

Biffi, Bach, and the E-Minor Violin Sonata BWV 1023
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Despite intense research on the textual history of individual works, much of Bach's development as a musician and composer has remained a matter of speculation due to the loss of composing scores and other relevant documents. This is particularly true for the early part of his career, up to his appointment as Concertmeister to the court of Weimar in spring 1714. We have ample quantities of keyboard music that originated before that date—enough to furnish the basis for plausible theories of his evolution as a player and writer of music for organ and harpsichord—even if the absolute chronologies postulated by scholars for various works must be regarded as hypothetical.¹ We have far less early vocal music and essentially nothing for instrumental ensemble; the handful of vocal compositions that can be placed at earlier stations of Bach's life (especially at Mühlhausen in the years 1707 and 1708) stands in no clear stylistic relationship to his later cantatas, concertos, and sonatas, including individual instrumental movements within the Weimar cantatas.

Vocal works of an up-to-date Italianate type seem to emerge fully formed around the middle of Bach's Weimar period (1708–17) with the so-called Hunt Cantata, BWV 208, which probably dates from February 1713.² Regular composition of sacred cantatas in the same style began about a year later, preceded possibly by BWV 21 and perhaps a few others.³ How Bach accomplished the transition from the middle-Baroque style of his first vocal compositions to one broadly echoing, or inspired by, that of contemporary Venetian and German composers, including Vivaldi and Telemann, is a mystery of which this essay attempts to illuminate one or two small facets.

A fragmentary cantata by Antonio Biffi

More than two decades have passed since Peter Wollny identified a fragmentary copy of an Italian cantata by Antonio Biffi in the hand of Bach, who subsequently added his own continuo figuration in certain passages.⁴ Wollny transcribed most of the fragment, including his realization of Bach's figures; he also noted stylistic parallels between the fragmentary aria and arias in Bach's early vocal works

1 See, e.g., Jean-Claude Zehnder, *Die frühen Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs: Stil—Chronologie—Satztechnik*, 2 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 2010).

2 The dating of BWV 208 is based on a record of Bach's payment for two days' accommodation by the Weissenfels court (BD 2:45 [no. 55]; NBR, 64–65 [no. 44]); his autograph score (D B Mus. ms. Bach P 42/3) appears to stem from that time rather than that of the work's likely reperformance in 1716 (its libretto by Salomo Franck was published later that year). See NBA I/35, ed. Alfred Dürr, KB (1964), p. 11. Bibliographic abbreviations are explained in the appendix.

3 On the possibility of early versions of cantatas preceding the surviving works that Bach performed as Concertmeister during 1714–16, see, e.g., Yoshitake Kobayashi, "Quellenkundliche Überlegungen zur Chronologie der Weimarer Vokalwerke Bachs," in *Das Frühwerk Johann Sebastian Bachs: Bach-Kolloquium Rostock 1990*, ed. Karl Heller and Hans-Joachim Schulze (Cologne: Studio, 1995), 290–308, esp. p. 304 on BWV 18; and Klaus Hofmann, "Anmerkungen zu Bachs Kantate 'Mein Herze schwimmt im Blut' (BWV 199)," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 99 (2013): 206–21, and idem., "Anmerkungen zu Bachs Kantate 'Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis' (BWV 21)," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 101 (2015): 168–76.

4 "Neue Bach-Funde," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 83 (1997): 7–50, especially pp. 7–20. The manuscript, D B, Mus. ms. 1812, can be viewed online at <https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/>.

(BWV 71, 21, and 208). Ambiguous features of the paper and handwriting prevented Wollny from giving a precise date for Bach's original entry of notes and text. The latter, however, clearly predated Bach's surviving composing scores from Weimar and could even have preceded his move from Arnstadt to Mühlhausen in July 1707. Bach's addition of continuo figures, on the other hand, together with a partially written-out realization in one passage, certainly took place later, at Weimar, although "hardly after around 1715."⁵

The cantata copied by Bach is one of some two dozen secular compositions attributed to the Venetian Biffi, who was elected maestro di capella at St. Mark's in 1702, in preference to Antonio Lotti, among others. Biffi is supposed to have been a pupil of Legrenzi and, in turn, is supposed to have been a teacher of Domenico Alberti. He was, therefore, a significant figure in his day, despite his present obscurity. His few other accessible works include examples of sacred Latin polyphony in both modern and "antique" style (*stile antico*), preserved at Dresden and Paris.⁶

The Biffi fragment is roughly contemporary with Bach's earliest extant sacred vocal music, including BWV 71 and 131; it might slightly predate BWV 106, and it certainly comes before even the earliest of the major Weimar sacred works, including the Hunt Cantata. Those Weimar works differ strikingly from Bach's early compositions written for or at Mühlhausen. The acquaintance with up-to-date fashions which they demonstrate could only have been the product of careful attention to compositions in the current Italian style. Moreover, the virtuoso character of both their instrumental and their vocal parts seems likely to reflect Bach's recent experience as a collaborator in performances of similar music with other professional musicians—as opposed to the students with whom he previously had to work. Some of the German and Italian composers from whom Bach might have learned this new style now seem insignificant, but Bach did not necessarily view them as such.

Unfortunately, basic information about the Biffi manuscript is likely to have been lost forever, including its exact date, where Bach found its exemplar, why he copied it, and why it is incomplete. Our difficulties in understanding the fragment are not eased by the fact that there are no known

5 "kaum nach etwa 1715" ("Neue Bach-Funde," 14). Wollny elsewhere has placed the original copy in the period 1705–8, based on the paper, which Bach is known to have used at Arnstadt and Weimar; see "Zwischen Hamburg, Gottorf und Wolfenbüttel: Neue Ermittlungen zur Entstehung der 'Sammlung Bokemeyer,'" *Schütz-Jahrbuch* 20 (1998): 59–76; cited: 71.

6 Other Italian cantatas listed by [RISM](#) remain unpublished. Seen here were:
Benedictus in in F (D DI 2007-D-4), SATB, b.c., in simple imitative polyphony, *alla breve*
In convertendo in g (D DI 2007-D-3), ATB, str., b.c., in concertato style
Miserere in c (D DI 2007-D-1), SATB, str., b.c., in mixed style
Miserere in F (D DI 2007-D-2), SATB (no b.c.), in very simple polyphony, *alla breve*
Miserere in g (F Pn), SSATB, str., b.c., in mixed style
O salutaris hostia (*Motetti a tre sole voci e organo*, 1731), ATB, b.c., simple imitative polyphony in modern style.

The somewhat perfunctory *Grove Music Online* article by Argia Bertini describes Biffi's style as predominantly "spirited" and "colourful" and not contrapuntal (<<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.03064>>, accessed February 17, 2019). Giorgio Morelli in *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (<<https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/19562>>, originally published in 1999) offers a similar evaluation.

concordances for either the text or the music. One could surmise that Bach took an interest in this Venetian vocal work at a time when he was eager to learn as much as he could about composition in the new styles and genres then emerging out of Italy. His older and higher-ranking colleague at Weimar, Vice-Capellmeister Johann Wilhelm Drese, had studied at Venice during 1702–3. If not a composer, like his father Johann Samuel, the Capellmeister, this Drese was at least a copyist (*Notist*), perhaps providing the court with manuscripts of recent Italian or Italianate compositions.⁷ Drese, however, provided only one of many possible avenues for the transmission of such music to Bach.

The subsequent history of the fragment is also somewhat mysterious. It appears to have become part of a collection owned by Heinrich Bokemeyer, Capellmeister at Wolfenbüttel and a friend and correspondent of Johann Gottfried Walther—cousin of Bach and organist at the Weimar city church of Sts. Peter and Paul during Bach’s time there.⁸ Presumably this single sheet of music was part of a larger repertory of mostly Italian compositions that both Bach and Walther were collecting and studying during the first decade of the eighteenth century. Yet it might have had a more specific, narrower significance signalled by Bach’s later additions. These take the form of basso continuo figures that are sufficiently detailed to prescribe a contrapuntal continuo realization, replete with passing tones and other details independent of the original vocal and bass lines. In effect, Bach’s figures constitute a partial arrangement of Biffi’s work, turning portions of the continuo part into a quasi-obbligato keyboard accompaniment. This raises several more questions. Why did Bach write out such detailed indications for accompaniment in this copy? Were these intended for actual accompaniment or were they merely some sort of exercise? If intended for practical use, was the resulting densely contrapuntal texture typical of Bach’s continuo playing, and how did the latter relate to his own compositions and his teaching?

Any further consideration of these issues must begin with a complete transcription and realization of the fragment (see appendix). Although Biffi is now little known, as Capellmeister at the most famous church in Venice he would have loomed large in Bach’s musical world. Bach might have been attracted to this composition by its text, whose surviving portion forms a secular parallel to the familiar Lutheran trope of welcoming death.⁹ Bach’s copy preserves an opening recitative followed by the first section of an aria; Biffi’s setting of the final line of the recitative might have particularly interested Bach, as it takes the form of an arioso in imitative counterpoint. This passage takes up almost half of the extant fragment.

A cavata (or cavatina) of this type, setting the moralizing final line or couplet of a recitative, is common in Italian cantata and opera of the period. One example by Alessandro Scarlatti even incorporates a written-out continuo part in imitative style (ex. 1). Bach began adding continuo figures only in this passage, which presents its one line of text no fewer than three times. Many of Bach’s figures dictate independent melodic motion, some of them apparently specifying the exact register of certain notes, as in a tablature. In one passage (mm. 27–28), Bach added notes rather than figures; these cross beneath the original bass line but are interpreted here as being intended to read an octave higher. Bach left the

7 As established by Konrad Küster, “‘Der Herr denket an uns’ BWV 1996: Eine frühe Bach-Kantate und ihr Kontext,” *Musik und Kirche* 66 (1996): 86–96 (cited: 91–92).

8 As Wollny notes, however (“Zwischen Hamburg, Gottorf und Wolfenbüttel,” 71), the provenance of the manuscript through Bokemeyer and Forkel is not entirely assured (“nicht völlig gesichert”).

9 Text and translation are given in the appendix. These must remain provisional due to abrasion of the source, rendering illegible what is transcribed here as the first word in line 4 of the poem.

concluding phrase of the cavata (for continuo alone) unchanged, but he again added figures in the nine extant measures of the aria. The contrapuntal texture of both sections is substantially enriched when the implications of Bach's figures are realized (as in the accompanying edition).

1. Alessandro Scarlatti, *Correa nel seno amato*, recitative "Ma voi, occhi dolenti," mm. 9–27, from Naples, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica S. Pietro a Majella, Cantate 259 (no. 30) and 260 (no. 22)

9 *subject*

Soprano
Sai ciò che vuo - le A - mo - re Ch'ar - da_in fiam - me di duo - le_e pian -

[Basso continuo]

12
ga, e pian - ga_il co - re, ch'ar - da_in fiam - me di duo - le_e pian -

15
ga_il co - re, ch'ar - da_in fiam - me di duo - lo_e pian - ga, e pian - ga,

19
pian - ga_il co - - - re, e pian - ga_il co - re. *si sona*

23

Custodes at the end of Bach's fragment point suggest that the copy continued, yet one can imagine Bach's breaking it off as he reached a cadence at the end of the first half of the A section, in what was presumably a da capo aria. Even if Bach did complete his copy of the cantata, it may be that he added figures only on the extant sheet, for use in his own practicing or for the teaching of continuo realization; if so, perhaps he or a subsequent owner had no use for the rest of the copy and discarded it. The absence of figures in the opening recitative and in the closing instrumental passage of the cavata

suggests that Bach’s primary concern was the addition of counterpoint in the more *arioso* vocal passages. Even the remainder of the aria might have offered nothing further of interest, comprising passages similar to the surviving nine measures and therefore of little further instructive value.

Several musical features of the aria are nevertheless notable for their recurrence in Bach’s Weimar vocal works: its notation in small note values, despite the slow tempo; its phrasing, broken up into short fragments separated by rests; the short ritornello which is subsequently repeated as accompaniment to the voice; and the trill-like motive within the ritornello that becomes part of the vocal line. The latter, previously noted by Wollny, is an example of what can be called an “obstinate” figure, employed perhaps for rhetorical emphasis and common in German music of the period; examples can be found in Bach’s early vocal works (ex. 2).¹⁰ Bach did not necessarily derive any of these ideas from Biffi’s cantata; rather he could have been attracted to the latter because of the features that it shared with his own music.

2. J. S. Bach, *Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit*, BWV 106, alto solo “In deine Hände,” mm. 1–5

Bach’s continuo figures are unlikely to have been copied from another source, for they show corrections made probably during their initial entry and are entirely uncharacteristic of the sketchy figuration typical of Italian vocal music of the period. Particularly notable are the numerous “inverted” figures, in which a numeral representing a smaller interval appears above one representing a larger interval. This already occurs in the first measure in which Bach entered figures; it is not a normal feature of notation, and there is nothing unusual about Biffi’s harmony that would have required this. Rather it is an indication that Bach, from the beginning, had some special purpose for adding figures here. Inverted figuring does sometimes occur inadvertently, as when a copyist is forced to add an overlooked 3 above an existing 6. But the use of uncommon figured bass signatures throughout the Biffi score (and in example 14, discussed below) could only have been deliberate, intended to dictate a realization that is unusually contrapuntal in texture—that is, comprising two or three parts that are, to some degree, melodically and rhythmically independent rather than components of block chords.

¹⁰ Wollny gives examples from the opening chorus of BWV 71 and the aria “Bäche von gesalzenen Zähren” from BWV 21.

This is clear with the initial instance of inverted figuring, which also illustrates the use of a pair of figures (3–2) on an individual bass note to indicate passing motion. Oblique motion in one of the voices of a realization is a common feature of eighteenth-century figured basses, but it more often occurs with the resolution of a suspension (typically 4–3, 7–6, or 9–8) or as passing motion between 6 and 5 (or 8 and 7). The repeated call for passing motion involving 2, 3, and 8 (an equivalent of 1, which is avoided) is unusual even within the continuo parts of Bach’s own compositions.

A model for Bach’s detailed notation of figures in the Biffi copy could be seen in treatises such as Heinichen’s *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung*, published at Hamburg in 1711. Here Heinichen illustrates the basic principles of figured bass through examples that combine figures with German tablature symbols (ex. 3). Even closer to Bach’s figuring are examples in an earlier handbook by the Salzburg organist Johann Baptist Samber, a pupil of Georg Muffat. In both books, as in Bach’s manuscript, the detailed figuring, often inverted, functions as a sort of tablature to indicate the precise configuration of the pitches in the upper voices of the realization (ex. 4). Similar illustrations can be found in Dandrieu’s figured bass treatise 1718, which, although published a few years later, probably reflects a common pedagogic tradition that originated in Italy, spreading subsequently to France as well as Germany.¹¹

Bach’s figures for the Biffi cantata look like his characteristically thorough, even extreme, extension of an existing tradition, carried out for self-instruction, for pedagogy, or as some sort of experiment. While adding a layer of real counterpoint to the original texture, Bach’s figures do not encourage the florid or improvisatory type of realization popular with some modern players, inspired by such things as the “embellished” (*manierlich*) figured basses illustrated at length in the later, now better-known, version of Heinichen’s treatise.¹² Chapter 6 of the latter illustrates the substitution of arpeggiated passagework for chords and the addition of melodies above the bass in the ritornellos of continuo arias. The corresponding chapter (5) of the original edition already contained a few examples of basses accompanied by parallel motion in thirds; Heinichen also shows how to embellish an upper line with escape tones and other ornaments (ex. 5).

¹¹ *Principes de l’accompagnement du clavecin* (Paris, 1718; *nouvelle edition*, 1719).

¹² *Der General-Bass in der Composition, oder Neue und gründliche Anweisung* (Dresden, 1728), for which Bach served as Leipzig sales agent, as advertised in the Leipzig *Post-Zeitungen* (BD 2:191 [no. 260]; NBR, 139 [no 142]) on April 18, 1729.

3. Johann David Heinichen, *Neu erfundene und gründliche Anweisung* (Hamburg, 1711), p. 46 (with transcription)

46 Von Signaturen des General-Basses,

§. 23. 6

Alle Signaturen / welche über einander stehen / als wie oben 2 / werden zugleich angeschlagen ; Hingegen diejenigen / welche neben oder nach einander stehen / als wie allhier 4 3. werden auch nacheinander angeschlagen.

Musical notation for §. 23 showing a single staff with notes c, e, g, a, b, c and figured bass numbers 43, 43, 43 below them.

§. 24.

Die zu der 4 3. gehörigen Stimmen seynd die 5. und 8 / also ist die obblige Harmonic bey dieser Signatur diese :

c	43.c	b	e	b	5. a	b	c	8.c	c	
g	8.g	g	g	43.g	f	g	a	5.g	a	
e	5.d	e	d	8.d	d	d	f	43.f	e	f
	41			4*				43		

Musical notation for §. 24 showing a single staff with notes c, e, g, a, b, c and figured bass numbers 41, 43, 43, 43, 43, 43 below them.

§. 25.

Von der 4. aber ist diese Haupt-Regel zu merken / daß selbige in derjenigen ober- mittel- oder untersten Stimme / wo sie die vorhergehende Note gelegen / unerrückt muß liegen bleiben / bis die dabey stehende 3. resolviret. Gleichwie aus nächstvorhergehenden Exempeln zu ersehen / daß sie einmahl oben- das andere mahl in der Mittel- das dritte mahl in der antersten Stimme den Accord zuvor gelegen habe / und hernach auch unerrückt in die 3. resolviret worden.

§. 26.

Editorial Realization of §. 26 showing two systems of musical notation. The first system has a treble staff labeled [Editorial Realization] and a bass staff labeled [B.c.]. The second system shows a full two-staff realization with figured bass numbers 4, 3, 4, #, 4, 3 and the word "sic" above a measure.

4. Johann Baptist Samber, *Continuatio ad Manuductionem organicam* (Salzburg, 1707), from p. 20 (with transcription). The wedge-shaped symbols indicate the momentary convergence of two parts in a unison; this notation seems to be unique to Samber.

Exemplum VI.
**In welchem auff dem anderten Mi die Quart-dif-
 sonans gefest zu sehen iff/
 worvon Manuductio pag.
 122. und 155. handel.**

Mi, Fa, Mi,

[Editorial Realization]

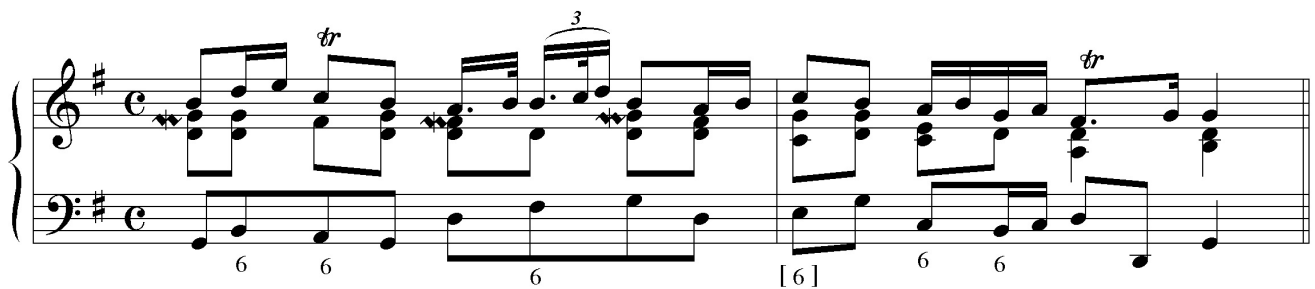
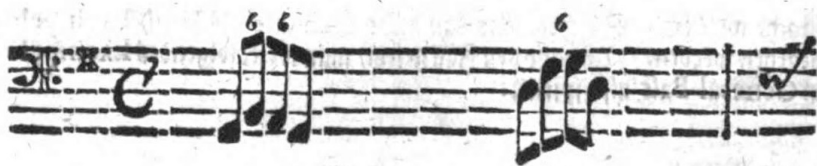
#5 7 6 4 #3 3 3 6 4 #3 8 7 6 8 #5 3

5 7 6 4 #3 8 7 6 8 3 3 6 4 #3 5 3

Bach must have been aware of this type of figured bass realization, for the solo harpsichord in his Fifth Brandenburg Concerto—perhaps first drafted at Weimar—has passages that can be understood as his version of an “embellished” continuo part. He must also have known of the partimento tradition, in which students learned composition or improvisation through the realization of keyboard pieces notated solely as figured basses. Even a partimento fugue in the revised edition of Heinichen’s treatise, however, lacks the detailed type of figuration found in Bach’s copy of the Biffi cantata, with its numerous indications of passing notes (ex. 6). Despite the presence of a few relevant sources fairly close to Bach, there is little evidence that he or his students used partimento exercises.¹³ However useful some teachers may have found partimento exercises, these are unlikely to have involved the substantive type of counterpoint characteristic of Bach, and they may rather have encouraged formulaic, facile playing.

¹³ I previously argued for the relevance of figured bass realization for the study of composition in the Bach circle; see “Composition and Improvisation in the School of J. S. Bach,” in *Bach Perspectives, Volume 1* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 1–42. Actual partimentos, however, such as those published by Gottfried Kirchoff and later Italian composers, or left in manuscript by earlier musicians such as Bernardo Pasquini, are unknown from members of the Bach family, apart from the dubious BWV 907 and 908 (which are atypically long and elaborate). On the sonata BWV 1021, see below.

So kömmt der General-Bass viel geschickter heraus/ wenn man nicht mehr als die bisherigen sehr wenigen und leichten Manieren/ nebst einen geschickten Ambitu, dabey auff folgende Art zu emploiren suchet:



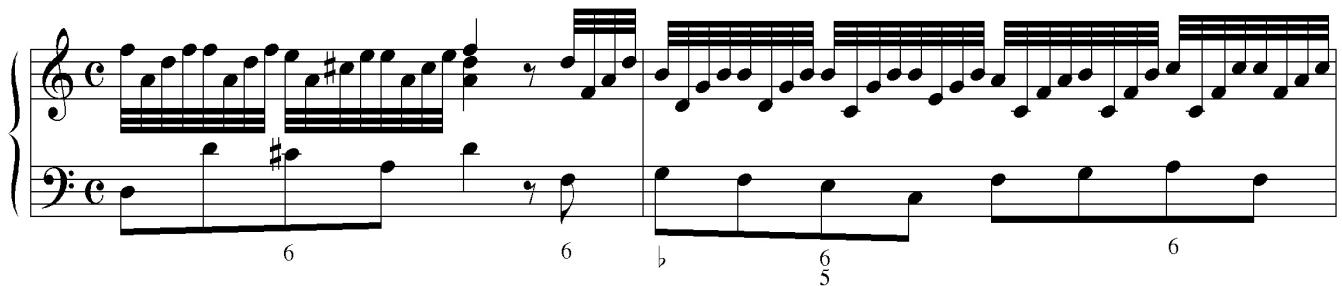
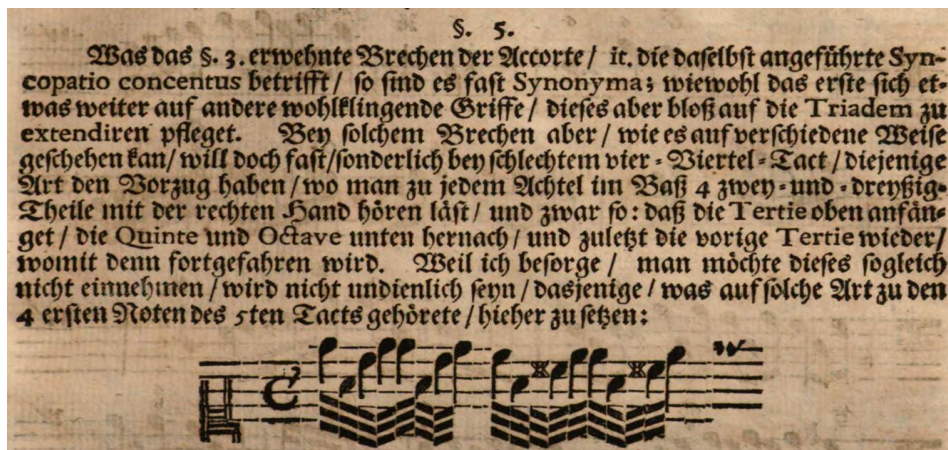
Many of Heinichen’s other examples of “embellished” realization, like the figured bass exercises in Mattheson’s *Grosse General-Bass-Schule*,¹⁴ teach a showier, superficially more virtuoso but actually less demanding style of realization or improvisation (exx. 7, 8). Never does Heinichen show the sophisticated, often dissonant or imitative voice leading of Bach, who, on the other hand, gives few signs that he would have favored the substitution of arpeggios and other flashy figuration for chords when accompanying vocal or instrumental music.¹⁵ Even when Heinichen takes up the “theatrical” resolution of dissonances, in the second part of his 1728 treatise, his focus is on melodic embellishment of ordinary progressions, not the exotic figured bass signatures that are uniquely prevalent in Bach’s

14 Hamburg, 1731; an earlier version appeared as the *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe* (Hamburg, 1719).

15 A very modest instance of such playing might be seen in the broken chords for the harpsichord bass in the aria “Heute noch” from the Coffee Cantata. The cantata *Amore traditore* (BWV 203), if by Bach, is not relevant here, for although the obbligato keyboard part for its final aria is composed largely out of written-out arpeggios and other figuration, it is clearly more than a realized continuo part.

continuo parts (including the Biffi cantata) due to the specification of so many passing dissonances. Encoding the latter as figures, or decoding such figures in performance, might have seemed to Bach a type of “learning” akin to mathematics. It surely has something in common with the fascination with exotic key signatures and abstruse counterpoint manifested in movements from the Well-Tempered Clavier, perhaps already envisioned at the time Bach was adding figures to the Biffi manuscript.

7. Johann Mattheson, *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe* (Hamburg, 1719), part 1, pp. 2 and 5 (with transcription showing arpeggiated passagework in a realization of the “Erstes Probe-Stück”)



♯ (574) ♯

Adagio.

Allegro.

A contested violin sonata and other works

Although unique, the Biffi fragment may not be unrelated to several mysterious works that are likewise Italianate and scored for a soloist—albeit an instrumental one—accompanied only by continuo. These are the E-minor violin sonata BWV 1023 and the so-called fugue in G minor, also for violin and continuo (BWV 1026), as well as one or two additional pieces for the same setting (BWV 1024 and Anh. 153).

Of these only the E-minor sonata is at all well known. Even it has only a tenuous place in the Bach canon, due to its preservation in a single anonymous manuscript copy to which one, two, or three

unidentified hands added attributions to “Bach,” “Sig.: Bach,” and “J. S. Bach.”¹⁶ The last of these increasingly precise attributions has been regarded as plausible at least since 1867, when the sonata was first edited by Hans Ferdinand David.¹⁷ A few years later Spitta gave it a rather cursory description in his Bach biography, without expressing any question about its authorship.¹⁸ It appeared two decades later in volume 43/1 of the Bach *Gesamtausgabe*. Only Joshua Rifkin seems to have raised serious questions about the authorship of the work, pointing to the unreliable nature of the attributions in the source as well as aspects of the music which clearly indicate that, “If Bach composed this piece, then he must have done so in his youth.”¹⁹ Among these features are the “loose-knit succession” of four movements, all in the tonic, as well as the “largely unbroken flow of quavers in the bass line of the Allemanda [movement 3].” Rifkin concludes that the “piece must remain dubious,” but not without indulging in “a bit of fantasy—by supposing that the scribe who added Bach’s name to the wrapper did so at the urging of the composer’s old friend Johann Georg Pisendel.”

That Pisendel might have acquired the work from Bach is inferred from their supposed meeting in 1709, when the violinist is thought to have passed through Weimar. This could place the sonata within the same time frame as the Biffi copy, but many other meetings are also possible. Even if the sonata is by Bach, there is no reason to assume that Pisendel acquired it directly from the composer.²⁰ If, however, we indulge ourselves in another fantasy—that the sonata is an early but genuine work of J. S. Bach—then certain aspects of it do fall into place. We have no idea of the sort of instrumental chamber music Bach composed (if he wrote any at all) during those first years at Weimar. But by then he surely knew trio sonatas by Albinoni and Corelli, as well as the *Hortus musicus* by Jan Adamszoon Reinken—that is, examples of both up-to-date Italian music and older German compositions.²¹ With his return to Weimar in 1708, the range of music available to him doubtless broadened, but he could not have known which of the compositions now available to him would be models for his own works a decade and more later. Any of his own lost compositions from this period might look quite different from his mature

16 In D DI Mus. ms. 2105-R-1 these appear, respectively, as a pencil (?) addition at the top of the first page of music (together with the title “Solo”); as an original entry in similar handwriting on the label affixed to a later wrapper; and as a supplementation of the latter, added in a distinct ink but possibly by the same hand. The original copyist, Johann Gottfried Grundig, was responsible for numerous copies now in Dresden and is presumed to have worked for Pisendel, but the wrapper was a later addition, as are probably all three attributions. The *kritischer Bericht* of the new edition in NBA, rev. vol. 3 (ed. Peter Wollny, 2014), dates the manuscript “um 1720/30” but entirely ignores the problem of the status and handwriting of the attributions.

17 The work was issued that year in his *Hoheschule des Violinspiels* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1867) as well as in the *Oeuvres complètes* of J. S. Bach, vol. 3/7.1, under the imprint of C. F. Peters.

18 Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1873–80), 1:732.

19 Programme 5 from “Sounds Like Bach,” a series originally broadcast on the BBC in 1993; I am grateful to Dr. Rifkin not only for providing a copy of the script but for generously providing helpful comments on my transcription of the Biffi cantata and other matters.

20 The 1709 meeting, taken for granted by biographers at least since Spitta, appears to be documented only by the very late report in Johann Adam Hiller, *Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Musikgelehrten und Tonkünstler, neuerer Zeit* (Leipzig, 1784), 184 (BD 3:189 [no. 735]); that this was also the occasion on which Pisendel received Bach’s copy of a Telemann concerto (TWV 52:G2, in D DI Mus. ms. 2392-O-35a) is of course unknowable.

21 Bach reworked material from both types of music, as in the fugues BWV 579 and 951 (after Corelli and Albinoni) and the sonatas BWV 965 and 966 (after Reinken).

chamber music, just as the early keyboard works can be strikingly different from later ones. The toccatas, for example, employ varieties of figuration, formal designs, and movement types not found in later works—not even in the one example of a toccata from Bach’s later years (the opening movement of the Sixth Harpsichord Partita, BWV 830).

The toccatas are germane to the present discussion, as the first two movements of BWV 1023 correspond in a rough way to the opening sections of several of the *manualiter* toccatas. These begin with a free prelude constructed in part over pedal points, followed by a more or less floridly embellished adagio.²² BWV 1023, however, lacks the fugue that follows sooner or later in every Bach toccata; instead the sonata continues with two dance movements, an allemande and a gigue. This sequence of four movements is rare if not unique, yet several of Biber’s violin sonatas open with a somewhat comparable prelude based largely on pedal points; the latter also figure in the opening sonata of Corelli’s op. 5. The dance pair of allemande and gigue may seem anomalous (and incomplete) by comparison with Bach’s keyboard suites, but it occurs often in Froberger’s works, and it is found also in two of Corelli’s op. 4 trio sonatas (nos. 6 and 12). Only the gigue of BWV 1023, however, might be considered Corellian in style; the allemande (called *allemanda* in the manuscript) is longer and rhythmically more complex than the straightforward allemandes in Corelli’s sonatas and concertos. In both movements, moreover, each of the two instrumental parts, but especially the violin, has the type of “polyphonic” melodic line that Bach also employed in his music for unaccompanied string and wind instruments. Both dances, in fact, end with cadential phrases in which at least one of the parts juxtaposes a pedal tone against a moving line (ex. 9).²³

Purely on a stylistic basis, Bach remains a plausible composer of BWV 1023, but who else might have written it? The most obvious candidate is Pisendel, who in his attributed violin sonatas comes close to Bach in certain respects: the elaborate and diverse written-out melodic embellishment of his adagios; expressive chromaticism that may involve striking modulations; unusual patterns of “polyphonic” figuration that are developed as regular motives while composing out underlying progressions in a logical manner. Both composers occasionally write things that could be traced to Vivaldi, such as the dramatic prolongation of a dominant seventh chord through several measures of passagework. Pisendel, like Bach, also had a real imagination for form, the movements of his sonatas not yet being locked into the schematic designs characteristic of the generation of his pupils (such as Quantz). Thus, for example, he incorporates a cadenza (or capriccio) into the concluding allegro of a violin sonata in D, of which all three movements are through-composed.²⁴

22 This description holds for the *manualiter* toccatas in F-sharp minor, C minor, and D minor (BWV 910, 911, and 913), although the pedal points are much shorter and the embellishments less florid than those in BWV 1023. Robert L. Marshall, “The Compositions for Solo Flute: A Reconsideration of Their Authenticity and Chronology,” in *The Music of Johann Sebastian Bach* (New York: Schirmer Books), 201–25 (cited: p. 318n.14a), suggests (implausibly, in my view) that the pedal point in BWV 1023 implies that this movement or even the entire sonata is a “remnant and/or reworking of a projected sonata” originally conceived for the cycle of violin Solos (BWV 1001–6). This reflects his hypothesis (also unlikely, in my view) that the doubtful C-major flute sonata BWV 1033 was “for unaccompanied melody instrument” prior to the addition of a basso continuo part.

23 This is clearest in the bass line, as shown in Example 9, but the violin part in both phrases is also “polyphonic.”

24 In D D1, Mus. ms. 2421-R-9; a scan of the manuscript copy as well as a modern transcription are available on imslp.org.

9. BWV 1023, (a) allemande, mm. 30–32; (b) gigue, mm. 36–40 (both with analysis of the basso continuo line)

(a)

(b)

Yet Pisendel’s command of and imagination for exotic harmony and modulation do not rise to the level of Bach’s, and at times he seems content to cultivate an Italianate *bizzarria*. His violin sonatas, moreover, are almost devoid of imitative counterpoint, and even the simple instance of imitation in the last movement of his C-minor sonata repeatedly produces parallel fifths of a type that any experienced composer of contrapuntal music would have known to avoid (ex. 10). In short, an attribution of BWV 1023 to Pisendel cannot be regarded as any more plausible than an attribution to Bach himself.²⁵

25 Similar reasoning applies to the *incerta* BWV 1024 and 1026. BWV 1026, although not a fugue in the usual sense—as was noted long ago by Johannes Schreyer—is hardly “formless” (*formlos*): Schreyer’s expression, from his *Beiträge zur Bach-Kritik* (Dresden: Holze und Pahl, 1910), quoted by Klaus Hofmann in NBA, vol. VI/5, KB, p. 65. BWV 1026 rather follows an ingenious design

10. Pisendel, Sonata in C minor for violin and continuo, from D DI, Mus. ms. 2201-R-11a, mvt. 3, mm. 1–5, with parallel fifths marked

Allegro

[Violin]

[b.c.]

A common denominator: the figuring of the continuo parts

Despite the “perennial charm” of controversies over authorship, further speculation on the attribution of BWV 1023 or the other pieces mentioned above is likely only to recycle equivocal arguments based on style and sources.²⁶ Whether or not Bach was the composer of BWV 1023, however, the detailed continuo figuration found in its sole source resembles that which Bach added to his copy of the Biffi cantata. This makes the sonata very unusual within the Dresden repertory with which it is now preserved—and which represents the tradition in which Quantz (Pisendel’s student) and other younger musicians developed their taste for straightforward solo music with modest continuo accompaniments.

David Ledbetter, reviewing the latest edition of BWV1023, noted that in the sole source “the continuo

reminiscent of the fugues in Corelli’s op. 5 violin sonatas, as well as those of Bach’s three unaccompanied violin sonatas—hence the plausibility of the suggestion that it is Bach’s “earliest extant chamber work” (Richard D.P. Jones, ed., *J. S. Bach: The Music for Violin and Cembalo/Continuo*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 1:v). On BWV 1024, the optimistically attributed edition by Rolf van Leyden (Basel: Reinhardt, 1955) and his subsequent *Bach-Jahrbuch* article of the same year (“Die Violinsonate BWV 1024,” 73–102) were convincingly refuted by Ulrich Siegele, “Noch einmal: Die Violinsonate BWV 1024,” *Bach-Jahrbuch* 43 (1956): 124–39 (summarized by Hofmann in NBA, VI/5, KB, 91). Yet the fugue of BWV 1024 reveals disciplined treatment of a syncopated subject and two countersubjects, as well as a recurring episodic passage. Hence even BWV 1024 is less likely to be by Pisendel than by someone closer to Bach’s orbit. Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, who worked in Dresden from 1733 to 1746 and was personally known to Pisendel, springs to mind as at least a possible intermediary. Although nothing with an uncontested attribution to Friedemann Bach resembles any of these pieces, he can be associated with several other odd *incerta*; see my “An Enigmatic Legacy: Two Instrumental Works Attributed to Wilhelm Friedemann Bach,” *BACH: Journal of the Riemenschneider Bach Institute* 41/2 (2010): 24–60. That Pisendel knew Friedemann is clear from the distinctly negative impression of the latter which he conveyed in a 1750 letter; see Georg Philipp Telemann, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Hans Grosse and Hans Rudolf Jung (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1972), 354.

²⁶ “‘Debates about authenticity and authorship have a perennial charm,’ wrote the classicist Ronald Syme over twenty years ago”: this observation, by the Shakespeare scholar MacDonald Jackson (review of Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction*, in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54 [2003]: 314–16 [cited: 314]), quotes a passage that I had previously cited in “The Keyboard Works of William Byrd: Some Questions of Attribution, Chronology, and Style,” *Musica disciplina* 47 (1993): 99–121 (cited: 109). See Ronald Syme, “Controversy Abating and Credulity Curbed?,” *London Review of Books* 2/17 (Sept. 4–17, 1980): 15.

figuring is sometimes laid out in a way that suggests voice leading.” That is to say that the vertical positioning of individual numerals or accidentals often clarifies which of these pertain to a given contrapuntal part, rather than signifying generic chords. The revised edition of this work within the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, however, “standardizes” the placement of the figures, although it “is difficult to see what is gained by this, particularly in a ‘scholarly critical’ edition.”²⁷ In fact the vertical re-positioning of most of these symbols, eliminating the tablature-like character of the figured bass, can already be seen in the original NBA score.²⁸ Paul Walderssee, however, had gotten this right in the old Bach *Gesamtausgabe*,²⁹ retaining the original vertical alignment of most figures so that numbers pertaining to the same voice appear adjacent to one another. He also correctly interpreted one passage that both editors for the NBA have emended unnecessarily (in different ways).³⁰

The player of such a part could not have aimed at the light, transparent texture that Emanuel Bach would prescribe in *galant*—that is, fashionable—chamber music four or five decades later.³¹ Rather one apparently sought to give even modestly scored chamber music the monumentality of an organ prelude or an old-fashioned church sonata. It is easy to imagine Bach accompanying in this manner, even—or especially—in works by contemporaries that otherwise would lack *gravitas* or fail to develop all of the harmonic and contrapuntal potential of their material. Almost by definition, “solos”—music for a single voice or instrument with continuo—lacked the type of depth and complexity that Bach favored from his earliest known compositions. He avoided composing solo sonatas, favoring trios—comprising three real contrapuntal parts—just as he evidently preferred writing concertos with multiple soloists. This was not unusual for older composers such as Biber and Corelli, for whom solo sonatas were apparently an afterthought (and Corelli never took up the solo concerto). The three solo sonatas for which Bach’s authorship is uncontested—the flute works BWV 1034 and 1035 and the violin sonata BWV 1021—have figured basses which, although not as complex as that of BWV 1023, frequently prescribe equally complicated, sometimes counterintuitive, harmony.³² The same is true,

27 Review of *Johann Sebastian Bach: Kammermusik mit Violine*, ed. Peter Wollny (Johann Sebastian Bach: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke, revidierte Edition, vol. 3 [Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2014]), in *Notes* 72 (2015): 415–19 (cited: p. 418).

28 NBA, vol. VI/1, ed. Günter Haußwald (1958). This edition is now available online at imslp.org.

29 BG, vol. 43/1 (1894), online at imslp.org.

30 In m. 3 of the allemande, the original sextuplets on the third beat appear as various combinations of ordinary sixteenths and thirty-seconds in the NBA. Both editions within the latter also alter the figures in at least two places, probably wrongly (in mvt. 2, mm. 18 and 45).

31 On the “refined” style of continuo realization advocated by Emanuel Bach in his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1753–62), see Andreas Staier, “. . . einen ganz anderen Gebrauch den Harmonie, als vordem . . .”: Der Generalbass bei Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach,” *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* 19 (1995): 189–219 (especially 191–92), and my “‘Toward the Most Elegant Taste’: Developments in Keyboard Accompaniment from J. S. to C. P. E. Bach,” in *The Keyboard in Baroque Europe: Keyboard Studies of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. Christopher Hogwood (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157–68.

32 Because neither flute sonata survives in an autograph, dates are uncertain, as are some readings for notes and figures; nevertheless both pieces are clearly mature works. At least two of the three continuo sonatas might have been written for specific purposes: BWV 1035 was, according to entries in two early nineteenth-century sources (D B, Mus. ms. Bach P 641 and 642), written for Michael Fredersdorf, *Kammerdiener* to King Friedrich II “der Grosse” (perhaps during Bach’s visit to Berlin in 1741); BWV 1021, for which Bach wrote the figures in the principal source (D LEB,

naturally, of recitatives and continuo arias in Bach's vocal works.

Precise, detailed, thorough figuring of continuo parts was apparently a family tradition, to judge from the copy made by Bach's father Ambrosius of a wedding cantata by his cousin Johann Christoph (ex. 11).³³ Where Sebastian's continuo parts for his own early vocal works survive, these too are carefully figured. Yet the figures in these parts rarely dictate passing motion as enthusiastically as those in BWV 1023 or the Biffi copy. Isolated instances occur throughout Bach's output, but the profusion of such unusual combinations of passing figures as 8–2, 3–2, and 6–7 is rare. Nevertheless, Bach presumably expected continuo players in his music to provide the same disciplined type of realization, with good voice leading in three or four parts, implied by his detailed figuration in the Biffi manuscript.

11. Johann Christoph Bach, *Meine Freundin, du bist schön*, copy of the continuo part by Johann Ambrosius Bach (D Bsa SA 5161, fasc. 2), beginning

Go.S.3, fasc. 1), shares its bass line with the trio BWV 1038 and might have been a model realization of a composition exercise resembling a partimento (see Klaus Hofmann, "Zur Echtheit der Triosonate G-Dur BWV 1038," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 90 [2004]: 65–85).

³³ I am grateful to Joshua Rifkin for reminding me of this part, which is also notable for its programmatic *Beschreibung* in the form of verbal annotations. The short recurring polyphonic passage within the part (at mm. 30 and 60) serves as a sort of instrumental refrain, developing in imitation the vocal line that precedes it; this recalls the cantata by Alessandro Scarlatti (ex. 1), although an Italian inspiration for Christoph's use of the device is unlikely.

That Sebastian on occasion went beyond this, turning an accompaniment into an obbligato solo, is suggested by several examples among his written-out keyboard parts. These are relatively late in date, occurring in revised versions of compositions that might originally have been relatively simple in texture. In the B-minor sonata with flute, the florid keyboard part of the second movement threatens to overwhelm the solo part, ascending above it and (contrary to Quantz’s later advice) repeatedly doubling sharpened leading tones in the same register (ex. 12). In the concerto BWV 1057, Bach adds a fourth contrapuntal part that rises above the two recorders, in what were originally solo episodes for the latter (ex. 13). The keyboard part in these passages is marked *piano*, suggesting that Bach intended to keep it secondary to the music assigned to the original soloists. Yet such a part remains a tour de force, illustrating virtuoso continuo realization as well as virtuoso passagework. The keyboard parts in both works suggest that Bach was not averse to making the accompaniment an equal or even the predominant partner in an ensemble work. This is the type of thing that could have made contemporaries see him as ostentatious, pretentious, and vain in his musical learning.

12. Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030, mvt. 2, (a) mm. 3–4, (b) mm. 11–13

The image displays musical notation for two excerpts from the second movement of the Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030. Excerpt (a) covers measures 3 and 4, and excerpt (b) covers measures 11 and 13. The score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes parts for Flauto traverso (flute) and Cembalo (harpsichord). The flute part is written in a single treble clef staff, while the harpsichord part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The second system continues the harpsichord part. The third system shows a further continuation of the harpsichord part. The key signature is B minor (two sharps: F# and C#), and the time signature is 6/8. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *tr.* (trill) and *z* (zaccato).

13. Concerto in F, BWV 1057, (a) mvt. 1, mm. 165–70; (b) mvt. 3, mm. 163–69

The image displays two musical excerpts from J.S. Bach's Concerto in F major, BWV 1057. Excerpt (a) covers measures 165–70 of the first movement, featuring Recorder 1 and 2 and Cembalo concertato. The Recorder parts play a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs, while the Cembalo provides a rhythmic accompaniment with a dynamic marking of *p*. Excerpt (b) covers measures 163–69 of the third movement, showing a more complex keyboard part with multiple voices and intricate rhythmic patterns.

The single obligato line for the right hand of the keyboard player in example 13 represents a rather different sort of accompaniment from that shown in example 12. The latter is closer to what Bach called for with the figures in the Biffi manuscript, which, however, lacks the flourishes of small note values also present in the flute sonata. Nevertheless, the Biffi part, properly realized, could—like the written-out part in the flute sonata—create the impression of what Bach’s pupil Kittel called “masses of harmonies.”³⁴ By this Kittel did not necessarily refer to so-called full-voiced (*vollstimmig*) playing, with indiscriminate doubling of chord tones, leading to numerous parallel fifths and octaves. In example 12, Bach scrupulously places a dotted rhythm in an inner voice of the keyboard part to avoid creating parallel fifths with the flute. His figures for the Biffi cantata, as in his own vocal works, force the player to pay close attention voice leading; so too does the figuring of BWV 1023, some of whose more unusual chord signatures indicate the doubling of pitch classes or the placement of particular notes in an inner voice (ex. 14). Those same figures, again as in the Biffi cantata and in Bach’s own compositions, often dictate either doubling the solo part or ascending above it, especially when high

³⁴ *Massen von Harmonien*, which Kittel recalled Bach adding to a continuo part during the performance (or rehearsal?) of a church piece (Johann Christian Kittel, *Der angehende praktische Organist*, 3 vols. [Erfurt, 1808], 3:33; trans. in NBR, 323 [item 317]). Such was a practical necessity when playing in a large space on a harpsichord (*Flügel*), whose sound would not carry as far as that of the voices and other instruments (as Quantz recognized; see his *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* [Berlin, 1752], trans. Edward R. Reilly as *On Playing the Flute*, 2d edn. [New York: Schirmer Books, 1985], chap. 17, section 6, para. 6).

notes in the bass line come close to the solo part (as occurs just a few measures after Bach begins adding figures). Emanuel Bach would counsel the player to leave out many of the notes called for by the chord signatures in *galant* chamber music,³⁵ but his father would not have repeatedly written out complex figures if he expected them to go unrealized.

14. BWV 1023, mvt. 2, mm. 9–17 (with editorial figured bass realization)

BWV 1057 is better known in its earlier form, the Fourth Brandenburg Concerto, which already gave the harpsichord a modest solo role in the form of an embellished version of the bass line in certain passages.³⁶ The chief solo harpsichord part in the Brandenburg Concertos is, of course, that of the fifth work, although this too contains a number of passages in which the right hand of the keyboard is more a contrapuntal continuo realization than a leading solo line. In the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto, however, the central compositional idea is that the keyboard player, originally Bach himself, gradually emerges as the principal soloist, rising out of the obscurity of the continuo group. The inclusion of an unusually elaborate, written-out continuo part was thus an essential element of the composer's original conception of this work. Such cannot be said of the counterpoint implied by the figures in the Biffi cantata. In BWV 1023, on the other hand, the "polyphonic" character of the bass line means that some

35 Part 2 of the *Versuch* gives detailed instructions on how to play various progressions in a reduced number of voices, e.g., by leaving out both an appoggiatura and its resolution (even when indicated by the figures) if doing so would clash with the soloist or hinder the latter's rhythmic freedom. For further discussion and references to specific passages in the *Versuch*, see my "Towards the most elegant taste," 160ff.

36 In those passages the cello has a simpler form of the bass line. It is the latter which, on the whole, Bach preserves in BWV 1057 as he adds the new obbligato line for the right hand, in passages like that shown in ex. 13.

degree of independent voice leading will be necessary in any continuo realization, if the latter is to avoid improper doublings or parallels. For instance, in example 14 (two measures before the end), one part within the realization would have to exchange notes with the bass even if the figures did not explicitly indicate voice leading by step from A-sharp through B to C-sharp. This suggests that the composer of BWV 1023 already had some idea of the sort of continuo accompaniment required by the tortuous violin and bass lines, even though it is unlikely that many figures were present in a first draft. The same is true of Bach's two flute sonatas: the implied polyphony within the two written lines presupposes an accompaniment similarly replete with sophisticated voice leading. The specific details of the latter could not have been part of the composer's original conception of either sonata, yet the latter would have been unthinkable without some general idea of the type of continuo realization that would have to accompany it. This must be true of BWV 1023 as well.

One other category of compositions by Bach notated as a solo melodic line with figured bass accompaniment comprises chorales and *Lieder*, which appear sporadically across his output. Early examples (sometimes of doubtful origin) are found alongside more elaborate organ chorales and might represent accompaniments for congregational singing. Later examples include those published in Schemelli's *Gesang-Buch*, in which Bach had a hand. The figures in these settings occasionally indicate the same types of passing motion mentioned above, although not in the profusion seen in Bach's better-known four-part chorale harmonizations (ex. 15).³⁷ It is possible that Bach expected the player to include the melody in the upper voice; this seems to be prescribed by the figures in many passages, although the same is also true in sonatas and arias as well. Quantz suggests that such doubling would not have been desired in chamber music.³⁸ Yet earlier practice, especially in vocal polyphony, seems to have been to double even solo parts as closely as possible.³⁹ As offensive as this might have seemed when using a harpsichord to accompany a virtuoso singer or player in a court chamber concert, to do so on a quiet flute stop in church would have been far less obtrusive. In any case, Bach's two-part chorales and *Lieder*, if not as demanding of the continuo player as his other works, presuppose the same attention to details of voice leading and could not have been conceived in terms of the simple harmony of settings by his contemporaries.

37 Some of the melodies in Schemelli's anthology were "newly composed" by Bach; some of the figured basses were also "improved" by him ("Die in diesem Musicalischen Gesangbuche befindlichen Melodien, sind von . . . Bach . . . theils ganz neu componiret, theils auch von Ihm im General-Baß verbessert"); Georg Christian Schemelli, *Musicalisches Gesang-Buch* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1736), unnumbered final page of the foreword by Friedrich Schultze, dated April 24, 1736. Robin Leaver, "Letter Codes Relating to Pitch and Key for Chorale Melodies and Bach's Contributions to the Schemelli *Gesangbuch*," *BACH Journal* 45/1 (2014): 15–33 (cited: 29), suggests that Bach also served as "musical editor" for the entire volume.

38 Quantz, *Versuch*, chap. 17, section 6, para. 22, counsels players to invert the written figures where these indicate parallel thirds or sixths, to avoid doubling the soloist in the upper part.

39 On the doubling of at least the outer voices as a norm for figured bass realization, see, e.g., Rebecca Herissone, "*To Fill, Forbear, or Adorne*": *The Organ Accompaniment of Restoration Sacred Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Her purview extends beyond English Baroque church music to that of Giovanni Gabrieli, Schütz, and later composers.

15. (a) “Kein Stündlein geht dahin,” BWV 477, mm. 5–10; (b) “Es ist nun aus mit meinem Leben,” BWV 457, with editorial realization of the figured bass

(a)

[Voice] Ich bin auch im - mer, wo ich bin, Daß mich der Tod Wird

[b.c.] 6 6 5 7 6 6 6 5 # 6 5 8 7 6

(b)

brin - gen in die letz - te Noth. Gott nimmt es

6 6 9 8 4 3 6 5 3 4 6 5

hin, der es ge - ge - ben, Kein Tröpf - lein mehr ist in dem Fass.

9 8 6 8 7 5 3 6 6 3 4 6 5 7 6 4 5

Conclusions

The uniqueness of the Biffi fragment and uncertainty over its date and purpose make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from it. At best, it deepens the impression created by other sources that Bach, even at an early stage of his career, was prepared to learn from diverse compositions; the continuo figures later added to the fragment show also that, as in other adaptations, he imposed his own imprint on the original. They also confirm that Bach followed a tradition of figured bass realization in which a rigorously contrapuntal accompaniment might challenge the solo part for prominence. The figures could be seen as a contrapuntal elaboration of an existing melodic framework, in this respect resembling the roughly contemporary chorale settings of the *Orgelbüchlein*. Perhaps, too, like the latter they initially represented an exercise that he imposed on himself, later offered to his pupils. Bach, moreover, would have expected an equally contrapuntal realization of the figured bass in several *incerta* for solo instrument and continuo that originated during the same period, whether these compositions stemmed from his own hand or from a member of his circle.

These highly conditioned statements are no less hypothetical than the speculative chronologies of Bach's early keyboard music that were criticized at the beginning of this essay. Like those, they add nothing concrete to our understanding of Bach's development as a composer. We have good reason to think, however, that as a player Bach was early to adopt a style of keyboard accompaniment that has echoes in written-out parts from his mature years. How widely this style of continuo playing was cultivated outside the Bach circle is unclear. If, as is likely, Pisendel knew BWV 1023 (even if he did not compose it), he would have understood the implications of the figures in the surviving Dresden copy. Still, the disciplined type of playing demanded by those figures cannot have been common, nor is it likely to have been favored at Dresden or elsewhere. It is remote from what Heinichen describes in his two treatises; he came to Dresden as Capellmeister in 1717 (from Venice), probably on the strength of his Italianate compositions—which he is likely to have directed from the harpsichord while playing in a less provocative style than was characteristic of the musician who would shortly become his counterpart at Cöthen.

That Bach persisted in his style of playing, and continued to teach it to his students, has been inferred from his own continuo parts as well as from remarks such as Kittel's. Gradually, his manner of realizing a figured bass must have come to seem as archaic as his compositions, both being useful for study but not as models for actual practice. Quantz and Emanuel Bach, reflecting preferences at the Berlin court (and probably also at Dresden, where Quantz formed his style), favored a transparent texture, with the keyboard often reduced to three or even two parts. Both writers advocate at times for an almost empty continuo realization—the opposite of the harmonically saturated type evidently favored by J. S. Bach. Even the third of a major triad was to be left out (leaving open fifths or octaves in the realization) when a tempered keyboard might produce clashes with a more purely tuned flute on notes such as D-sharp and A-sharp.⁴⁰ Of course it is possible that even Sebastian would have followed such practices in a late chamber work, such as the sonata from the *Musical Offering*, dedicated to the ruler of the Berlin court. His pupil Kirnberger published a written-out figured bass realization for that work which ignores the admonitions of Quantz and Emanuel Bach, but this may have been meant less for practical than for theoretical or pedagogic use.⁴¹ The same could be true of Heinrich Nicolaus Gerber's written-out realization for a violin sonata by Albinoni, which Bach corrected; like the keyboard part in Bach's B-minor flute sonata, this makes no effort to avoid unison doublings of leading tones and small clashes with the soloist.⁴² Yet it is also possible that Bach saw no distinction between theory and practice; a full yet literal realization of a figured bass might have been entirely acceptable to him, however unpleasing to lesser musicians.

Even at Dresden and Berlin, heavy, full-voiced continuo playing surely continued to have a place in

40 Quantz, *Versuch*, chap. 17, section 6, para. 20.

41 Kirnberger included a realization for the third movement in *Die wahren Grundsätze zum Gebrauch der Harmonie* (Berlin, 1773). Hans Eppstein, in his edition of the sonata (Munich: Henle, 1976), included a "Generallbassaussetzung von J. Ph. Kirnberger"; this is actually derived from several Berlin manuscripts which may or may not reproduce Kirnberger's own realizations.

42 Gerber's manuscript, D B, Mus. ms. 455, can be viewed online (on [Bach-Digital](#)), but as it lacks both the violin part and the original figures it is best studied in Spitta's transcription, included in the musical supplement to his biography (most easily consulted on pp. 388–98 of vol. 3 in the 1899 English version by Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller Maitland [London: Novello], online at [Google Books](#)).

orchestral and operatic music. Such playing, however, would have had no use for the expressive inner voices and passing dissonances of Bach's own continuo parts. Meanwhile, the prescriptions of Quantz and Emanuel Bach, together with the acquisition of quiet Cristofori-style pianos to accompany royal chamber music, show that by the later 1740s a very different style of accompaniment was already coming into vogue.⁴³ This style was no less demanding than Sebastian's; it is not easy to follow Emanuel's prescriptions for "refined" performance when reading a figured bass at sight. Founded in organ practice, however, Sebastian's style of accompaniment would have seemed increasingly gauche in fashionable arias and concerto movements, appropriate only to fugues and other types of densely written compositions in which "taste" (*Geschmack*) was not a requirement.⁴⁴ Was this last comment, from Emanuel Bach, a direct retort to his father? Clearly, for Emanuel, the type of playing implied by the figures in the Biffi fragment, as also in BWV 1023 and similar works, was no longer sufficiently refined to be considered *galant*. The same, of course, was true of the compositions themselves, which, whatever their exact provenance, are lone survivors of a repertory whose usefulness died with Sebastian.

43 Mary Oleskiewicz, "The Trio in Bach's *Musical Offering*: A Salute to Frederick's Tastes and Quantz's Flutes?," in *Bach Perspectives*, vol. 4, ed. David Schulenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 79–110 (cited: 98–101), demonstrates the appropriateness of the Silbermann fortepianos acquired by Frederick the Great, beginning in the 1740s, for accompaniment. For further details, including the identification of specific instruments, see her "Keyboards, Music Rooms, and the Bach Family at the Court of Frederick the Great," in *Bach Perspectives*, vol. 11, ed. Mary Oleskiewicz (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 24–82, especially 68–72 and table 9 on p. 82.

44 C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch*, part 2, introduction, paras. 24–26.

Appendix

Text and translation of the fragment

Amante moribondo

Dying lover

[Recitativo ed arioso]

[Recitative and arioso]

Hore brevi e fatali

Hours brief and fatal

che lo stame vital presto troncaste

That swiftly cut short the living stem,

a voi consacro a voi

I dedicate to you

l'ultime [?] voci e i dolorosi accenti

My last [?] notes and my sad accents

acciò de miei lamenti

So that you will faithfully repeat

il funesto tenor fide serbate

This sad lesson of my sorrows

ed impari ogni Amante,

And let every lover learn

a viver e morir sempre costante.

To live and die always constant.

[Aria]

[Aria]

Morte cara, ah vieni o morte,

Dear death, ah, come, oh death,

a donar pace a quest'alma,

To give peace to this soul,

deh gl'appresta porto e calma

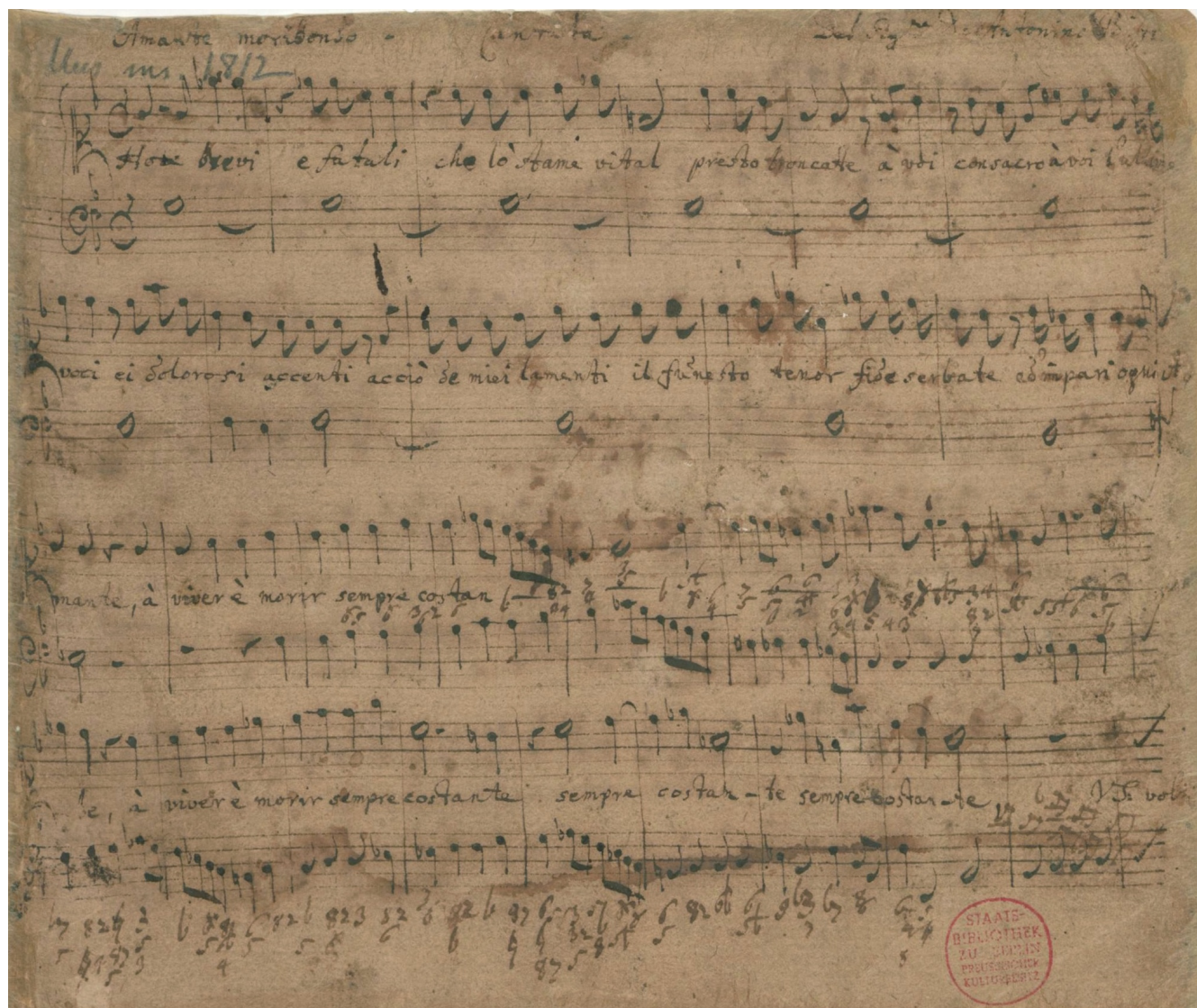
Ah, prepare it for its end and calm it

al soffiari d'avversa sorte.

In the face of suffering an adverse fate.

Bach's fragmentary copy of Biffi's cantata (D B, ms. 1812)

Note the abrasion at the end of the first system, obscuring the text.



A handwritten musical score on aged, yellowed paper. The score consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are written in Italian. The first system begins with the lyrics "à viver e morir sempre costan". The second system includes the lyrics "Morte cara eh vienio morte à son". The third system has the lyrics "nar pace à quest alma à sonnar pace à quest al - ma deh gl'appresta porto e calma al soffiar d'aversa cor". The fourth system continues with "te, deh gl'appresta porto e calma porto e calma deh gl'appresta porto e calma al soffiar d'aversa cor". The music is written in a cursive hand, with various notes, rests, and clefs. There are some annotations in red ink, possibly indicating fingerings or performance instructions. The paper shows signs of age, including some staining and discoloration.

Transcription (with editorial realization of Bach's figured bass)

Amante moribondo
Cantata

Antonio Biffi, copied by J. S. Bach
in D B Mus. ms. 1812

[Sop.]

Ho - re bre - vi e fa - ta - li che lo sta - me vi - tal pre - sto tron -

[Editorial Realization]

[B.c.]

5

ca - ste a voi con - sa - cro a vo - i l'ul - ti - me[?] vo - ci e i do - lo - ro - si ac - cen - ti ac -

9

ciò de miei la - men - ti il fu - ne - sto te - nor fi - de ser - ba - te ed im - pa - ri o - gni A - man - te, a

13

vi - ver e mo - rir sem - pre co - stan - - -

6 5 6 3 2 6 b 8 2 # 7 3 b 5b 6 4

4 # 5 b 6 4

17

te, a

7 6 6 3 3 2 8 7 6 5 3 4 6 5 5+ 6 6 7 8 2 4 8 7 3 5 5 3

21

vi - ver e mo - rir sem - pre co - stan - te sem - pre

b 5 6 8 6 8 2 5 8 2 3 8 2 3 6 8 2 b 8 7 6 5 3 2 5 6 5 8

25

co - stan - te, sem - pre co - stan - te,

6 8 2 6 6 9 b3 [?] b7 8 6 6 4 5 4

29

a vi - ver e mo - rir sem - pre co - stan - te

8 7 5 b 6 8 6 5 8 2 3 8 2 3 6 8 2 6 8 2 6 8 2 6 8 2 8 7 5 3

*Eighth notes here and in the next measure are original, written one octave lower (in lower staff). - 2 -

33

te.

37

Adagio

3

Mor-te ca - ra, ah vie-ni_o mor - te, a do -

5

nar pa - ce a que - st'al - ma, a do - nar pa - ce a que - st'al - - -

6

ma, deh gl'ap-pre-sta por-to e cal-ma al sof - fiar d'a-ver-sa sor - te,

8

deh gl'ap - pre - sta por - to e cal - ma, por - to e cal - ma, deh gl'ap -

9

pre - sta por - to e cal - ma al sof - fiar d'a - ver - sa sor - - - te.

Bibliographic abbreviations

- BD *Bach-Dokumente*, ed. Werner Neumann, Hans-Joachim Schulze, et al. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963–)
- BG Johann Sebastian Bach, *Werke*, 46 vols, edited by the Bach-Gesellschaft (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1851–1900)
- BWV Wolfgang Schmieder, *Thematisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der musikalischen Werke Johann Sebastian Bachs: Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*, 2d edn. (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1990)
- D B Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek
- D Bsa Berlin, Archiv der Sing-Akademie zu Berlin (on deposit at D B)
- D DI Dresden, Landesbibliothek
- KB *Kritischer Bericht* (critical commentary)
- F Pn Paris, Bibliothèque National
- NBA Johann Sebastian Bach, *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, edited by the Johann-Sebastian-Bach-Institut, Göttingen, and the Bach-Archiv, Leipzig (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1954–)
- NBR *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, rev. Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton, 1998)