the aria no. 9 ends with a cadence on D, the alto arietta "Herr, wert, dass Scharen der Engel dir dienen," preceding the Heilig in the printed score, was obviously meant to be omitted to avoid a duplication of the harmonic gesture.

des fertigen Michaelis-Turms, H 823—can be observed. The latter can be positively ascribed to Johann Ludwig Gericke (1751–1823), a medical doctor and talented author of occasional sacred poetry. It remains to be investigated whether or not these similarities are merely coincidental.

Sources and Issues of Performance Practice

The source situation for the *Dank-Hymne der Freundschaft* is favorable. The autograph score and the original set of parts are in the music archives of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. Both sources are relevant to the edition because Bach carefully proofread the original set of parts, entering details for the planned performance. In many respects the set of parts is more specific than the autograph score and thus serves as the primary source for the edition. Since the work was composed for a specific occasion it is unlikely that any copies—with the possible exception of a dedication copy for the patron—were made during Bach's lifetime or in the years before the manuscripts came into the possession of the Sing-Akademie in or around 1811.

Despite the existence of a full set of parts, a few aspects of performance practice remain to be investigated. The cue for "Das Heilig" in the autograph score (on fol. 13v) was not realized in the set of parts for the *Dank-Hymne*, because they would have used the parts already available in Bach's library. The double-choir Heilig, Wq 217, rather than the single-choir setting, Wq 218 or any other piece, was meant to be inserted after aria no. 9.¹⁶ However, since the original set of performance parts for the Heilig is lost, we do not know how Bach coped with the differences in orchestration between the interpolated movement and the main work. Wq 217 requires two groups of three trumpets and timpani; it seems unlikely that Bach would have restricted himself to two trumpets in the remainder of the *Dank-Hymne* if he had actually intended to hire additional musicians for the Heilig. In all likelihood Bach had the horns play the upper trumpet parts of one of the choirs, omitting (or rearranging) the third trumpet and timpani parts in one of the two choirs. On more than one occasion Bach would have needed an arrangement of the Heilig with reduced forces; however, no such setting is known from Bach's immediate circle.

As far as we know Bach had only eight singers at his

disposal, who formed the choir and sang the solos. The autograph score and the set of parts indicate the following singers were intended to perform the piece: (Johann Georg?) Schumacher (soprano); Peter Nicolaus Friedrich Delver and Johann Matthias Seidel (altos); a certain Herr Rosenau and Johann Heinrich Michel (tenors); and Friedrich Martin Illert and Johann Andreas Hoffmann (basses). Only the name of the singer of the "Canto. Ripieno" is not mentioned anywhere. Bach assigned the first solo for a given voice to his first singer (Delver as alto, Rosenau as tenor, and Illert as bass). Though Bach usually regarded a recitative and an aria as a unit, assigning both to the same singer,¹⁷ in the second part of the *Dank-Hymne* he chose to assign the accompanied recitative no. 17 to his second singer Hoffmann, and the aria no. 18 to Illert.

The performance of the soprano parts was a constant problem during Bach's tenure as music director in Hamburg. The rearrangement of some of the soprano solos for tenor might be explained if "Mr. Schumacher," the soloist specified in the autograph score, became ill or was otherwise indisposed in early 1785; his name does not appear in the set of parts, whereas the names of the other singers mentioned in the score are given on the respective part books. As in most of the parts for the Passions, the soprano aria no. 16 in part II was entered into both soprano parts; it cannot be ruled out that this aria was sung by both sopranos in unison. Likewise, copies of the soprano solo sections in the final chorus (no. 19) are contained in both parts. However, the much more demanding aria no. 7 is only found in the principal part. The part labeled "Canto. Ripieno" has a tacet indication for the aria instead; the ripieno part also does not contain no. 14b, scored for solo soprano and the upper strings. Since the performance was apparently not intended for one of the Hamburg churches, it would have been possible to hire a female soprano as was sometimes the case from the time of Johann Mattheson, but there is no evidence from the sources that Bach (or the commissioner) regarded this as an option.

Despite a number of entries by Bach in the continuo parts, the scoring of the continuo is not entirely clear. The bassoon apparently played in all movements, even those without other woodwind instruments. With a few exceptions (e.g., the specific indications for no. 6) there is no clue as to whether or not the violone dropped out in solo

16. The double-choir Heilig is published in CPEB:CW, V/7; for a discussion of its use in Bach's church cantatas and occasional works, see Paul Corneilson, "Zur Entstehungs- und Aufführungsgeschichte von C.P.E. Bachs Heilig Wq 217," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 92 (2006), forthcoming.

17. This observation was originally also valid for nos. 4 and 5, both conceived for "Mr. Schumacher" and nos. 6 and 7, both conceived for "Hr. Rosenau." A series of changes between sopranos and tenors led ultimately to an uneven distribution of solos.

or particularly soft sections. In no. 19, mm. 85–100, the autograph indications are seemingly self-contradictory: the part labeled “Violoncell. u. Fagott.” bears an indication “ohne Fagott,” whereas the same passage is inscribed “Violon allein” in the part “Violon. u. Violoncell.” Thus it remains uncertain whether the violoncello is supposed to participate in the stanza.

In two instances, the autograph score could be interpreted as if more than one keyboard instrument may have been involved in the realization of the continuo: the final bars of no. 11 have a “tasto” indication above and bass figures below the staff line; the basso line in no. 14i, in the passage with an obbligato harpsichord part, is nevertheless figured in the score. In both instances, the “Fundament” from the original set of parts has no figures, implying that it was obvious to Bach’s copyist Michel that no doubling was intended.

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