

# 1 | Early years, 1685–1703: background, family, studies

The Obituary is headed ‘the Honourable Johann Sebastian Bach, world-famous in organ-playing, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer and Music Director in Leipzig’, and begins

Johann Sebastian Bach belongs to a family in all of whose members equally a love for and skill in music seem, as a common gift, to have been imparted by nature.

Emanuel Bach, presumably responsible for these words, was familiar with the outlines of his family’s musical history, since quite apart from any anecdotes about it that circulated in the family, his father had spent time around the age of fifty compiling on paper a selective genealogy. This is the ‘Origin of the musical-Bach family’, *Ursprung der musicalisch-Bachischen Familie* (Dok. I, pp. 255–61), a Genealogy known to Emanuel in whose household it was later copied: a unique source of information about the family tree and, in the sparseness of other evidence, used ever since in all kinds of connections. This is a document, often since referred to as a ‘table’, into which something can be read about the composer, his interests, his industry, even now and then his opinions.

Although for reasons that can only be guessed Bach contributed little to the published biographies and autobiographies of the day, he did compile a genealogical list either from scratch after many time-consuming enquiries or, more likely, by revising and enlarging an older document begun by a previous member of this large family. There remained some gaps waiting to be filled, signs of some haste (Dok. I, p. 263). Still an indispensable source, it numbers fifty-three Bachs in the course of two hundred years or more, many of them professional musicians well known in central Germany (qv), though only a few became so in a larger Europe – Sebastian himself and, as perhaps he was anticipating by the 1730s, several of his sons. Emanuel added to the Genealogy in which he and five brothers figured. It also enabled him to begin his ‘Memorial’ more tellingly, even proudly, than John Mainwaring was able to begin his biography of Handel (‘George Frederic Handel was born in Halle’).

Since the ‘Memorial’ or Obituary opens in the present tense, the question immediately arises whether it was prepared during the composer’s

lifetime, perhaps shaped like a curriculum vitae or a biography for one of the several lexicons being published in Leipzig which did not, however, include him. The two other obituaries printed along with it begin less ambiguously by referring to their subjects as deceased. And as Emanuel's narrative continues, a further point might strike the reader: now and then one has the impression that he was citing from press cuttings at his disposal, leading one to wonder further whether his father had collected and preserved them along with the genealogical table. Possible instances of such cuttings are identified below as they occur.

It is easy to imagine personal reasons why a composer would compile such a Genealogy at or near his own half-century, when Scripture itself had ordained that one's fiftieth was a jubilee year, with family celebration (Leviticus 25:10). In Bach's copy of the Calov Lutheran Bible, various marginalia in the chapters to do with such observances and rules suggest that he had more than a casual interest in such things (e.g. Cox 1985, facs. 66). And there were also likely to be personal reasons for the Genealogy, including both a birth and some deaths: the recent birth of Johann Christian (the 'London Bach', in September 1735, his last son, as it happens) and the loss of so many close relatives, from early childhood on. Deceased close relatives were his parents (mother at her own half-century, father two days short of it), gradually all seven of his siblings (one before he was born, two while he was a small infant), his first wife (she too had been an orphan), ten of his twenty children (an eleventh died later, aged twenty-four in 1739) and a particularly beloved employer. His brother and former guardian Johann Christoph had died in his fiftieth year, as had his sister Marie Salome in her fifty-second.<sup>1</sup>

This catalogue of bereavements may have been larger than was usual among such classes. For example, by his late fifties Telemann had lost only two of his surviving seven children. But the wider the extended Bach family was, the more constantly news of deaths within it must have circulated among relatives or, just as bad, been taken for granted. For example, ten of the eleven children of Johann Günther, great-great-grandson of Sebastian's great-grandfather, died before their mother. Sebastian's first conscious family bereavement was when he was six years old (brother Balthasar),

<sup>1</sup> It seems that fifty was a significant age in Thuringia and Saxony. At fifty, Handel apparently planned a visit to his native Halle (HHB 4, p. 254); later in Weimar, at about that age, Goethe drafted *Der Mann von fünfzig Jahren* ('the man of fifty'). Also probably belonging to 1735 is the 'Bach goblet', on which are engraved the JSB monogram, several inscriptions including *Vivat*, and motifs including B A C H (qv) (Dok. II, p. 264; Dok. IV, p. 278): a jubilee gift?

his last within nine months of his own death (grandson Johann Sebastian Altnickol); and not only relations – during Bach's time at Leipzig, no fewer than seventeen students in the choir-school died. All this implies that when Bach's own entry in the Genealogy says he is still living 'by God's will', this is no empty formula.

There is another relevant point: in working on the Genealogy when he did, with whatever personal or religious urges he may have had, the composer was knowingly or otherwise following the day's taste for family tables. In the book-centre of Leipzig such tables were well known throughout the 1720s and 1730s. Johann Hübner was publishing aristocratic and other tables for a ready market, one of them with some 333 tables (meant to be an evocative number, no doubt), and these could have encouraged Bach to work on a list of the 'musical Bachs', perhaps even to think of publishing it. His careful assemblage of materials confirms that he was a born collector and portfolio-organizer, even implying that he was more of a letter-writer than is now known or than he was said by Emanuel to have been (Dok. III, p. 290). Both the various blanks he left in his table (e.g. when a date of birth was unknown) and the musical specifics he included (e.g. that Johann Günther Bach was singer and schoolmaster at a church in Erfurt) suggest that he had a lively variety of sources: existing information, correspondence, conversation, visits to and from, hearsay.

In listing the musicians of the large and well-distributed clan to which he, an early orphan, belonged, Bach accomplishes several things: he establishes the story of an exceptional family, omits mere family-lore anecdotes and salutes an art practised to the greater glory of God. The story is not a fairy tale but sets out an (as it were) apostolic succession, one not entirely unlike the genealogical tables in two of the New Testament Gospels and parts of the Old Testament Pentateuch – another biblical allusion, in other words, whether or not a conscious one. So well read in both Old and New Testaments were genealogists, including J. S. Bach, that there cannot have been much difference between conscious and unconscious similarities in all such compilations.

The first name, Veit Bach, was that of a man said in both Genealogy and Obituary to have fled Hungary in the sixteenth century on account of his *Religion* (Obituary: Dok. II, p. 80), specifically his *Lutheran Religion* (Genealogy: Dok. I, p. 255). Although the latter phrase, like its antithesis *Roman-Catholic Religion*, was used commonly enough in mid-century Dresden and elsewhere, since 'Hungary' (meaning present-day southern Slovakia) was already predominantly Protestant at the time, Bach's Genealogy might have been making an assumption. Perhaps *its* source was

referring to Christianity itself, which at that period was under serious threat from Islam and Turkish Muslims. (Also threatened in the early sixteenth century were Jews in that region, when it was finally divided into Hapsburg, Ottoman and Transylvanian sections. The Jews' *Religion* was another one to be shunned?) The Turks were still being fought centuries later by the Swedish army to which Sebastian's brother Johann Jacob belonged (Dok. I, p. 259). Elsewhere in German literature 'Hungary' featured as a haven for anti-Papist musicians, as in Daniel Speer's *Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus*, 1683.

The entry on Veit Bach, a *Weißbecker* ('fancy baker'), is fuller than for some others, for from him a Tree of Jesse springs, branches of a Protestant tree flourishing over generations. Partly as a result of this Genealogy, the Bachs have become the best known of all musical dynasties, though positions of higher prestige were occupied in Paris by some of the Couperins.

It seems that a few years later, the Genealogy was joined by another family document of sorts, the Old-Bach Archive (*Alt-Bachisches Archiv*), a surviving collection of choral works by older family members, and today deposited in the Staatsbibliothek, Berlin. Now constituting some two dozen pieces, but once perhaps many more, the collection includes music by Johann Christoph, the organist in Eisenach admired by Sebastian (his father's cousin); Georg Christoph (Sebastian's uncle); and Johann Michael (Sebastian's first father-in-law, also praised in the Genealogy). Some of the copying of scores was done by this Johann Christoph, some performing parts and a text by Sebastian's father, but the biggest contributor-copyist has been identified as not a Bach but Ernst Dietrich Heindorff, cantor in Arnstadt, who died in 1724. This suggests that the archive was first assembled as a 'repertory for use in Arnstadt, during Heindorff's cantorate' rather than as a Bach family document, and that it passed complete or incomplete to J. S. Bach when the organist there, his first cousin Johann Ernst, died in 1739 (BJ 1998, pp. 138, 147).

In the following years Bach then added to the Archive himself, *perhaps* contributing or intending to contribute such autographs as the score or parts of various early cantatas (qv) (Nos. 71, 4, 106 and 131), fit representatives of his early successes. He also wrote much of the text underlay for Johann Christoph Bach's twenty-two-part motet 'Es erhob sich ein Streit' and parts for another, 'Lieber Herr Gott, wecke uns auf'. This last, in which Bach was helped by a student, dates from his final months and could have been prepared for his own funeral. So it seems that the Archive continued to be made up piecemeal over the years and was meant to be enlarged further, even after Emanuel appears to have taken charge of it under the

name *Alt-Bachisches Archiv* (Dok. III, p. 502). It was also Emanuel, presumably being reliably informed, who spoke of his father performing Johann Christoph's motet in Leipzig (Dok. III, p. 292).

As well as how, quite why Bach should carefully preserve such an archive, provide some title-pages for its music, complete some texts, insert corrections and even make some performance materials from it, is an interesting question. Likely, of course, is 'family loyalty': preserving work by other Bachs, a further and natural step in his work on the family tree. And just as his own name featured in the Genealogy, so representative manuscripts of his own music could have been added to the Archive, or were planned to be. Was this one of the reasons that in his maturity he made certain fair copies, such as the late collection of organ-chorales, and even that it was for this that he completed the Mass, an archive in more senses than one? Also likely is that the Archive was still supplying him with service-music from time to time in his final years, despite its out-of-date styles. For it is often forgotten that as well as modern cantatas, a good deal of much earlier music was sung in the main Sunday services in the larger churches – motets, chorales, chant. Presumably by the time the Archive passed to Emanuel along with the main copy of the Genealogy, its value for the family was mostly (but not entirely) antiquarian. But this was something not at all insignificant for the wider Bach family, judging from a letter of 1728 written by another Bach, Johann Nicolaus, who was aware of the family's tradition that it had come originally from 'Hungary' (BJ 1989, p. 213). So was J. G. Walther when he included a biographical entry on J. S. Bach in his *Lexicon* in 1732.

To imply in the 1730s that music was an honourable family trade was a reflection of the growing national respect for 'art and the artist', *Kunst und der Künstler*. These very words appear often in the Obituary itself, indeed conspicuously so, and became deeply respected over the German Enlightenment and Romantic periods. After all, this was not a dynasty of shoemakers or bakers but, as the Genealogy's title said, 'musical Bachs', which included not only composers and performers but also those who were active in devising new musical instruments. Walther (1732, p. 64) suggested that those called Bach were devoted to music since their very name was melodic (B A C H, qv). A surgeon and a shopkeeper who qualified for inclusion in the list of 'musical Bachs' were, one assumes, gifted amateurs – and therefore in principle very different from one early Bach who had been a different kind of musician (a court jester/fiddler) and is not listed, despite Sebastian's probable knowledge of him. (His portrait had even been engraved and published: see Geiringer 1954, plate iv.)

Unlike true family trees, the genealogical table lists few mothers, wives or daughters, mostly in earlier generations, although the best surviving source of it is a copy made by Sebastian's granddaughter. The table does mention the 'four unprovided-for daughters' of Johann Michael Bach of Gehren, one of whom was Maria Barbara Bach, Sebastian's first wife; but, curiously, she is not named. Nor are his wives mentioned under his own entry, any more than his second wife is in the communicant lists at Leipzig when they name Bach and with him, fairly regularly, one or more of his sons. Such a formal church document is unlikely to name women even though the formative table in Matthew 1 includes Mary (an actual personal name?), and baptism-records list godmothers, usually by defining their status ('wife of . . .'). In a letter of 1730 discussed further below, Bach makes a point of mentioning the current professional position of three sons, noting also that his wife sings well and that his first child, Catharina Dorothea, is unmarried and plays 'not badly' (*nicht schlimm*: Dok. I, p. 68). In a further letter of 1748, he informs a cousin about Emanuel's 'two male heirs' but does not mention their sister, for it was through boys that the list of 'musical Bachs' contained in the Genealogy might gradually grow longer.

Yet Bach's own mother was undoubtedly musical, being a member of the family Lämmerhirt, closely involved with music in Erfurt and even mentioned in the Genealogy (Dok. I, p. 256). Erfurt was the area's largest town and a Hanseatic (qv) city with allegiances far afield, and it happens that Elisabeth Lämmerhirt was also related to two other prominent musicians in Thuringia: J. G. Walther (she was Walther's grandfather's half-sister) and J. H. Buttstedt (she was his wife's second cousin). These were composers to whose music her gifted son was to respond later in one way or another and, clearly, a mother's connections could be important to a musician. Telemann in his autobiographies claimed that his musical gifts came from his mother, as something surely had come to Johann Sebastian Bach from his. Both of Bach's wives had belonged to professional musical families and must have contributed to the musical gifts of the children, as also no doubt to their daily musical studies.

### 'Honourable Thuringians'

After listing various musical members of Veit Bach's 'race' (*Geschlecht*), the Obituary continues

It would be something to wonder at that such fine men should be so little known outside their fatherland if one did not bear in mind that these honourable Thuringians were so content with their fatherland and their standing [there] that they would not venture at all far from it, even to go after their fortune.

There is something approaching an apology here. Emanuel is speaking of earlier Bachs, ‘worthy men’ the memory of whom deserves to be kept fresh, musicians he had learnt about from the Genealogy and the Old-Bach Archive. Whether he is fairly representing his father’s views as they had been expressed at various times, perhaps at some moment of particular discontent in Leipzig, cannot be shown. Emanuel would certainly have known how much travel and such experiences had featured in recent biographies of contemporary composers (in Mattheson 1740) and for his readers, the relevance of what he says to the biography that follows would not have been missed. Especially the musicians among them would assume that normally a musician’s highest status could be measured only by two kinds of success which Bach, unlike Handel, never achieved: leaving home to study abroad, especially Italy; then occupying a position of prestige in a court or capital city such as Hanoverian London or Prussian Berlin. (It was in Berlin that Emanuel and Agricola were working by the time the Obituary was published.)

A general and keen interest in a musician’s early studies and later career is clear from Johann Mattheson’s collection of biographies published a few years earlier, the *Ehren-Pforte* of 1740, which generally addressed the question of where and what a composer had studied. This is a most important book to bear in mind when reading the Obituary. Emanuel knew that Mattheson had not published a biography of Bach to compare with those of Handel or Telemann, whose travels, meetings with the elite, engagement with opera, concert-going in important cities and so on, were described there. An upper-middle-class boy, Telemann had been a university student in Leipzig, had good and continuing contact with Handel, had travelled, had enthusiastic contact with Polish music, became opera- and church-director for the free city of Hamburg, visited Paris and actually declined the job of cantor in Leipzig. Altogether, such a varied and productive musical life of fame and obvious success as Telemann’s was surely in the mind of Emanuel Bach, his own godson, as he drafted the Obituary.

There were many German musicians of the time with wider experience than Bach. Two very respected musicians trained in Leipzig and whose biographies were published, Fasch and Graupner, had branched out either in or beyond Germany, although Fasch was said to have been unable to afford to study in Italy. (Handel funded his first Italian visit himself from earnings he made in Hamburg, as reported by Mainwaring (1760, p. 42), probably wrongly.) Bach’s successor at St Thomas’s, Gottlob Harrer, had ‘spent some time in Italy’ and learnt composition there as well as the job of cantor (Dok. II, p. 480). These were the kind of travels that Emanuel, who had by then applied to succeed his father, later admitted he had never

made himself (Dok. III, p. 255). The 'Jena Bach', Johann Nicolaus, had spent some time in Italy, as Walther's *Lexicon* of 1732 informed its readers. At about the time the Obituary was published, Emanuel's younger brother Johann Christian was leaving to study in Italy, and was soon to find success in Milan and London, freelancing in the modern way. But the biggest *éminence grise* behind this and other statements in the Obituary, more than is often now recognized, is surely Handel. For some decades the garrulous Mattheson had been lionizing Handel and reporting on his successes, and no doubt news of his great if fluctuating wealth in England had reached his native city of Halle and nearby Leipzig. Furthermore, Handel was not a native Thuringian, the focus of Emanuel's remarks (Halle was within the march of Brandenburg).

To what extent Emanuel is reporting his father's views on 'not venturing far' can only be guessed: his various grumbles over pay and conditions, particularly in Leipzig – grumbles presumably made aloud in the family – may have led all of them to feel a need to justify the fact that he remained there until he died. 'Not venturing far' is an aspect of the biography more important than it is often taken to be. For there is a big contrast here with G. H. Stölzel's obituary that accompanied Bach's, where pages are devoted to Stölzel's travels and experiences, surely affecting Emanuel had he seen it before publication, which is possible. Yet Sebastian himself, at a point in his Genealogy, refers to a certain family member as one who

never took a job [*function*] but sought most of his pleasure [*Plaisir*] in travelling (Dok. I, p. 260)

– an expression of disapproval, even sarcasm? The offender was none other than the son of the Eisenach organist Christoph admired by Sebastian, another Johann Christoph (b. 1676), who became active as a keyboard-player in London, as did other Germans such as J. C. Pepusch. This Bach was probably employed as a theatre musician – another source of disapproval?

For it to be true that J. S. Bach had the chance to achieve fame abroad but chose not to, he would have had to have removed himself more permanently from his native province in his teens or early twenties than he ever did. Handel and Christoph Graupner had done so, one from Halle and one from Leipzig. Or, to match them, he would have had to treat the Leipzig cantorate as a stepping-stone to Dresden or elsewhere, and if he had tried to do this, without success, the Obituary authors would surely know about it. To put it no more strongly: there is little evidence that Bach wanted to stay in Leipzig or was happy as long-term cantor of St Thomas, certainly not in his later years when Emanuel was occasionally with him.



But the theme of contentment with one's home country was not unknown in biographies of other German heroes familiar to Bach and his sons, such as Camerarius's life of Melanchthon, the early reformer and revered colleague of Luther. Melanchthon too was orphaned (aged eleven), expressed fidelity to his fatherland and place of origin, was headstrong and educated himself by assiduously studying what others had written: all motifs to occur in the Bach Obituary. By 1700, several editions of Melanchthon's *Life* had been published in Leipzig, and he remained influential through his practical directives on preaching. (Melanchthon's portrait had been drawn by Albrecht Dürer, who, though well travelled, similarly let it be known that he preferred remaining in Nuremberg to seeking fame and riches elsewhere – as Italian painters did? Dürer's family too was said to have originated in 'Hungary'.) Both Bach and Melanchthon strove 'for God and their neighbour' and parallels between them as musician and theologian were close: a cantata's musical rhetoric was equivalent to a sermon's verbal rhetoric.

Though it could be true that Thuringia was less confined culturally than either Hamburg in the north or Munich in the south, it may be rather wishful thinking to see it as an important cultural crossroads, as some have done. On the contrary, signs of any impending Enlightenment are hard to find in writings and other evidence from an area characterized by a kind of residual medievalism only partially leavened by the Reformation. Travel overland being as difficult as it was, really lively contact between cities on major water-routes such as Amsterdam–London or Dresden–Hamburg would have been easier than, say, Dresden–Eisenach. Yet a province's very narrowness is not a disadvantage when its traditions are healthy and lively. Self-contained Thuringia was a province of marked character and traditions, culturally alive, competitive from city to city and vigorous in a range of artistic endeavour. Here, in such a province, an exceptionally gifted and voracious boy could well have been stimulated both to learn what he could from elsewhere and to rely on his own achievements. Of course, local or national pride can mean underrating the foreign, as it clearly did later in Emanuel's sarcastic reference to the celebrated French organist Louis Marchand. Nevertheless, it was far more common for a Protestant boy in 1700 to be receptive to foreign influences, to seek personal development abroad or in some other way take in what other musical cultures have to offer his education, than it was for a young Roman Catholic boy.

When it says 'fortune', the Obituary seems to mean both financial and artistic success. Certainly the various Bachs including Sebastian did progress financially over their careers, doing so without the kind of risks that

Handel, never a family man, took. In regular income, as a young court musician J. S. Bach earned 28 guilders, as a minor parish organist 50 then 85, as court organist 150 then 200, as concertmaster 250 to 300, as court capellmeister to 450, as cantor about 800, plus not insignificant payments in kind at each stage, as was customary for those with organists' positions in Protestant Germany (lodging, fuel, cereals, etc.). Whether, like some organists in northern cities, Bach was able himself to hire out seats in the organ-galleries of the churches he served is not, and probably never was, clearly recorded. Nor is his income from teaching known in more than occasional detail, but it is not unlikely to have been larger at most stages of his life than his actual salary, though 'off the record'.

Nevertheless, obviously Bach's fame and fortune did not match Handel's. How well situated financially the family was by 1730 or so, with six children at home including one at the university, is a question the composer himself may not have known quite how to answer. As is clear from Telemann's story in Hamburg, there was nothing unusual in a composer-cantor supporting a large household and at the same time devoting vast energies to composing and directing musical events, all without either the large reward or the occasional disaster known to many an opera-composer.

When it praises those 'honourable Thuringians' staying at home and aiming to please loyal countrymen rather than a few and 'perhaps even envious' foreigners elsewhere, a provincial-nationalistic element creeps into the Obituary. The accusation of 'envy' is puzzling, but something similar was still there when later on another Leipziger, Richard Wagner, complained bitterly of those fond of fame and wealth abroad while having no real fatherland themselves, e.g. Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer (Wagner 1907, 2, p. 35). But it is not at all certain whether the young J. S. Bach would have agreed with the Obituary authors, when for all anyone knows, he had (or had once had) the broadest of horizons. It would be dreadful to imagine him towards the end of his life regretting how he had spent it, feeling very provincial, wondering what he had missed in the musical centres of Europe and willing himself to be content with what he had done in his home country 'for God and his neighbour'.

### **Birth, family**

Only after summarizing the family background does the Obituary turn to its main subject:

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in 1685, on March 21, in Eisenach. His parents were Johann Ambrosius Bach, Court and Town Musician there, and Elisabeth *née* Lemmerhirt, daughter of a town official in Erfurt.

From those two brief sentences its readers would have learnt a great deal more about the background. Where Emanuel found the information is not certain: records in a family Bible, perhaps, though not the Genealogy itself where only the father is mentioned. Although the cultural significance of Eisenach, a city of about 7,000 inhabitants, is today established by its associations – with a medieval Minnesinger (Tannhäuser), a famous ‘combat’ between minstrels, a saint (Elizabeth of Thuringia), Martin Luther (a native, translating the New Testament while sequestered in its castle) and J. S. Bach – only the last two would have been in the forefront of Obituary readers’ minds. Probably more familiar to them were the brief biographies of Bach and Handel in Walther’s *Lexicon* of 1732, where they could have learnt that 21 March was barely four weeks after the birth of *Georg Friedrich Hendel* in Halle, a bigger town than Eisenach and by the time of the *Lexicon* also the seat of a notable university.

Johann Sebastian was the youngest of eight children in the family, the last-known child born to his mother, then aged forty-one and, in Lutheran tradition, not present at his baptism two days later. After the common family name Johann, the second came from his main godparent, as was customary. Sebastian Nagel was *Stadtpfeifer* (qv) or municipal musician in Gotha and a colleague of the infant’s father, Ambrosius, both of them members of musical ensembles active in the usual way in the local court, town and churches. By the time of Sebastian’s birth, his father had been director of the municipal music in Eisenach for fourteen years, a violinist who had earlier served the city of Erfurt. There in the Erfurt Kaufmannskirche, on 8 April 1668, he had married Elisabeth Lämmerhirt, a young stepsister of Ambrosius’s uncle’s wife, daughter of a town councillor and thus bourgeois by class.

Had Ambrosius succeeded a few months before March 1685 in obtaining the release he sought from the local duke and town council at Eisenach in order to return to Erfurt, Johann Sebastian Bach would have been born there, as his elder brother Christoph had been – the brother who was to take him in as an orphan about ten years later. It was also to Erfurt relatives that his sister Marie Salome was to return when their mother died. At least indirectly, Erfurt played a big part in Johann Sebastian’s musical background, and it is rather surprising that he is not recorded as ever having sought a job there. Its musicians over the years included Pachelbel

(who taught Sebastian's brother Christoph there from 1686), Nicolaus Vetter and J. H. Buttstedt (Pachelbel pupils), Johann Effler (Sebastian's predecessor in Weimar), J. G. Walther (a Buttstedt pupil) and J. Adlung (an organist and influential writer on organs) – all well-known names in the world of German organists and organ music for the best part of a hundred years.

In the Erfurt Kaufmannskirche over the decades, no fewer than sixty-one infants with the name Bach were baptized. For Johann Michael Bach, who was to become posthumously Sebastian's first father-in-law, Erfurt would have been the local capital city, and there too various Bachs remained prominent town musicians until Napoleonic times. In 1716 Sebastian returned to the city to test (and possibly inaugurate) a new organ in the Augustinerkirche, the Augustinian church or 'Austin Friars', where Martin Luther himself had been ordained priest in 1507. This organ was the work of the privileged Erfurt builder J. G. Schröter, with whose family Sebastian remained in contact, and whose pupils included Franciscus Volckland, builder of several instruments in and around Erfurt still in recognizably historical condition today. It is quite possible that an abiding sense of pride in Erfurt's and Eisenach's associations with Luther was still with the composer in 1739, when for the very first time he published some organ music. This was *Clavierübung III*, which made a point of drawing on Luther's hymns and their melodies in a year of special significance to Lutherans in Leipzig – 200 years since Luther preached in the Thomaskirche, which also was originally an Augustinian church.

As a civic musician (*Hausmann*) in Eisenach, Bach's father seems to have been unusually gifted, was officially praised as a versatile and effective music director (BJ 1927, p. 141), was better paid than his predecessor, employed four musical assistants (two journeymen, two apprentices) and was presumably a good violinist. His musical handwriting itself suggests an accomplished musician, but there is no clue as to what if anything his youngest son learnt from him except, presumably, from observation. Ambrosius's duties in the town included playing in the wind band twice a day from a balcony or tower of the town hall, participating in the main service and vespers (qv) on Sundays and feastdays in the Georgenkirche (St George's Church, where Sebastian was baptized) and playing at various ceremonial events civic or private, for which he had the *privilegium* (privilege, qv). Whether such civic musicians as Ambrosius considered themselves primarily wind- or string-players is not clear or very significant, but judging from the support shown to his eventual widow by his senior colleague, the cantor of the Georgenkirche, he was much respected (Dok. II, p. 4). So, consequently, was his family.

Although the local cantor, A. C. Dedekind, would have been very well known to the boy, both as a composer of music for various occasions and as his class teacher in 1694–5, a more certain influence on him was also the church's organist at the time, Ambrosius's cousin and colleague, Johann Christoph Bach. This is the Bach uniquely and conspicuously called in the Genealogy 'a profound composer' (*ein profunder Componist*), one of whose expansive and carefully wrought motets Sebastian, as noted, might have planned for his own funeral. If so, one might see in this a further sign of Bach's sense of family and tradition, wishing to acknowledge in death his having belonged to a proud dynasty of church musicians.

It is often now conjectured that it was Ambrosius's cousin Johann Christoph, described a few years after his death as 'a real wonder of an organist' (BJ 2004, p. 158) and active as organist and composer (neither of which Ambrosius is known for certain to have been), who allowed the boy Sebastian to learn as many basics of organ-playing and organ-construction as he could. Johann Christoph laboured for many years to get the large organ in the town's major church improved, and it is possible that the boy was as much interested in this ongoing work as he had been in accompanying his father to *his* various duties. Also, because this Christoph lived eight years longer than Ambrosius, his influence on Sebastian could have continued over his early teenage years even at a distance, this becoming a further reason – over and above its quality – for the music at Sebastian's funeral. Had Sebastian been a pupil of Christoph in any formal sense, however, one would expect the Genealogy to say so. It did mention his brother Johann Jacob's teacher, Ambrosius's successor in Eisenach, but it lists only Sebastian's later appointments. The Obituary barely hints that he learnt much from his father.

Presumably, Ambrosius's sons sang in the *Schülerchor*, the schoolboy choir providing music in the three churches of Eisenach, including the Georgenkirche, whose recorded repertory of choral music included some works by Josquin, a composer known to have been admired by Luther himself and therefore especially appropriate to Eisenach. The choir also sang twice a week in the streets of the town, in music at special events and even perhaps now and then in a Passion on Good Friday (BJ 1985, p. 53). The kinds of contact between the town's musicians and members of musical families are not difficult to imagine, although where exactly J. N. Forkel in 1802 got his information about convivial family gatherings over this period, when apparently siblings and cousins met annually and sang chorales, quodlibets (qv) and popular songs, he does not say. A second- or third-hand report from one of the Bach sons? It is a plausible picture, however, and Forkel had probably seen some physical evidence of one Bach-family

gathering: the copy of a vocal work for some birthday celebrations of Bach's father and uncles in 1689, preserved in the Old-Bach Archive.

Sebastian's schooling is not documented before 1693 when he entered the Latin school in Eisenach where Luther had been a pupil almost exactly 200 years earlier, a boys-only school which taught German and Latin literacy, confessional study such as the Catechism and psalms and no doubt some degree of numeracy. For boys from five to (finally) twelve years old, attendance at a different, mixed primary 'German school' was compulsory in the dukedom (BJ 1994, p. 180), either providing them with the first part of the more senior Latin school's curriculum (except for the Latin) or instead, eventually releasing them into the world of apprenticeships. One of the German schools of Eisenach was to be found in the street in which the Bach family lived, its schoolmaster a professional colleague of Ambrosius. Sebastian's early admission to the Latin school suggests that he had been 'fast-streamed'. Telemann too had been a pupil of the 'high school' in Eisenach, describing later how it was that there he had come to a 'true foundation not only in various things pertaining to music' but also in Christian teaching or *Christenthum* (Mattheson 1731, p. 166). For the young Bach, doubtless the most familiar book was one or other local hymnal, such as the Eisenach *Gesangbuch* of 1673.

That Sebastian was younger at entry than his brothers had been, went straight into the fifth class (above the sixth), by 1695 was placed higher than his elder brother Jacob and again above others later in the Lyceum at Ohrdruf (see below), suggests him to have been a brighter than average child and one already well taught by somebody in Eisenach. Also, living far longer than any of his siblings, who had died or were to die at six months and age eight, ten, eighteen, forty (Jacob), forty-nine and fifty-one (Marie Salome) respectively, he seems to have been the fittest physically, as indefatigable in body as in mind – although a child born to a mother at an age rather advanced for that period could just as likely have turned out to be a weakling, physically and mentally. The many half days he was absent from school over three years, according to the register (96, 59 and 103 times: Dok. II, pp. 3f.), are less likely to have resulted from ill health than from being busy assisting his father in some way.

### Loss of parents

Bach's mother had died before his father, about 1 May 1694, so at that point there was less of a financial problem than there would be nine or

ten months later. Until then, Sebastian and Jacob had remained with their father who remarried later in the same year (27 November 1694), only to die not long after that (20 February 1695), leaving a widow who already had four children of her own. Ambrosius's last-known signature of 21 January 1695 has been interpreted as showing an unsteadiness of the kind discerned in his son Sebastian's handwriting half a century later (BJ 1995, p. 181), raising the question of whether they both suffered from diabetes. Emanuel's coverage of this difficult moment is brief:

Johann Sebastian was still not ten years old when he saw himself deprived of his parents by death. He made his way to Ohrdruf to his eldest brother, Johann Christoph (organist there), and under his guidance laid the foundations for his keyboard playing. (*Obituary*)

One cannot tell for sure whether Emanuel intended any pathos with his words 'made his way' (*begab sich*) while 'still not ten years old' (only a month short of this, however) and, if he did, whether it came from the composer himself. But considering how common the death of relatives was – Sebastian would have known only four of his siblings and Handel lost three of his before he was thirty-three – to have 'seen himself deprived of his parents by death' does seem a more evocative way of saying 'his parents had both died'. There was no such shade of meaning in the entry on Bach in Walther's *Lexicon*, which merely recorded that his eldest brother instructed him in 'the first principles' (*principia*) of keyboard-playing. Nor was there in the autobiography of the flautist J. J. Quantz, who reported that his mother had died when he was five and his father five years later, aged forty-eight, he having (like Bach's father) married a second time.

Several of Ambrosius's sons must have taken part in the funeral procession of both parents in Eisenach, either as family mourners or as choristers, and certainly at the moment of their father's death neither Jacob's nor Sebastian's prospects can have been good. Their Ohrdruf brother Christoph, still in his mid-twenties, was only modestly situated himself, though content enough there to decline a job at Gotha a year later (BJ 1985, p. 60). Perhaps Emanuel did not know that his father's elder brother Jacob, also orphaned, went with him to Ohrdruf, and that their first cousin Johann Ernst was in the same school at the time. (Or he did know and wished not to endanger the potential pathos?) Nor of course is reference made to Christoph's wife Johanna Dorothea, who must have borne the brunt of housing two young orphans and passed on her name as godmother to Sebastian's first child, Catharina Dorothea, twelve or so

years later. Exactly when the boys moved to Ohrdruf is not certain, for their stepmother in Eisenach received the usual six-month extension of a deceased town musician's salary. Their new school register lists them from July 1695 (Dok. II, pp. 4–7).

Even if, as is just possible, the father left Christoph money to take in the younger boys as 'family-member apprentices', the costs of a regular apprenticeship under an established master elsewhere were surely now out of their reach. Whether in Sebastian's case the loss affected him in such a way as to lead to the single-mindedness, defiance and even irascibility that people have read into the pitifully small number of later documents concerning him is another big unknown, except perhaps to Freudians. Handel lost his father just before his twelfth birthday, but his biographer notes only that this 'produced a considerable change for the worse in the income of his mother' (Mainwaring 1760, p. 29), a remark that was probably owed to Handel himself. At this period, it is not personal feelings but practical circumstances that were the business of biography.

To lose both parents within a year at the age of nine could have been mitigated only by warm relations within the remaining step-family, but nothing of this kind is recorded or is likely to have been the case. It is under Sebastian's stepmother's name that a curious request was made on 4 March 1695 to the town council of Eisenach, in which, having quoted the local ruler as saying 'he should and must have a Bach again' for a position once held there by another Johann Christoph, Ambrosius's twin (d. 1693), she went on to say that this was not possible because 'in the last few years the musical species of Bachs has withered' (Dok. II, p. 5). Perhaps this was to strengthen her case for a pension, for by 1695 she must have known that her elder stepson Johann Christoph, Sebastian's brother, was already a professional organist, as indeed he had been briefly in Arnstadt (BJ 1985, p. 60). If by 1695 Sebastian was showing great musical aptitude – something that cannot be taken for granted, however – was she following convention in ignoring a child of nine–ten years old? Or there was little love lost between herself and her three younger stepchildren? All three soon moved on to other relations and the other side of the step-family fades from familiar history.

So common was bereavement and so normal was it for relations to take in family orphans – Sebastian's parents had done so while he was a child (two cousins, perhaps more) and both he and his children Emanuel and Elisabeth were to do so – that one can only guess how the death of parents was taken. How anxious financially Christoph was when he became responsible for two younger brothers in Ohrdruf, and how hard life was



in any respect for any of them, can be imagined: Christoph himself was only twenty-three at the time and had been married less than a year. When exactly he took in his younger brothers is not recorded, but it would have to be before the end of March 1695 if Sebastian was not yet ten years old, so within a month of their father's death. Although any intended pathos leaves one doubtful about this, we can safely assume that Christoph took him in some months before the birth of his own first child on 21 July 1695.

It was probably also Christoph who arranged for them to receive charity income (free board with him) as poor scholars, Sebastian for a longer period as a chorister in Christoph's church at Ohrdruf, St Michael's. Exactly how the charity was managed is not known, but the position of chorister may also have brought in other moneys from municipal events and appearances in the *Schloß* over the way, but so far no details of these activities have surfaced.

### Earliest musical activities?

Whether, as the Obituary said, the 'foundations for Sebastian's keyboard playing' were laid by his brother Christoph in regular lessons or as circumstances allowed is not recorded, though it may be wrong to assume that a young musician merely picked up what he could within an active musical family. Regular lessons or not, in Ohrdruf there would have been music-copying to do (and to have checked), spinets to learn to tune, playing techniques to practise, services to help in, perhaps odd jobs in connection with work on the organ of St Michael's. While various musical performances in Eisenach and, presumably on a more modest level, in Ohrdruf can be pieced together – church motets and other choral works, organ and keyboard music, instrumental and vocal music in the town square or in a chamber in the neighbouring castle – it can only be conjectured what contribution the young Bach made to any of them, in either town. At much the same time, and at the same age, Handel was taking lessons with a distinguished musician in a major city, Friedrich Zachow in Halle, but again, details of the lessons are lacking. Probably, the Obituary authors say little because what Bach was learning or being taught would not have been mysterious to readers.

The little that is known about Christoph Bach does suggest a noteworthy musician. At the early apprentice age of fourteen or so, presumably at some cost to their father, he had studied for three years with Pachelbel in Erfurt and, to judge by his later and impressive manuscript albums of keyboard

music, had become a player of wide interests, indeed 'a very good craftsman' or *optimus artifex*, in the words of his church's registers. Perhaps it was from Pachelbel, or from a natural alertness to the new and the challenging, that Christoph acquired an interest in copying French music and in effect passed it on to his younger brother. His marriage in October 1694 had been the occasion for some music in which their father had participated along with Pachelbel, whom one can suppose the boy Sebastian heard play on that occasion, and perhaps by whom he was himself heard. Christoph's reported contentment with his position at Ohrdruf was justified by the high reputation of the school and church, as well as their proximity to the local court and its functions. The school at Ohrdruf was an exceptional foundation (see also chapter 2, note 1, p. 65) and its cantor Herda was apparently helpful to pupils of promise.

Although Ohrdruf was a minor town in comparison with Eisenach, the Michaeliskirche was known to be one of the oldest church-foundations in Thuringia, and for 125 years members of the greater Bach family were organists here. There was also an important lyceum attached (a 'Latin school', the most eminent in the dukedom of Saxe-Gotha), a church library better than many and a new organ that was meant to be up to date and to deal competently with all the relevant repertory. It was normal for a new organist to be involved in the work on the organ, as later was Sebastian in his first appointments, at Arnstadt and Mühlhausen; Christoph too was young, barely twenty in 1690 when he was appointed (BJ 1985, pp. 68ff.). On completion, the Ohrdruf instrument was to have two manuals and twenty-one stops, including a pedal stop for bringing out the hymn melody in the chorales and, like any new, well-working organ, would have inspired and positively excited any young musician keen to learn. But not only the organ was important. It is feasible, though without evidence in support, that Christoph's wide knowledge of harpsichord music shown by surviving manuscripts was sometimes put to good use in concerts in the castle across the way. It would certainly have kept the brothers in practice.

A big tantalizing unknown in the Bach biography is how gifted Christoph was and how deep his influence. Some decades after the Obituary Emanuel repeated in a later letter that his father learnt the 'first principles' in keyboard-playing from this brother, a point also made earlier in Walther's *Lexicon*, which probably derived from Sebastian himself. Emanuel added that Christoph instructed Sebastian as an organist 'and nothing more than that' (Dok. III, p. 288), as if to say that whatever Walther had been implying, the boy taught himself to compose. This was part of Emanuel's picture that Sebastian owed little of his eventual achievement to any teacher.

In broad terms all this might be true, but such self-reliance is something a little too consistently implied by Emanuel to be wholly persuasive. (So little did Emanuel know of his father's Ohrdruf period that he thought that Christoph died in 1700 and left Sebastian to make his own way: see below.) Certainly the two brothers came to have a common interest in both local and foreign keyboard music, an interest that possibly went back to the years before 1700.

It is possible that had his father lived longer, the young Sebastian would have worked more on the violin and begun to compose string music. Perhaps he did. As it is, however, the praise given in the Genealogy, the Obituary and elsewhere to another Christoph Bach (the elder Johann Christoph of Eisenach) could mean that this eminent organist had a deep and more lasting influence on both brothers in Ohrdruf. Emanuel, by then knowing some of his music from the Old-Bach Archive, singles out more qualities in it than he does for the music of any other family precursor (Dok. III, pp. 80–1):

he is strong in the invention of beautiful ideas  
 also in expressing (*im Ausdrucke*) of the words  
 composed as elegantly and melodiously (*galant und singend*) as taste at  
 the time allowed  
 produced some uncommonly full-voiced music  
 played organ and *Clavier* (qv) in never less than five real parts.

While some of these statements are vague, and none is directly related to his father, Emanuel's last points are surely repeating what he had heard his father say: that it was important for an organist to gain mastery of the 'full-voiced effect' (as indeed it is). Emanuel must have studied some of Johann Christoph's scores, for he gives as an instance of his inventiveness a courageous use of a particular chord much favoured by Emanuel's own generation (the augmented sixth). He also remarks of the motet in twenty-two parts that it was composed 'without any detriment (*Eintrag*) to the purest harmony' – another quality one imagines being recognized and imitated in Sebastian's early efforts.

In effect, through his references to the two Johann Christoph Bachs, senior and junior, Emanuel is listing qualities not only desirable in themselves for composers but prominent throughout his father's oeuvre. He learnt keyboard (which normally included skills in harmonizing, realizing figured basses, transposing, handling clefs, transcribing); studied and copied scores; composed by inventing ideas; and mastered harmony enough to create full-voiced music. Unfortunately, when and in what order he did

any of this are too uncertain for it to be clear how he developed and what models he took at what stage, but some hints do emerge from time to time. Copying other composers' music, for instance, was crucial.

### **Copying music and the 'moonlight episode'**

Brief and very selective though the Obituary is, it still gives generous space to an incident from the Ohrdruf period and reveals something about how the young Bach learnt:

The delight our little Johann Sebastian took in music already at this tender age, was uncommon. In a short time, he had mastered completely ['brought under his fist'] all the pieces which his brother had voluntarily passed to him to learn. A book full of keyboard pieces by the then most famous masters Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel, which his brother owned, was however denied him, in disregard of all entreaty, and who knows for what reason . . . At night when everyone was in bed, he copied it out by moonlight, never being allowed a light. After six months this musical booty was happily in his own hands. With exceptional eagerness he was secretly attempting to put it to use when, to his greatest dismay, his brother became aware of it and without mercy took from him the copy he had prepared with such trouble. A miser whose ship on the way to [and from] Peru sank with a hundred thousand thalers might give a vivid idea of our little Johann Sebastian's distress over this loss of his . . .

Surely this was a story that Bach himself told (more than once?) and even loomed large in family lore – but perhaps only after 1721, when Christoph died and when, the Obituary goes on to say, Sebastian got the book back.

Characteristic of the Obituary are the ill-concealed suing for sympathy and the reference to money, two motifs to appear later in another important anecdote it recounts in detail, the aborted competition at Dresden in 1717. The attempt to give the story verisimilitude is shown further in a description of Sebastian's little hands being able to extract the rolled-up manuscript through the latticework front of the bookcase. Note, however, that the phrase 'tender age' here could mean anything between ten and fourteen. Despite this uncertainty, and considering how rarely any intimate detail appears in the Obituary, the anecdote is also useful in touching on motifs familiar in a musician's life, especially the glimpse it unwittingly gives of the importance for a young musician of copying music, and how proprietorial a professional organist could be with the copies he himself had made or purchased. At least it credits Christoph with having already 'voluntarily passed on' other music to his brother.

Several things can be learnt from the anecdote, therefore, such as that the manuscript was unbound (a convolute made up of local Ohrdruf paper?) and devoted to keyboard music. If it took six months to copy, either it was very extensive or the moonlight was good enough for only a few nights each month – perhaps the former if it provoked such a reaction. In containing work by admired southern composers (Froberger and Kerll were Roman Catholic, Pachelbel was by now working in Nuremberg), its repertory is unlikely to have been a Thuringian organist's service-music, rather a miscellany of harpsichord suites, preludes, toccatas of various kinds, etc. Such a repertory was of interest to a professional musician and of use in his teaching and keyboard-playing. So was another miscellaneous manuscript known about from this period and region, associated with another young musician (Handel) but now lost, and once containing work of a similar repertory.<sup>2</sup>

If the copied music by Froberger originated in either of his recent publications of keyboard suites (Mainz 1696 and Amsterdam 1698), then Johann Christoph was well up to date – and therefore all the more justifiably proprietorial about his hand-made copies. That at this point in the Obituary's remarks Buxtehude's name does not appear is particularly striking. By or before the age of fifteen Sebastian was copying some Buxtehude, if one can reliably judge by his tablature (qv) fair copy of a fantasia based on a chorale ('Nun freut', BuxWV 210) and recently found in Weimar. Of course, this was organ music. Perhaps the album confiscated by Christoph had no church organ music and contained no Buxtehude; or it was yet earlier in date and was made for use in playing, which is less likely to have been the case with the Buxtehude tablature.

The manuscript's repertory as reported might support the idea that when Sebastian eventually moved on from Ohrdruf, not south to Nuremberg but north to Lüneburg, one of the various reasons was a wish to learn other kinds of music, something more expansive than could be found in a keyboard album of 'Froberger, Kerll and Pachelbel'. Perhaps by then he had an idea of Buxtehude's abilities also from a copy made by his brother, or someone else, of an outstanding and versatile work that seems to have been known for some time in central Germany, Buxtehude's G minor Praeludium, BuxWV 148. Its bravura moments alternating with sound fugal counterpoint would impress any inventive young musician, especially one inclined to learn by imitation. Many a Buxtehude fugue (qv), especially

<sup>2</sup> Reported as containing music by Zachow, Alberti, Froberger, Krieger, Kerll, Strungk and others (HHB 4, pp. 5, 17), names which imply a more 'domestic' repertory than for organ.

of the rattling *canzonetta* type, has left traces in Bach's own keyboard works, including his dashing and demanding organ Fugue in D major.

Another significant detail that Emanuel gives is that the brother's manuscript was valued enough by its owner, a professional keyboardist, to have it under lock and key. Quite how little hands got it out is not easy to envisage, and it could be that like this detail, the reference to the 'six months' it took to copy is an ageing man's embellishment for increasing the pathos. Most importantly for the Obituary's agenda, the story gives a picture of how industrious and single-minded the young orphan was, how deep his musical feelings were, how much he deserved our sympathy despite this act of deceit. The story is thus revealing on several fronts, but how far it was meant to malign the elder brother is uncertain. Emanuel could be to blame for conveying in the story no sense of the loyalty he or his father should have had to Christoph, and nor does Emanuel give any consideration to Christoph's children, at least four of whom were still living.

As for Christoph himself, according to his curriculum vitae (where he mentions only his late parents and godparent: see BJ 1985, p. 60), he seems to have been content to remain an organist-schoolmaster. Of the copies he made of German, French and Italian music in two large surviving albums (see below, p. 46), it has been justly said that he 'offers extremely reliable texts ... for virtually all the pieces he collected' (Hill 1991, p. xii), and he certainly showed discernment in the number of high-quality pieces he chose. One could read into his confiscation of the younger brother's work several things: personal envy, genuine solicitude or (most likely) sheer annoyance. Unauthorized copying of valuable and hard-won professional materials was improper, especially if they were then put to use, as Emanuel, insensitive to the implications, says they were. Was the boy presuming to play suitable excerpts even in his brother's church?

Copying was a serious business. Telemann, hinting that he too as a student was deceitful in this way, had already described in print copying voraciously whatever his teacher left lying around (Mattheson 1740, p. 355). Bach's own practice after childhood reveals a little more about the copying of a teacher's music, though whether he charged pupils to see his materials, as Walther said his teacher Buttstedt had charged him (Beckmann and Schulze 1987, p. 68), is not documented. (As it would not be, whether they paid in cash or labour.) Bach pupils copied sections from manuscript collections (or drafts) of keyboard works such as the suites, the *Orgelbüchlein* or the organ sonatas, but few if any of these are complete single copies in the order of Bach's own manuscripts. It rather looks as if he 'controlled' what of his music pupils were allowed to copy for their own

use, even possibly keeping some of the best away from them – like sword-instructors of the time, who kept the best moves to themselves, according to a contemporary book for prospective cantors (Johann Kuhnau's *Der musicalische Quacksalber*, Dresden 1700). A single concerto here, a selected group of chorales there: was no complete set of anything permitted for a student's own use?

Copies of Bach's later keyboard works made in the 1720s by J. P. Kellner seem to have been made singly and grouped together only later. Walther too made copies well after their years together in Weimar. More substantial copies made by pupils, particularly of a complete set such as J. Schneider's later copies of the 'English' and 'French Suites', could have been commissioned for sale to a client or for some other special purpose. It is not difficult to imagine how sharp Bach's own reaction would have been to find a pupil copying a valuable manuscript of his without permission, and doing it by moonlight to avoid detection. This would be so even if accredited pupils did have access to his music, as one of them later claimed (P. D. Kräuter). If Sebastian was in effect apprenticed to Christoph, permission to copy would have been granted only in certain connections. A few years earlier, a student of Pachelbel's, J. V. Eckelt, had gathered a collection of the copies he made, and in it made notes of which of the pieces he had purchased from Pachelbel. This in turn implies that payment for lessons covered the making of some copies only.

The Obituary says that Bach had his 'moonlight' copy returned to him only on his brother's death, and if this did happen, it could have been via a nephew, Johann Bernhard, even perhaps as a fraternal bequest. Judging by the albums he compiled, Christoph had a wide interest not only in music of different origins but also in music of all the common genres: suites, fugues, chaconnes, toccatas, airs and variations, overtures, preludes of several kinds, programmatic sonatas, opera interludes. As for continuing contact between the brothers, as Christoph's wife became godmother to Sebastian's first child, so in 1713 Sebastian was godfather to one of Christoph's twin sons, named after him, Johann Sebastian. Johann Bernhard, another of Christoph's sons, came to Weimar in 1715 to study with (or serve as apprentice to) his uncle, going on to an appointment at Cöthen in 1719, no doubt with his support (Dok. II, pp. 47, 202–3). And in 1724 another son, Heinrich, came to him in Leipzig for some years. Although the Obituary does not say so, there was also something improper in a young ward defying and deceiving a guardian *in loco parentis*, one solicitous, among other things, for the boy's eyesight. (On whether excessive copying as a young musician did have any effect on his later eye problems, see p. 456.)

Nor, more generally, was it rare at the time for the responsible adult to resist a young child's musical preoccupations: this is found again in Mainwaring's biography of Handel, whose father

said it was easy to foresee, that if [the boy's love of keyboard music] was not subdued very soon, it would . . . wholly disconcert the plan that had been formed and agreed on for his education (Mainwaring 1760, p. 57)

i.e. probably towards becoming a lawyer or surgeon. Perhaps this was the line taken by Johann Christoph Bach towards his ward. Handel's father

forbad him to meddle with any musical instrument . . . [but he] found means to get a little clavichord privately convey'd to a room at the top of the house. To this room he constantly stole when the family was asleep. (Mainwaring 1760, p. 5)

And presumably he did so by moonlight, as Telemann must also have done when he spoke of spending many nights as a child with a pen in hand (Mattheson 1731, p. 162). There is a recurrent leitmotif here.

Perhaps there was a more musical reason for Christoph's action. The brothers' father had been a violinist active in various spheres; Jacob became an oboist and Sebastian, if encouraged to devote as much time to the violin as the keyboard, could look forward to becoming more than a church organist. His brother the oboist travelled far, even with the Swedish legation to Constantinople by 1710 or earlier. The education and the later compositions of Bach's eminent German Protestant contemporaries (Handel, Telemann, Mattheson, Fasch, Graupner) were all far less dominated by keyboard music than his were, though by all accounts they too were exceptionally able keyboard-players. If Bach developed as a string-player, as might have been his father's wish, it was open to him to become capellmeister to a great king or, better still, opera and music director in an important city. If he pursued keyboard music too single-mindedly he could expect only positions as an organist, at best the cantor-ate of a major church . . .

So an exceptionally gifted and strong-willed child conquers family resistance, and for his biographer this persistence becomes an important part of his distinction. So it was when Handel's biographer Mainwaring referred to the mathematician Pascal, another child prodigy pursuing studies 'against the consent of [his] parents, and in spite of all the opposition'. A parent's preference for a son to become other than a musician is a motif in not a few autobiographies of the time, such as Telemann's, Quantz's and Kellner's (see list of references). In Bach's case, neither the brother nor other family members need have been as discouraging as Emanuel is



implying: his return aged seventeen to Thuringia and to an organ-world peopled by his relations suggests the contrary. So, in the following year, do his inauguration of the organ in Arnstadt and his appointment as its young organist.

A footnote: how feasible it is to copy by moonlight, presumably only for the few nights that the moon is full and high, is more than doubtful. The tale's piquancy is unmistakable. Even here, however, was one of biography's conventions: studying by moonlight was a valuable detail in the biography of an orphan, appearing again a couple of centuries earlier in Philipp Melancthon's, a classic and influential text of the early Reformation. There too it suggested a young spirit, ardent, self-reliant, serious, never afraid of hard work and of self-improving study, all for the sake of mastering the chosen field.

### The move to Lüneburg

Fortunately, the registers of the Ohrdruf Lyceum, a school going through troubled times when Bach was first there,<sup>3</sup> show him to have been successful in schoolwork, being fourth in the *prima* class (largely for eighteen-year-olds, and with a wide curriculum) when he left aged almost fifteen, in March 1700. Another sign that he was smarter or more engaged than most?

Having wondered rather obliquely, on the basis of the moonlight anecdote, whether the boy's evident industry and passion to improve himself played a part in his eventual death, the Obituary continues:

After his brother had died, Johann Sebastian made his way, in company with one of his schoolfellows called Erdmann (who, Baron and Imperial Russian Resident in Danzig, departed this life not long ago) to Lüneburg and to the St Michael Gymnasium there. In Lüneburg, our Bach, because of his unusually fine treble voice [*Sopranstimme*], was well received.

It is likely that the phrases 'in company with', 'unusually fine treble' and 'well received' were owed to Bach himself when recounting this period in his life, as were some following remarks about his voice breaking. Presumably, the information about Erdmann's death is given in the interests of

<sup>3</sup> Terry 1928, pp. 26–7 reports on the removal in 1697 of the *gottlos* cantor and Latin teacher, after various problems possibly affecting the boy's class (the *tertia* or third form).

name-dropping, quite unnecessarily since it happened nearly twenty years earlier (1736). It is also a sign, however, that the family had continued to receive news from far and near.

Emanuel gives no date for the move to Lüneburg and guesses that it occurred after the death of Christoph. Yet Christoph did not die for another twenty-one years: Emanuel must have misunderstood, for his father certainly knew Christoph had not died in 1700, having later taken in two of his sons, one of them after his death in 1721. Emanuel was still at home on that later date, presumably learnt that Johann Heinrich's father had died and later misremembered. Or he was speculating, relying on his father's genealogical table which happened to leave blank Christoph's dates of birth and death (Dok. I, p. 259), and unable to imagine any other reason for the departure to Lüneburg. Or he knew that Christoph had taken on duties in the school in 1700, making it an especially appropriate time for his younger brother to leave. Or – and this could be so in any case – perhaps Emanuel was suing for sympathy in demonstrating his father's initiative, for in itself there was nothing unusual in a fifteen-year-old going away as an apprentice, often at some remove from the family home. Normally made possible one way or another by parents, arranging a regular apprenticeship must have been problematic for an orphan.

Considering how few people are named throughout the Obituary when one compares it with other biographies published around 1750, it is surprising that it would name the teenage friend Erdmann, who was in the same class in 1700 but three years older. But Bach remained in contact with him for many years, still in 1726 addressing him as 'most worthy brother', 'school comrade' and, significantly, 'travel companion' (*werthester Herr Brüder, SchulCammerade, Reisegefährte*: Dok. V, p. 85). Companionship at a key juncture of anybody's life might well remain something never forgotten, but there are several significant points in the Obituary's sentence above. It suggests that the boy had formed a close friendship with an older, professionally successful person (later with a title) and continued to talk of it in later years. It also shows a degree of drive and courage in its subject. Here was a coming together of talented teenagers, one of them something of a mentor to the other, perhaps, both of them adventurous and ambitious. It seems they were leaving a well-regarded middle school, with good musical training, for a notable senior school with a special musical reputation.

The school register reports Bach leaving Ohrdruf on 15 March 1700, before the end of the school year and still before his fifteenth birthday, and this *ob defectum hospitiorum* ('on account of a failure of hospitality');

Dok. II, pp. 7–8) – probably indicating that his free boarding or subsistence as a charity boy had expired, as it would have done at age fifteen in any case, unless he were kept on in the school as some kind of assistant. The same phrase had been used for Erdmann two months earlier and need not imply that Christoph was refusing his brother board and lodging at home, though it might, for Bach was noticeably younger than Erdmann when his charity support was withdrawn. The register said that Bach ‘took himself off’ to Lüneburg (*se contulit*), but only that Erdmann had left (*abiit*), which looks like a significant distinction: Erdmann left school in the usual way, Bach took responsibility for himself before his fifteenth birthday, perhaps at Erdmann’s urging?

Whether or not their departure was prompted by some epidemic of the kind documented in Ohrdruf early in 1700, and whether they actually went together, as implied by the not unambiguous reference to Erdmann as ‘travel companion’, some important friendship between them can be supposed. The Lüneburg school had its procedures guided ‘by the ducal chancery in Celle’ nearby (Maul and Wollny 2007, p. xxxii), and perhaps through family contacts Erdmann had somehow had a hand in the choral scholarship for his younger friend, hence the exceptional nature of the Obituary’s reference to him. Was it Erdmann who was responsible for Bach moving to Lüneburg rather than, say, Nuremberg? When Bach heard French musicians at Celle (see below), this too could have been through Erdmann.

Fifteen, or even fourteen, was an age when generally boys did become more independent, and the move looks very much as if it were pre-planned, conceivably as a fifteenth-birthday ‘gift’. At about that age Christoph had gone to Pachelbel, and at fourteen Jacob had already left his brothers in Ohrdruf and returned to Eisenach as apprentice to his father’s successor. For another young musician who had a quite different career, J. J. Quantz, there had been a quite different curriculum: he reports that when eleven years old he became a *Lehrbursche* (junior apprentice?) for five and a quarter years, then *Geselle in Condition* (indentured journeyman?) for two and a quarter. This was to the town musician of Merseburg, who had succeeded the uncle to whom Quantz had gone as soon as he had lost his father (Quantz 1755, p. 199). Sebastian seems to have taken the opportunity of his good treble voice to leave Thuringia before his voice broke, and enter an important establishment in the north, a decision both personal (friendship with Erdmann) and musical (better composers in a bigger northern city).

Lüneburg had not been the only plausible destination for such a boy. Not only was Nuremberg, in the south, so much nearer to Ohrdruf but

Johann Pachelbel was there, writing more imaginative music than he seems to have done while still in Thuringia. Pachelbel had recently looked north for a good teacher for his own son, though judging by a surviving album of pieces probably written under his guidance by another pupil, J. V. Eckelt, the great northerners had no monopoly on what was taught farther south. It rather seems that by 1700 there was something of a south/north divide in a Protestant boy's training: the choice for him could be either Nuremberg/Darmstadt or Lüneburg/Hamburg. The latter being farther away made it desirable for him to be accompanied by an older friend.

In several Thuringian towns en route to Lüneburg various makers of ingenious instruments and mechanical toys were to be found. A place of particular interest to organists was Halberstadt, whose late-gothic organ in the cathedral had been famously described by Michael Praetorius in 1619, the only such organ ever described in detail. Although little if anything was left of it by 1700, in the Martinikirche of the same city the organist was Andreas Werckmeister, author of widely influential books about organ-building, including the *Orgelprobe* almost certainly known to Bach (see p. 97), as well as studies relating music to theology and arithmetic. In 1700, there was no figure comparable to Werckmeister elsewhere in all of Europe, and though various suggestions have been made about the young Bach's actual route from Ohrdruf to Lüneburg, it must remain possible that it lay through Halberstadt – or at least the return journey in 1702 did, when Bach was probably alone.

Many seeds of curiosity and even of lifelong interests could have been sown by a visit to Werckmeister, an expert in keyboard temperaments (qv) and known to possess manuscripts by the renowned Michael Praetorius. (He claimed the last in a book describing a typical piece of German musical-technological ingenuity, the late-Renaissance organ in the castle at nearby Gröningen.) Shortly after Bach's return, in 1703 J. G. Walther is known to have visited Werckmeister and to have come away with various materials of interest, this a few years before he and Bach became colleagues in Weimar. The *Orgelprobe* is a book Thuringers would take pride in as a local product, and it must have whetted many a musician's appetite for those big instruments with colourful effects built farther north by the peerless builder Arp Schnitger, who wrote a dedicatory poem for the book. Other cities potentially on Bach's route included Sangerhausen, where he was soon to seek a position, and Brunswick, where a distant relative mentioned in the genealogical table was cantor (Dok. I, p. 256).

But if the boys had not already left Ohrdruf before 15 March and were in Lüneburg in time for its Easter rehearsals in late March (see Wolff 2000,

p. 477), there cannot have been time for extensive visiting en route, either professional or private. The return journey was more open. For a boy just fifteen years old to be ‘well received’ in his new position, as Emanuel alleged, meant that his gifts were recognized. Even if this claim was made only much later, it was an important one for Emanuel and his father to make in view of Lüneburg’s prestige. As a claim, it was comparable to the later praise given to the mature Bach by the doyen of northern musicians, Adam Reinken in Hamburg – another event reported in the Obituary (see p. 208).

It has been supposed that the new and effective cantor in Ohrdruf, Elias Herda, a trained theologian, had encouraged or arranged for the two friends to try Lüneburg, having been a chorister there himself for some years. Such an encouragement is more than likely, especially as Bach went on to sing treble in the special ‘matins choir’ (*Mettenchor*) of the Michaeliskirche, where he was given free board, a small monthly honorarium and instruction in the school (Dok. I, p. 69), all of which suggests there had been an audition of some rigour for what we would now call a ‘choral scholarship’. Two of the St Michael’s School’s requirements for supporting a boy were clearly satisfied: that he had no other means and that he had a good voice (see Maul and Wollny 2007). He joined in time for the Holy Week and Easter services of 1700, the point at which the Lüneburg school year began – something he or Herda had known about and kept in mind, presumably. But soon, his ‘unusually fine treble voice’ broke, and for eight days he could only sing and speak in octaves. Emanuel, who is surely quoting his father’s account here, says this occurred ‘some time after’ the move to Lüneburg, a detail which could be read as anticipating the reader’s suspicion that he had gone there on false pretences, knowing his voice was near breaking. But the chronology is uncertain, and since voices often broke later than nowadays it was not unknown for boys fifteen or older to expect to remain in a choir and its choir-school for some years.

Despite their respective ages, both Bach and Erdmann were listed among the trebles in April and May 1700 (*Diskantisten*: Dok. II, p. 9), and it is unlikely that Sebastian’s voice settled so quickly that he sang bass soon after it broke. A faint question arises whether the Obituary’s term *Sopranstimme* actually meant adult male soprano, and thus whether the seventeen-year-old was still singing falsetto with the trebles: either way, he lost ‘his beautiful voice’. Unfortunately, the terms are not reliable enough to form a view on a bigger question concerning practices in general: how regularly, if at all, adult males sang treble in church choirs. ‘Soprano’ is the usual label for treble parts in the cantatas and may or may

not intend to denote something different from treble, for it is an Italian term appropriate for an Italian genre. When in 1740 Bach praises a former boy of the St Thomas School, Leipzig, for his contribution as a *Sopranist* (C. F. Schemelli, then twenty-six years old: Dok. I, p. 145), he could be referring to him either as a former boy-treble or as a more recent adult falsetto-soprano. Presumably the top part of the later 'Phoebus and Pan' cantata (1729) was sung by such an adult falsetto-soprano.

At Lüneburg, Bach had remained a scholar in the top class (the *prima*) until 1702, in a school known to have had a distinguished humanist curriculum, including rhetoric, Greek and German verse. The good repute of both the Ohrdruf Lyceum and St Michael's School, Lüneburg, raises the question whether Bach was regarded as too intelligent and advanced for his age to have gone the common route of serving as apprentice to a church organist, but was meant for higher things. The church library at the Michaeliskirche was exceptionally well stocked, one of the best in Protestant Germany, with not only Protestant choral music (including Schütz, Buxtehude and Weckmann) but Italian (Monteverdi, Carissimi) – though as anyone who has been a chorister knows, what impact a church's library might have on the boys depended on what use their master made of it.

The 'matins choir' consisted of fifteen of the more gifted musicians, probably SATB or SSATB, part of the bigger instrumental-vocal ensemble of a well-appointed church, and with the special duty of singing daily matins, corresponding to daily evensong in an Anglican cathedral or collegiate chapel today. This was in addition to the Saturday vespers and the Sunday services in which the whole choir took part. Such were heavy new duties for a boy whose voice was about to change, especially as one supposes from the reference to an 'unusually fine treble voice' that once there he was singing solos. The Ohrdruf cantor Herda, who had left Lüneburg in 1695 aged twenty-one, had been singing bass in his last two years there (Fock 1950), as presumably Bach, leaving age seventeen, did not, at least to such an extent. Another difference between Herda and Bach, perhaps indicating Bach's need to be off to earn a living, was that Herda had then gone on to the University of Jena. His studies there were what had qualified him to be cantor in Ohrdruf by 1698, above the organist Johann Christoph there, though Herda was younger than he.

### Composing in Lüneburg?

The year 1698 was also when the eminent composer Georg Böhm became organist at the Johanniskirche, Lüneburg, which had a famous instrument

by then in faulty condition (to be rebuilt 1712–14) but well able to inspire a boy interested in ‘northern’ music. By 1700 neither Bach nor Herda can have been ignorant of Böhm’s presence in the city, in a house next to their own church, the Michaeliskirche.

This is the moment, perhaps, to point out that whatever has been traditionally assumed by Bach’s biographers, Georg Böhm’s influence on Bach is easier to pin down than Buxtehude’s. Surviving keyboard music of Böhm, such as the suites reminiscent of French styles and chorale-variations typical of German, have their equivalents in Bach’s early works. The number and quality of Buxtehude’s major organ works have rather misled later historians into supposing their influence to have been greater than can be easily demonstrated. That (some of) Bach’s earlier organ works are similar in shape or in principles of construction to Buxtehude’s need not mean they were directly or only influenced by them, since those principles were not unique. Böhm’s predecessor in the Lüneburg Johanniskirche, Christian Flor, is also well represented in Johann Christoph Bach’s albums, and the French pieces there, including Böhm’s suave F minor Suite, suggests further musical connections between Lüneburg and the brothers Bach. If there had ever been a comparable album of organ music in the form of collected chorale-preludes and fantasias by Böhm or Flor or indeed Buxtehude, which is not unlikely, it is long lost.

Other documentation about the early years being so scant, a discovery made in Weimar in 2005 of some manuscript leaves bringing together Buxtehude, Reinken and Böhm is most significant. Some key facts about this, a previously unknown keyboard tablature in the young J. S. Bach’s hand and evidently from Lüneburg (see Maul and Wollny 2007), are:

Two substantial chorale-fantasias, Buxtehude’s ‘Nun freut euch lieben Christen g’mein’ and Reinken’s ‘An Wasserflüssen Babylon’ were copied, the Buxtehude possibly before 1700 (paper and writing suggest Ohrdruf *c.* 1698), the Reinken signed and dated 1700 by Bach (on paper associated with Böhm).

An inscription under the latter, *Il Fine / à Dom. Georg: Böhme / descriptum ao. 1700 Lunaburgi*, has given rise to speculation whether Bach not only copied the work at Lüneburg with Böhm’s approval but even under his tutelage, as a pupil or quasi-apprentice copying the master’s handwriting characteristics. Accordingly, Bach was (i) using tablature in his mid-teens, as no doubt he was earlier, and was (ii) acquainted with big chorale-fantasias while still with his brother in Ohrdruf.

Three smaller works by Pachelbel (under the same library number) were copied by another hand, perhaps J. M. Schubart's, a pupil or assistant of Bach later on, from 1707. Some of the many questions raised by the discovery include these:

*Dom.* is short for *dominus* (master) not *domus* (house)?

Either way, does *à Dom. Georg: Böhme* indicate he was the boy's teacher?

Why would a fifteen-year-old copy Reinken's long, demanding chorale-setting?

To study it and the tablature under Böhm's guidance? Do some corrections in the manuscript mean anyone played from it?

Was the Buxtehude copy made yet earlier (at the age of thirteen)?

Made to play and/or to emulate? At Christoph Bach's request?

Some further speculations about the young Bach are:

Since the contact with Böhm appears soon after the move to the Lüneburg school, this had been the main reason for his leaving Ohrdruf at apprentice-age.

The boy's return to Thuringia in 1702 meant he had had no offer in Lüneburg and Hamburg (which he had visited). Or he could not afford to pay Böhm.

The relative brevity of two early organ-chorales attributed elsewhere to Bach (BWV 739, 764) could mean that either he or churches in Thuringia had little use for the long fantasias he met with 'in the north'.

Since other works (chorale-variations) of Bach have many details in common with Böhm's, perhaps they resulted from study with him, then or soon after.

These manuscripts held in the Weimar library were left behind, willingly or unwillingly, on Bach's dismissal from Weimar in 1717.

Despite the uncertainties, there are useful hints here of the boy's activities, his methodical approach and indeed of his meticulousness. The Buxtehude copy supports the idea that he was singularly gifted at an early age, although too little is certain about this tablature to base very much on it. Its crammed appearance makes it unlikely to have been used on an organ's music-desk: more likely, as with other manuscripts of the time, it was a reference or archive copy, to be recopied if needed for practical purposes, possibly in more than one version, i.e. to be written out more spaciouly in stave-notation and adapted to take advantage of



a particular instrument at hand. This, in a nutshell, must have been the fate of many a manuscript of the time.

It is not unlikely that in Ohrdruf before 1700 Christoph Bach had acquired copies of Buxtehude, but the date ‘pre-1700’ for the tablature is not certain enough for one to conclude that his young brother had intended to visit Buxtehude in Lübeck earlier than he actually did. A couple of years earlier another Johann Christoph, the son of the Eisenach organist admired by Sebastian, had also been to Lübeck, visiting or learning or copying, an event surely known to his young cousin and possibly giving him the idea. Other important questions about Bach’s biography also arise: was he a schoolboy at St Michael’s for the full two years (there is no record of his leaving)? And if so, had he by 1700 become or aspired to become apprentice in Böhm’s own church? In either case, what could the reasons be that he moved back to Thuringia after two years at, it is said, age seventeen? Because the ‘apprenticeship’ was complete? Because he had failed to find a position in Lüneburg? No money? Or was there a personal reason for preferring Thuringia, including family networks?

Above all, it cannot be simply assumed that the young Bach had an overwhelming desire to study the church music and organ-playing of north Germany in particular, not even that he admired ‘northern’ music and the region’s organs to any exceptional degree. His first recorded job was as a court musician back in Weimar. How strongly his cantor in Lüneburg, August Braun, exerted a musical influence on the teenager is also conjectural, though the absence of written references to this may be significant. (That broken voices could leave boys at the mercy of cantors is described in a satiric novel some years earlier, Johann Beer’s *Die kurzweiligen Sommer-Tage*, 1683.) It is not impossible that the teenage Bach left school early and studied privately with Böhm, sought an apprenticeship, found time for the trips to Hamburg (for similar reasons) and applied for jobs which did not materialize. For such purposes, Lüneburg was an interesting choice and had come about because of personal contact of one kind or another. One can suppose, after all, that far more convenient for a boy from Ohrdruf had been either the city of Halle, where quite recently the famed Zachow had been teaching the young Handel (HHB 4, p. 17), or the city of Leipzig, where Kuhnau was an admired and influential figure. That Pachelbel’s Nuremberg was also nearer than Lüneburg has already been remarked.

It could be that the Pietist form of Lutheranism in Halle, by now a university town, was too ‘Low Church’ and that Zachow was too

closely associated with it. Or Bach was already exercising critical judgement: in Leipzig, Kuhnau's published work was just not imaginative enough, whatever his status in the Kingdom of Saxony. It is quite believable that Georg Böhm's keyboard music made a stronger impression on the young Bach than did that of the other eminent organists of the time, Pachelbel, Kuhnau, Zachow and Reinken. Also probably significant was that Böhm had connections in and around Ohrdruf, his own birthplace, and it is not hard to imagine J. S. Bach both exploring family connections and also following where a discriminating taste led him.

Yet questions remain. If, at an age when other boys entered regular, even humble apprenticeships, young Bach (on his own initiative?) went instead to a fine school far away with a distinguished friend, was it to look into the possibilities of a profession other than in music or in the church? After the Gymnasium the friend, Erdmann, returned south to enter eventually the University of Jena, from where he went on to develop a diplomatic career. It may be significant that of the two schoolboys it is specifically Bach's fine voice that the Obituary refers to, almost as if this was to foretell a very different career from Erdmann's. Perhaps for Emanuel it did, but there is no clue whether Bach similarly at this stage had hopes of university – nor, consequently, whether it was poverty or inner conviction that pulled him later but irresistibly towards the life of a church musician.

## Visits to Hamburg

From Lüneburg he travelled from time to time to Hamburg, to hear [*hören*] the then famous organist of St Catharine's, Johann Adam Reinken. (*Obituary*)

If one reason for the move to Lüneburg had been to study formally under a northern master, it is difficult to see how this would materialize for a teenager with no means to buy an apprenticeship. The reference to Reinken suggests ambition on the part of the boy, and such visits serve as a substitute for the apprenticeships which a biographer would normally, at this juncture, be able to report for a young composer. Why Bach should visit Reinken in Hamburg rather than the more gifted Buxtehude in Lübeck, as he did later, is not obvious: perhaps because Hamburg was nearer for such visits 'from time to time' or because Reinken's ensemble music was widely known and admired, some of it having been published. His string music could have been of particular

interest, even if Emanuel would not know this so much later or find it important to say so in the Obituary.

It is also the case, however, that for musicians and organists of Emanuel's generation, Reinken's longevity made him better known than Buxtehude and still able to bestow special credit-by-association on any young learning musician. Moreover, the Obituary authors' personal experience of Bach's mature virtuosity led them to refer to his involvement with organs or organists whenever they could, in fact doing so rather to the neglect of his music overall. They did not question how easily he could make the demanding journey to Hamburg while he was supposed to be a schoolboy in Lüneburg with very brief church and school holidays – nor whether, on the contrary, he had left school at some point, was then *in statu pupillari* privately to Böhm and had been actively encouraged by him to make study-trips to Hamburg from time to time. The ambiguity of whether 'to hear' includes 'to study with' could well be deliberate, implying something either positive (Bach learnt by careful observation, no one *taught* him) or negative (there was sadly no money for lessons or an apprenticeship).

Although the Obituary specifically said that Bach went to Hamburg several times, it says nothing whatever about what was a major attraction for visitors to Hamburg – the opera. This was by now in the hands of the admired Reinhard Keiser whose directorship was very soon to draw the young Handel to the city which, however, he soon left for a very different career in Italy. Handel certainly offers a vivid illustration of how a gifted young composer could develop his ambition if he had help of the kind Bach never had (in Handel's case, allegedly from a Medici prince at this point: see HHB 4, p. 25). When Walther's *Lexicon* of 1732 spoke of another composer, Georg Leyding, visiting Reinken for instruction, are we to believe that these young musicians had no interest in Hamburg's theatre music? The city was after all the second largest in the empire after Vienna, and a very flourishing period for its opera is well documented for the very years around 1702. Also documented are performances by opera-singers in the churches of Hamburg: any young visiting Thuringian student would have been exposed to 'theatrical' music in church services to a degree he would never have been in cities nearer home.

Published biographies of the time often show that their subject as a young man made a point of hearing opera where and when he could: Telemann in Berlin, Stölzel in Florence, Quantz in several Italian cities – three significant composers with whom Bach and Emanuel were well acquainted. For the Obituary to make no mention of one of the things Hamburg was most famous for suggests an agenda on somebody's part,

the composer or the obituarist. Bach's first job as a court musician (see below) might mean that at that moment at least, he was or had been looking towards courts and theatres for a future profession. Any Hamburg opera by Keiser would have given him useful insight into setting words rhetorically, writing recitative, creating melodies, planning a sequence of movements, writing appropriately with instrumental colour and so on. But Emanuel does not (care to) say so.

So there are many possible questions which, were one to know the answer, would give some idea of the kind of young musician Bach was, whether he planned his career carefully, whether he made decisions for professional or personal reasons, whether he was at the time, or indeed ever, as dominated by church and even keyboard music as the Obituary authors wished to suggest. Or it could be that he did come to recognize Buxtehude as the most important master for church and keyboard music, hence a couple of years later travelling to Lübeck for the express purpose of visiting him. The Eisenach organist Johann Christoph Bach, already mentioned several times, had meanwhile died (1703) and it would not be surprising if in 1705 Buxtehude had been viewed as a kind of 'successor as mentor' by a young musician, then twenty years old and by then professionally employed.

Since so many readers of the Obituary would have known that Handel and Telemann went to Hamburg as young musicians for the very purpose of learning about opera, they too might have found it puzzling to find no mention of this in connection with Bach. Nor was there any mention when Bach was again in Hamburg in 1720 for a position at the Jakobikirche. Yet it is still difficult to believe that the whole attraction of Hamburg, on both occasions, was Reinken and organ music. If Emanuel had obtained the impression over the years that his father had consciously rejected the theatre and had freely chosen the world of church musician and cantor despite the inevitable irritations, that need not be at all a fair picture of him in his teenage years. Nor, as will emerge from later events, would it be an entirely fair picture of him as a mature composer.

A musician for church or for theatre? On one hand, Emanuel makes it clear that his father was proud of having later become chamber musician to the prince of Cöthen, and therefore active in areas of music-making very different from those of an organist or cantor. On the other hand, both at Weimar and much later in Leipzig, when Bach helped prepare performing parts of notable works originating with the Hamburg opera-composers, it was for sacred works (Handel and Keiser's Passion oratorios) not for their operas.

## Influential composers: Böhm and Reinken

Though having no clear or direct connection with Bach's choir at the Lüneburg Michaeliskirche, Georg Böhm was nevertheless the most gifted composer the boy could have come across so far, with an unusual melodic flair for setting chorales and a sense of drama in other works. The two men were still in contact in 1727, when Böhm had copies of two of Bach's printed harpsichord partitas (qv) for sale, confirming their common interest in keyboard suites, an interest that could well have gone back to those early years and been sustained, for all anyone knows, in intervening years.

In a much later letter about his father, Emanuel actually crossed out the phrase 'his Lüneburg teacher Böhm' to replace it by 'the Lüneburg organist Böhm' (Dok. III, p. 290), but why is unclear. The change of words conforms too closely to the image of his father as self-taught, learning *sine duce* ('without a guide'), something that was also said of the preacher Melancthon during the early years of the Reformation. Writing shortly after the Obituary was published, Quantz too claimed to have taught himself both in composition and in playing a whole range of string and wind instruments, mostly not to any great extent but, as he said, such as was 'necessary, even indispensable' to a composer of church music (1755, pp. 199–201). In Quantz's case, however, teaching himself was something he did despite being a formally instituted apprentice, as Bach is not known to have been. Quantz's clear description of how useless apprenticeships could be – especially for an unusually talented teenager? – goes some way to suggesting one of the reasons why neither Handel nor Bach travelled this route to professional qualification.

It is possible to infer that Böhm had some influence on the young Bach's compositions, either through observation or actual instruction, though not necessarily at this very early stage. First, several of Bach's earliest surviving organ works (Praeludia in C major and D minor, BWV 531 and 549a) are both in shape and melody generally like Böhm's works of this kind, unaware of this though Emanuel very probably was. It seems from these two works and others that while still a teenager, or at least before taking the Weimar job in 1708, Bach had grasped important musical ideas: the rhetoric peculiar to toccatas (pregnant pauses, repeated groups of notes, flashy runs, a sense of continuity), the stretching-out of fugues (harmonizing the theme variously) and above all the art of 'diverting' through modulations and chromatic touches (both often sudden). Because of the difficulty in dating such early works and the uncertain status of extant copies, one can only guess that certain early organ preludia (qv) (G minor,

BWV 535; G major, BWV 550; D major, BWV 532) have absorbed certain details from Buxtehude as well, including a playful and highly inventive treatment of the basics – scales and arpeggios. One can make similar points about the toccatas for harpsichord, all works that fit uncannily in the two hands, even sufficiently to make one think they were composed actually at the keyboard.

Secondly, the quality itself of Böhm's harpsichord suites, not dated with certainty but likely to have been written by *c.* 1700–2, could have been the most persuasive models of French style by a German composer of the time. Uncertain authenticity, unreliable sources and conjectural dating make it impossible to trace direct influences at a time when up-to-date publications of French music from Paris were also circulating in Germany. Böhm's influence might be discerned in the more adventurous approach to chorale-preludes and chorale-variations that can be sensed in Bach's early examples, including one or two in a collection of chorales discussed below (the 'Neumeister'). Reverse influences from Bach to Böhm cannot be discounted, though it is seldom asked even today whether or how far the young Bach might have influenced his elders.

In the case of Reinken, whether any strong influence on the young Bach was entirely beneficial is another matter. Reinken is a thoughtful composer, conscientious and thorough in going through the motions and the conventions of genres popular at the time (preludes, fugues, suite-dances) and he probably inspired a few details in Bach's earlier keyboard works. One of Reinken's few extant toccatas (in G minor) anticipates the sections and melodic details found in Bach's early harpsichord toccatas, always assuming these came later. Emanuel, knowing his father's early toccatas, may himself have realized how Reinken's motoric and rather prosaic keyboard style had fundamentally influenced such early works, and possibly his father had acknowledged it himself in later years. But Reinken's thoroughness could send a learner in the wrong direction, and there is a sensuality to the younger composer's harmony (as in the *Adagiosissimo* of the D minor Toccata, BWV 913, *c.* 1707) hard to find in the older composer's rather vacant note-spinning.

In more than half a dozen early Bach fugues, one hears Reinken's rather long, rattling type of theme. Copies of keyboard transcriptions, attributed to Bach, of two of Reinken's chamber sonatas (BWV 965, 966) were being made by J. G. Walther a decade or more later, but whether Bach had kept up an interest in such music in his later twenties is not known. Many a minor composer like Reinken is at his best when he is closely imitating one of the more conventional styles – a French *suite* or an Italian

*allabreve* (qv) – and his gigue, though relatively unprepossessing, could well have been a model for several of those in Bach's later 'English Suites'. Significantly, Bach seems to have recomposed the fugues in these Reinken sonatas and added many other details such as chromatic notes in a gigue. Though it cannot be certain that his source was the known prints of these works, nevertheless the additions and new counterpoints are in typical style and are similar enough to the 'additions' he felt free to make to Vivaldi concertos.

As far as the harpsichord toccatas are concerned, quite as widely influential a composer as any of the 'northerners' was the French-Bavarian Georg Muffat, whose *Apparatus musico-organisticus*, first published in Salzburg in 1690, gives many ideas on how to write for keyboards. Its pieces were more widely known over swathes of Europe than Reinken's suites or, indeed, Bach's toccatas. Muffat's idiom has a suavity that must have appeared more up to date, especially in the way he was adopting French *manières* and implying that he had learnt subtle keyboard articulations. It might have been because of what Walther said of Bach in his *Lexicon* of 1732 that Emanuel similarly emphasized Reinken rather than Böhm or Muffat.

Though not as elderly as was later thought, Reinken was also famous for presiding at the great organ of St Catharine's, Hamburg, which Bach was to play in 1720. The Obituary's co-author Agricola said later in another of his books that Bach admired not only this great Hamburg organ and its reeds but the fine condition in which Reinken kept it (Dok. III, p. 191). In other words, Reinken was a master such as the Obituary authors themselves evidently admired: one who was both an artist and a practical man, both a creative musician of string and keyboard music and a skilled player with technical knowledge. But Böhm also had an unusually fine organ in St John's, Lüneburg, and it would have been strange if he were not just as careful a curator of it.

In more ways than one, the northern composers surely left their mark. In addition to arranging or recomposing chamber sonatas by Reinken for keyboard, Bach came later to copy/arrange another Hamburg work, the anonymous St Mark Passion performed in Hamburg in 1707 (attributed to one 'R. Kaiser' on Bach's copy).<sup>4</sup> This may be a token of other works that somehow wended their way from Hamburg. More importantly, perhaps,

<sup>4</sup> The printed textbook for the Passion refers to the work as *abgesungen* ('sung', 'performed', perhaps 'performance put on') by F. N. Brauns, *Direct. Mus. Instrum. Hamb.*, not as composed by him (BJ 1999, p. 45).

Bach also came to compose arias in the shape made especially popular in Hamburg operas, the so-called ABA (qv). How soon he did this, however, and whether the influence was quite so direct is uncertain. His experience as a teenager in several important types of Italian and French music, and again in his late twenties with Vivaldi concertos, certainly helped him open up otherwise limited horizons, and not only in the realms of instrumental music. Only a vastly widening experience could have stimulated the kind of development that every player feels must have come between, say, the early *Capriccio* in E major, BWV 993, and the mature ‘Chromatic Fantasia’.

As to any organ music Bach may have improvised or drafted or composed on the big organs of Lüneburg, Hamburg and Lübeck, their essentially traditional if regularly updated contents made it desirable for their players to keep to traditional types of organ music. These included both the simple chorale-settings and longer chorale-fantasias, the ‘stereophonic’ toccatas (pitting one part of the organ against another), and especially the often quite long chorale-variations based on common-property formulae. And these would have contrasted with the more modern string music making its way into certain services at certain times, such as chamber sonatas imported from Venice and Rome or Italianate sonatas published in Hamburg, some of which were surely transcribed by organists. Whenever it was that Bach made arrangements of Reinken sonatas, BWV 965 and 966, the busy counterpoint in this music, its limited harmonic and rhythmic invention and its purely conventional rhetoric cannot have stirred a dormant genius as powerfully as would any of the showy and stirring string music of Corelli or Bononcini that he came across. Again, however, the Obituary authors might not have known this.

### **Johann Christoph’s albums and some early compositions**

The miscellaneous nature of this section rather reflects a double uncertainty about the ‘early compositions’: how reliably in some cases they can be attributed to Bach, and how reliably in all cases they can be dated. Much depends on how closely involved Bach was with two albums of keyboard music copied predominantly by his brother Christoph, and this cannot be certain. Compared with the big vocal masterworks for Leipzig, the ‘early compositions’ are minor and rather isolated but must give some idea of the young composer’s interests and priorities.

If a curious little work like the sectional fantasia, BWV 917, copied by Christoph in one of his albums is trustworthy, then Bach’s earliest works



give a picture of the grammatical details he was trying to master, one or two in each piece. In this fantasia he is mastering suspensions (qv) while the prelude BWV 921 is giving him practice in creating sequences (qv). There are other ‘grammatical details’, of course rather technical: in the fantasia a few toccata-like scales, a conventional fugue *duobus subjectis* (actually three not two), simple ornaments on the beat and a neat final cadence. All these were elements of musical grammar needing to be learnt. In the manuscript containing it, a continuous Sonata in A minor (BWV 967) is exploring something quite different: a particular shape (ritornello, qv) not unlike that of certain so-called sonatas of the young Handel, who had been composing such shapes since he was a late teenager. Sustained length is aimed at by the Fugue in A major (BWV 949), in which a young composer considers how to modulate, where to bring in the subject, how to write a countersubject, how to suspend the action in episodes and, not least, how to leave the whole piece playable by two hands. Another fantasia, BWV 922, explores ideas obsessively as if by way of experiment. In other apparently early works too, a certain repetitiousness, even pedantry, can often be heard. None of them, however, depends entirely for its interest on how well each particular ‘grammatical detail’ is being exercised, for these are no mere textbook examples and have resulted in genuine, if modest, pieces.

The Toccata in F sharp minor (BWV 910) is taken to be a later work because each of its five sections shows occasional sparks of a kind rare in works by acknowledged masters of the region, Pachelbel, Kuhnau or even Buxtehude and Reinken. Its qualities (no longer teenage music?) derive not from novelty but from handling in a new way so many of the old conventions, such as broken chords or chromatic themes. Such new ways to work old conventions suggest an intelligent observer. So do certain extant organ-chorales (qv) which, if correctly attributed to J. S. Bach, must date from about the time he left his brother’s house at age fifteen. These could include some of those found in the so-called ‘Neumeister Collection’, BWV 1090–1120, an album of over eighty chorales copied or compiled from unknown origins in the late eighteenth century, by an organist-schoolmaster, J. G. Neumeister. Thirty-eight chorales are attributed to J. S. Bach, including six more reliably authenticated elsewhere. The rest are not always distinguishable from work of Pachelbel’s pupils, and if not quite safely attributed to Bach, or to any single period, some do look like the work of a gifted and responsive if still immature composer.

Some of the ‘Neumeister’ settings attributed to Bach are more than faintly similar to settings in the same manuscript by the organist of nearby

Gehren, Johann Michael Bach, Sebastian's father-in-law to be. Whatever their personal connections were at this time, the many contacts and professional exchanges between Bach-family members are easy to imagine. Consequently, the more trustworthy are Neumeister's attributions, the clearer it becomes that as a teenager Sebastian was endeavouring to imitate the music of his Thuringian elders. And yet at the same time, among the more original chorales in the collection there are instances of both a sure harmonic touch and an imagination in the details, even a waywardness, that are exceptional among Thuringian composers of *c.* 1700 – interesting repetitions, changes of direction, brief cadenzas (qv), effective closes, unfamiliar textures, reliable and pleasing harmony and not a few surprises. One would dearly like all of them to be proved authentic, but proof there will never be.

Some settings give the impression of being a written-down improvisation of the kind an adventurous teenager could produce when he was responding to the hymn-tune, sometimes quite unpredictably. However they are treated, the chorale's melody and harmony are so faithful to the basic hymn as to suggest an organist habitually embroidering as he played. Example 1 shows three ways of treating a melody: in bb. 1–4, a simple harmonization is broken up with an 'echo' at the octave below; in bb. 5–7, line 1 of the hymn-tune is accompanied by note-patterns (qv); in bb. 8–9, the chorale-verse's second line is a four-part harmonization with passing notes (qv). Though on a tiny scale, these are three specific techniques of

**Example 1** Organ-chorale, BWV 1092, opening; B. 8, *sic*. The single flat was added by the late copyist, unsure of the early original harmony, which needed no flats.

which the second and third will characterize so much of Bach's music to come, including large-scale cantata movements. All three suggest a composer already with a well-taught grasp of what can be done, not always in such quick succession as here and not often with such an imaginative little 'echo', but grammatically perfect all the same. All that is missing so far is a sustained shape, as if the composer is responding to each line of the chorale in turn and as yet not concerned to integrate the whole.

At other moments in the 'Neumeister Collection' there are ideas much more likely to have been worked out carefully on paper first, particularly the moments of purer counterpoint and some unusually inventive paraphrases (qv) of the hymn melody. Generally, the scale is not expansive, and the idiom does not go beyond the simple ambitions of an organist-functionary; but with suitably optimistic hindsight we do have a glimpse of the future composer's lifelong search for ever-newer ways to set a chorale-melody. Among predecessors' work that the putative young composer may have had in mind is Pachelbel's publication of chorales in 1693 (*Acht Choräle*, Nuremberg), which illustrated the traditional ways of using a hymn melody. The 'Neumeister Collection' as a whole looks like the kind of repertory aspired to for decades by organists in relatively humble positions, men for whom Bach's later and large-scale collections cannot have been very useful, being the challenging works of somebody who had moved on.

Keyboard music other than organ-chorales is also hard to date and place. Quite where Forkel learnt that the young Bach, when improvising, 'ran or leapt up and down on the *Instrument* ... until some resting place was caught by chance' (1802, p. 23) is unknown. It sounds like a guess. But a further remark, that this was common to 'all beginners', suggests that Forkel had concluded something of the sort from early toccatas he knew or had seen, where indeed there is a considerable amount of running up and down the keyboard. '*Instrument*' in such a context probably meant harpsichord, or perhaps keyboards in general, as distinct from church organs playing chorale-settings. Various 'early signs' such as short phrases and persistent short motifs (melodic cells, qv) can be found in a harpsichord toccata (D minor, BWV 913a, dedicated in a copy to his 'brother Johann Christoph') and in two chorales (BWV 764 and 739, some details of which also appear in works of Pachelbel). Short and pretty sequences are still found in the melodies from Bach's early twenties, such as the Adagio of the organ Toccata in C major and the Cantata No. 106. The chorale BWV 739 has another 'early' characteristic: one can never be sure whether it will shoot off in some other direction.

Tablature or letter-notation, learnt by many a young organist, leaves one to suppose that other early works were written out in this way, never transcribed and subsequently discarded. Not discarded, however, presumably because of its dedication (to one or other Johann Christoph), is the Capriccio in E major, BWV 993, a formless, turgid work whose harmonic poverty suggests not only an early date but that the young composer had a propensity to experiment for the sake of it. (His own propensity, or was he imitating Christoph's?) It must predate the Passacaglia in C minor by several years. Assuming its title to be authentic, this capriccio is so different from another early piece with this title, the six-movement capriccio in B flat, BWV 992, as to confirm something implied by the already mentioned Toccata in D minor: that Bach's interests were ranging widely as he tried to sustain movements but was not yet achieving much in the way of harmonic tension. BWV 993 also suggests that he was already interested in something else of importance: creating sheer length, sustaining a movement that did not have the prop of a text or a programme. From what survives of Bach's earliest work, it does look as if each piece that survives is a self-given study or exercise.

Were the dedicatee of BWV 993 to be Christoph the elder (d. 1703), one could read into it Sebastian's respect for him, perhaps *in memoriam*; were its dedicatee proved to be Christoph the younger, Sebastian's brother and temporary guardian, it would suggest a good contact between them despite the moonlight episode. This last is also suggested by Christoph possessing copies of his brother's harpsichord toccatas (written in part for him, perhaps) and by the two rich manuscript collections of music (the Möller manuscript and the Andreas Bach Book). To these, Sebastian might over time have contributed some of the music by other composers, and well after he had left the Ohrdruf home. From these big manuscript collections, it is clear that other composers known to one brother and probably both include Buxtehude, Böhm, Buttstedt, Flor, Kuhnau, Pachelbel and Reinken, French composers Lebègue, Dieupart, Lully, Marais and Marchand (Suite in D minor) and the Italian, Albinoni. Not all of the contents in the two manuscripts are distinguished and some of it (such as Marin Marais's long *Ouverture Alcide*) served rather to supply patterns as in a pattern-book: samples of particular dance-types rather than fine music *per se*. Nevertheless, the manuscripts give a wider survey of composers and genres than is found in collections of keyboard music in other parts of Europe at the time except, oddly, England, where a significant amount of foreign music was available.

Other Bachs from Thuringia, including another Johann Christoph (b. 1676) and the Johann Ernst (b. 1683) who had been at school in

Ohrdruf, had wide contacts and could also have served as a supply route for many pieces in the two albums. Consequently, there is a tantalizing uncertainty about what the brothers Sebastian and Christoph (b. 1671) could have learnt from each other and indeed from other Bachs, and thus what the younger brother might have been composing. But since both brothers made use of Albinoni's Op. 1 *Sonate à 3* (qv), a 'lively interchange' of ideas between them seems very likely. Whoever composed the Sonata in A minor, BWV 967, copied by Johann Christoph, seems to be taking steps towards something noted above and of great potential for the future in instrumental music and subsequently choral. This was the so-called 'ritornello' form. Doubtless originating in Italian (Venetian) opera, the way of shaping a movement was there for anyone to see in the concertos of Albinoni, *Sinfonie e concerti* (Venice 1700).

Two sonatas of Albinoni appear in Christoph's manuscript, and three of his fugue subjects are made use of by Sebastian in well-paced fugues, including a pair in B minor, BWV 951 and 951a, whose subject is surely the most beautiful either brother had yet come across. Its lyrical qualities are now brought out more than they were in Albinoni's original print. At whichever point exactly in his earlier years Bach was selecting and working with fugue subjects by foreign composers (Albinoni, Corelli, Bononcini or Legrenzi, probably Raison), it is clear that he was indeed searching beyond the more prosaic fugue subjects by his compatriots Reinken, Buxtehude and Pachelbel. Copies through which his workings of such foreign fugue subjects survive come mostly from later years, in his or pupils' manuscripts, which rather indicates that they were never entirely discarded. Looking ahead, one can guess that it was stimulating for the young composer to search beyond the work of Protestant organists, and to move on as he did over the years towards the concertos of Torelli, Vivaldi, Marcello and others, up to at least Locatelli in the 1730s.

As in other instances among Bach's earlier work, the different versions of the Albinoni fugue, whether one thinks of them as workings, studies, experiments or essays, do counter a common assumption that composers create a composition and work on it again only in exceptional circumstances. Rather, different versions might be made, with different copies easily scanning decades. The several later works that exist in equally authentic 'alternative' versions do not necessarily indicate second thoughts but are upholding the craftsman's tradition of returning to an artefact, benefiting from something recently learned. One of the problems in dating certain major works for organ is that it is not always clear how to answer the questions, 'Of what surviving version are we speaking? Were there no other versions?'

How soon the young composer showed signs of one of his most enduring characteristics – a thoroughness in exploring all kinds of variety, as if he were ticking off a list – is not easy to document. Probably very soon, is the answer. A sense of harmonic tension in the surely juvenile Fantasia in C minor (BWV 921) just survives what looks like an almost childlike wish to exploit two particular ‘textbook’ interests: different time-signatures and different little patterns of notes (*figurae*, qv). Each of three other early works called ‘Fantasia’ either by Christoph or Sebastian in the Andreas Bach Book (those in B minor, BWV 563; C major, BWV 570; C minor, BWV 1121) explores a simple musical idea at length, freely, ingeniously and unpredictably, indeed fantasy-like. (The C minor even anticipates a moment in the St John Passion, at ‘Crucify!’) If Christoph’s copy of the early organ preludia in G minor, BWV 535a, and D minor, BWV 549a, does transmit Sebastian’s first versions, as seems to be the case, one sees him developing little melodic cells again, and now and then going off at a tangent. The impression they give of being an exercise (‘Take a small group of notes and explore it’) is enhanced even by their specific choice of titles: an unusual term *Imitatio* for the second part of a fantasia (BWV 563), or the alternative *Praeludium ô Fantasia* for BWV 549a. *Imitatio* might have a double meaning here: a contrapuntal imitation (qv) between the voices, and a theme imitating the work of somebody else, in this case a chaconne by Böhm copied in one of his brother’s albums.

Such pieces from Bach’s teenage years are for keyboard and are not yet particularly extensive or adventurous harmonically, but they do lay the foundation for that tireless reworking of themes or motifs that became familiar throughout the Bach oeuvre. The *Imitatio* referred to explores a simple idea already found in a Kuhnau sonata from 1696 as well as the Böhm chaconne. Other early or quite early works, such as the *Praeludium* in A minor (BWV 894), give the impression of a composer fully grasping harmonic grammar, doing what he likes with it, not coy about length and in these respects also anticipating his later music. When a less than sophisticated work of uncertain origin or one without reliable sources has such qualities, the temptation is to recognize Bach as the composer. When it does not, the question is more open.

Many of these remarks apply to compositions after the Ohrdruf and Lüneburg years and when Bach had taken further professional steps for himself. It may seem strange that there is still so much uncertainty as to who composed what and when among these and other keyboard pieces often attributed to him, but the period was too early for exceptionally gifted boys to be such a wonder that their work would be systematically

preserved. As a recognized and written-about phenomenon, the child prodigy barely existed yet in music, especially the composer-prodigy, and much of what is preserved from the early period hangs on later copies made for the studies of Bach's pupils or of their pupils. When early pieces do survive, as also with Handel at much the same age, they do so by chance or in a form as revised and copied out later. Even some of the later and more assured works attributed to Bach such as Cantata No. 4 can be challenged on the dual grounds that (i) the source is inconclusive, (ii) the musical style and form belong to a common fund. Cantata No. 4 is a set of variations of a kind familiar to Thuringian organists from their work with variations on chorales (the so-called 'chorale partitas'), but to whom else a work of such quality could be attributed is rather a mystery.

Early choral works also known only from much later copies, such as Cantatas Nos. 150, 106 and 196, are less doubtful, both in being more mature and in having more recognizable hallmarks.

## French and Italian tastes

And from here too [Lüneburg] he had the chance, through frequent listening to a then famous band kept by the Duke of Celle, and consisting largely of Frenchmen, to give himself a good grounding in French taste [*Geschmacke*], which at the time was something totally new [*ganz Neues*] in those parts. (*Obituary*)

Rather than having regular teachers, Bach is again pictured as learning through listening to various kinds of music. He must have been responsible for two important details recounted here by Emanuel: that the visits were 'frequent' and that the band 'consisted largely of Frenchmen'. 'Then famous' must mean that for the two Berliners writing the *Obituary* in c. 1750, the Celle band was so no longer.

So, having as a boy sung the standard German and Latin repertory in one important Lutheran church far from home, heard a famous organist play and direct in another and quite possibly heard Italian arias and recitative sung in Hamburg theatres, he was now experiencing French music as performed by French musicians employed in a duke's own *cappella* (qv). That such music was 'something totally new in those parts' could well be something Emanuel heard his father say and is not at all likely to be true, though the way it was played by Frenchmen, especially the string-players, could well have been new to him, a young Thuringian

organist. *Geschmack*, like French *goût*, denotes ‘manner’ or ‘style’ as much as it does ‘taste’. Here, then, is another example of Bach being described as learning (i) by personal experiences of (ii) diverse musical activities in (iii) different parts of his home country.

Certain types or genres of French music, especially overture-suites with all their many idiomatic characteristics, were already familiar in much of Germany, as seen in quite a few more-than-competent examples in J. K. F. Fischer’s *Journal du Printemps* (1695) and Georg Muffat’s *Florilegium* (1698). Handel’s biography, at a similar point in his life, testifies to his grasp of both local German church music and French styles and in his case various Italian as well, claiming that he instructed Corelli himself ‘in the manner of executing these spirited passages’ in French *ouvertures* (Mainwaring 1760, p. 56). This could refer to both the dotted preludes and the scurrying fugues. Interestingly, in Telemann’s case it was in Eisenach that he reported hearing players excelling in French music, or so he reported later in speaking of the period around 1708 (Mattheson 1740, p. 361) – so, as it happens, after Bach’s departure.

Telemann’s godson Emanuel Bach surely knew this report, and in speaking of his father’s teenage experiences in Lüneburg may have remembered something else that Telemann had said: that he had been able to hear the Hanover court band while a schoolboy in Hildesheim, a city reasonably nearby (Mattheson 1731, pp. 171–2). So Bach’s hearing the Celle band was nothing out of the ordinary. Another sign of musical developments at the time is that just then Telemann was promoting his concert series in Leipzig, with frenchified overture-suites soon imitated by other local composers such as J. F. Fasch, later a competitor of Bach’s for the Leipzig job. But the Obituary’s reference implies there was something superior about Bach’s teenage experience of French music as he had reported it: the players themselves were French.

The Duke of Lüneburg-Celle’s band played in the ducal residence in Lüneburg.<sup>5</sup> In noting the nationality of the players and showing thereby that early on, Bach had learnt French *Geschmack* from the horse’s mouth, Emanuel may have had in mind a remark made in print by an earlier Thuringian composer: that in his case it was (only) from examining the written music that he had learnt the art of French *ouvertures*. This was P. H. Erlebach who, in his preface to *Harmonische Freude* (1697), may not

<sup>5</sup> The Obituary’s phrase ‘away from there’ (*von Lüneburg aus*) implies that Emanuel assumed that his father had had to go over to Celle to hear the band.



have realized that notation gives only a pale impression of how vivid and tuneful the convention-choked music of France can be in sympathetic hands. A French string-group introduced gesture and expressive articulation that no one around Lüneburg was likely to have heard from local musicians, especially in the church cantatas most familiar to the public at large. A French windband could show what a minuet or *bourrée* or *gavotte* was better than any keyboard suites could have done. The duke's full Celle ensemble, if as good as its reputation suggests, produced harmony of a sensuousness out of place in church, and the manner of playing it – the rhythms, *rubato* (qv), articulation, ornaments – would, one imagines, have made a strong impression on any young musician. Bach undoubtedly benefited.

That he liked certain individual elements of French style is clear throughout Bach's creative life, from the early keyboard *ouverture* in F major (BWV 820) right through to a movement in the Art of Fugue (BWV 1080.vi). As with the 'Neumeister' chorales, one would dearly like the authenticity of this F major *ouverture* to be established, for in its different way it too demonstrates a sure if not yet mature handling of very particular conventions. A part of this grasp must also have come from studying volumes of music, however, as is suggested by similarities between some of its movements and J. K. F. Fischer's *Pièces de clavessin* of 1696. Other composers such as Telemann must also have learnt the French *manière* (qv) from comparable personal experiences. Certainly Handel had done so before his first operas in Hamburg, and he even prefaced his first opera in Italy (*Rodrigo*, 1707) with a convincingly French suite, idiomatic, polished and very extensive.

One can assume that here and there Bach had already heard *ouvertures* or ballet-suites, music of an entirely different kind from any Parisian organ-books he ever got to know. Perhaps Böhm had recommended his visits to the duke's band, having himself shown an intimate grasp of many details of French style. For a time, the Duke of Celle's theatre also had Italian opera, but it was the French court ensemble founded in 1666 that became famous, probably brought to a high standard for the sake of the duke's French Huguenot wife.

Unfortunately, the F major *ouverture*'s very fidelity to the harmony, rhythms and melody typical of a Parisian composer of c. 1690 leaves one wondering whether it is an arrangement of an imported work rather than a very clever musical imitation. Perhaps for a young composer the difference between the two was not as important as it might now seem. There are certainly hints of the work's genuine Frenchness in tiny details, as for example in the way the stately dotted-note introduction ends with

a big chord the first time but not on its repeat. This reproduces Parisian practice, when the first violin shoots off with a lively fugue immediately after the repeat, as if taking literally the word *fuga*, 'flight'. Exactly the same detail can be found in Bach's later overtures in *Clavierübung II* and '*Clavierübung IV*', where the careful notation of the published engravings appears to be entirely trustworthy.

To what extent visits to the Celle band first introduced Bach to the various French mannerisms of harmony, string-bowing, leaning grace-notes and lilting rhythms is hard to know, since his earliest organ and vocal music would not have been the place for such details and does not reproduce them. It is probably fair to say, however, that the much later overtures for orchestra (BWV 1066–9) and for harpsichord (in *Clavierübung I, II* and '*IV*') enrich the true Parisian *manière* with a harmonic sophistication, varied melody and well-wrought counterpoint that are seldom if ever found in France itself. Conversely, some of the most characteristic elements of the French suite, such as the *petite reprise* and the *rondeau* (qv) and even the various picturesque titles, rarely if ever emerge in Bach's work except through some faint allusion. In the case of later fugues with marked dotted rhythms, in both the cantatas and keyboard works, Bach was exploring one particular French element towards a much more stately effect than Handel or Zachow did in their own dotted-note fugues.

The young Bach was assimilating and imitating not only Parisian idioms but Italian as well, as is clear in his other early keyboard music employing several distinct Italian styles. That the Obituary mentions no Italian composers is a sign of its taking for granted that Italian music of one kind or another would form the background for a young composer of the period. For keyboardists, the most widely influential composer over the last hundred years had been Frescobaldi, *fons et origo* for (among others) those German organ-composers known to Bach. Quite possibly even much of the terminology itself went back to Frescobaldi (1583–1643), as with *Canzona* for the sectional fugue in D minor (BWV 588) in the early copy by Johann Christoph (for whom, see p. 42). The more recent Italian counterpoint of such composers as Corelli, Albinoni and Bononcini or Legrenzi informs the violinistic themes and treatment of certain fugues (BWV 579, 574, 946, 951), although sustained harmonies of the kind seen in the chorale BWV 714 may also ultimately derive from Bach's familiarity with Frescobaldi. Nevertheless, none of these pieces could be mistaken for original Italian music any more than Bach's *ouvertures* could be mistaken for the capricious Parisian model. The genres Bach came into contact with

in the first decade of the century were so thoroughly explored that in each case he not only stretches the definition of each but generally demotes the foreign idioms as he does so. He continued to do this for nearly half a century.

If throughout the Bach oeuvre as a whole, French characteristics tend to be more conspicuous than Italian, the reason again could be that the Italian style is altogether more widely distributed and ‘normal’, indeed a kind of norm. Another point to observe across the whole of Bach’s output, when the following chapters consider the great composers he admired over decades, is that he might adopt certain characteristics of their style but less so the *kinds* or genres of music they wrote. Frescobaldi would bequeath him a style of counterpoint but not, say, a genre like a toccata for the Elevation; Froberger (1616–67) would give him subtle keyboard textures but not the long sectional genre he called *capriccio*. Bach’s admiration for Marchand led to no known interest in the free French *prélude*, and even the concerto as understood by Torelli or Vivaldi was expanded virtually beyond recognition in Bach’s three virtuoso violin concertos. In considering ‘influence’ or ‘admiration’, therefore, one needs to be aware of how selective Bach was.