

A Bach Manuscript Recovered:
Berlin, Bibliothek der Hochschule der Künste, Spitta Ms. 1491
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The musical manuscript Berlin, Bibliothek der Hochschule der Künste, Spitta Ms. 1491 is one of a number of items listed by Christoph Wolff as missing from this library since World War II.¹ Part of the estate of the nineteenth-century musicologist and Bach biographer Johann Philipp Spitta (1841–94), the manuscript is the principal source for the organ chorale preludes of Johann Christoph Bach (1642–1703), the most distinguished of Sebastian's ancestors. It was, moreover, the sole known source of Sebastian's early chorale prelude *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* BWV 719, prior to the identification of the Neumeister Codex, which contains a concordance.² The manuscript also contained organ chorales by Pachelbel, Buttstedt, and others, as well as additional material relevant to the study of composition and improvisation during the eighteenth or early nineteenth century.³

In fact, the manuscript was in private hands since at least 1954 and has recently been returned to the Berlin library that is its legitimate owner. The return was made possible by Roderick A. Manson of Montréal, who introduced himself to the present author after the latter had given a public lecture as part of the Bach International Harpsichord Festival in that city in May 1997. Manson, a retired social worker, Bach enthusiast, and accomplished organist, presented photographs of a manuscript for which he was seeking an appropriate depository. Identifying marks within the manuscript, such as library stamps and a bookplate, had been removed or defaced, and thus it is understandable that its possessor was unaware that the manuscript had disappeared, presumably during the war, from the Berlin Hochschule für Musik and that it remained of great interest to scholars.⁴

When the present author traveled to Montréal in March 1998 to retrieve the manuscript, he found the latter being kept unprepossessingly in a locked metal box, a prized possession in a modest, austere furnished flat. Manson presented a bill of sale indicating that he had acquired it from

¹Christoph Wolff, "From Berlin to Lodz: The Spitta Collection Resurfaces," *Music Library Association Notes* 46 (1989): 326.

²See *The Neumeister Collection of Chorale Preludes From the Bach Circle (Yale University Library LM 4708): A Facsimile Edition*, with introduction by Christoph Wolff (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). The text of BWV 719 in this source is inferior and contains significant variants; see Christoph Wolff, "Zum Quellenwert der Neumeister-Sammlung: Bachs Orgelchoral 'Der Tag der ist so freudenreich' BWV 719," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 83 (1998): 155–67.

³See *Die organistische Improvisation im 17. Jahrhundert, dargestellt an den "Verundvierzig Chorälen zum Präambulieren" von Johann Christoph Bach* (Kassel, 1929).

⁴Manson explained in a letter to the present author (June 3, 1997) that he was aware of Spitta's account of the manuscript as a source for the music of Johann Christoph Bach, but that "other writers" had written off the latter's chorale preludes as "unimportant."

the Montreal book dealer H. E. Heinemann; he also stated that Heinemann and his wife, a dentist, had been Jews who had fled Germany to Canada via China. The invoice is undated, and Manson was uncertain of the exact date of the acquisition, but his typed inventory of the manuscript is dated June 1954. Heinemann's Mansfield Book Mart no longer exists, and Manson did not know how Heinemann had come into possession of the manuscript. Thus the present discovery unfortunately does not seem to furnish any clues to the location of other missing Spitta materials.⁵

Although this is not the place for a detailed inventory or study of the manuscript, a brief description of the contents may be appropriate inasmuch as it has remained hidden for so long from scholars.⁶ In its present state, the opening section (pp. 1–44) containing forty-four chorale preludes by Johann Christoph Bach is followed by a second group (pp. 45–65) of chorale preludes anonymous save for two attributions to “J. D. F.” A number of pieces in this section, as in later sections, contain indications for registration and the like. Several subsequent gatherings containing chorales, now separate but perhaps originally constituting a single unit, include attributions to:

“Mons. Fiedl”

“J. D. Fiedl”

“W. C. B.”—the Gotha capellmeister Wolfgang Carl Briegel (1626–1712)?

J. S. Bach;

Johann Pachelbel;

“Witte”—Christian Friedrich Witt?

J. D. Scheidler—the Gotha cellist Johann David Scheidler (1748–1802), father-in-law of Spohr?

“J. Buttstedt”

“J.G. Rausch”—supplemented in pencil as “Reuch,” perhaps the Strasbourg organist Johann Georg Rauch (d. 1710) or his son of the same name (1702–79) and “J.R.”

Interrupting the series of chorales are several apparently pedagogical pieces, the first bearing the name “Bergman,” presumably Adolph Gottfried Bergman (1740–1807), organist at Mühlhausen, or Andreas, organist in 1778 at Trier (pp. 74–90). These are followed by a section that has the appearance of a notebook or sketchbook used by one or more students (pp. 91–120); here are found passages in figured bass notation (many fully or partially realized), including what appear to be exemplary progressions, partimento fugues, and the like. One little ten-bar piece is signed “D. Haueize” or the like (p. 97; the script is not entirely clear), calling to mind the Frankfurt organist and publisher Wolfgang (Wilhelm) Nicolaus Haueisen (1740–1804). The style here is that of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century; several hands appear to be present.

⁵Listed in Wolff, “From Berlin to Lodz,” 326.

⁶A microfilm of the manuscript in the New York Public Library was first listed in the 1972 supplement to the library's published catalogue; the source of the film and the story of its acquisition remain to be investigated.

Another section of short, apparently pedagogical pieces (pp. 141–179) opens with twenty-five or more items apparently copied from a collection identified as *Güßler's* [or *Hüßler's*] *Kleine Orgelstücken*.⁷ Parts 1 and 2 of this section each contain twelve numbered pieces; a *Dritter Theil* includes pieces numbered 25 to 35, several with attributions to “Vierling”—perhaps the Schmalkalden organist Johann Gottfried Vierling (1750–1813), a student of Kirnberger who published numerous organ works in the late eighteenth century, or his son Johann (1777–1822). Following these is a new series of numbered pieces that begins with a “No 9 Fuga,” but this section of the manuscript (pp. 185–241) appears to be bound out of order and the present series is probably meant to begin with the eight preludes, fugues, and other pieces that begin on page 206.⁸ The numbering of these pieces continues up to 60 (an Allegro by “Vierling”) or 61 (a “Fuga”; the digit “6” has been smudged); a number are attributed to “Rink,”⁹ and to “Rembt” (possibly Johann Ernst Rembt, 1749–1810); the latter suggests a connection to another missing Spitta manuscript (ms. 1440), a late-eighteenth-century copy in the hand of J. E. Rempt.¹⁰ The present author has not had an opportunity to compare these pieces with those published in collections of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by the composers whose names appear in the manuscript.

The manuscript's origin and its relationship to the Bach circle remain to be elucidated. The conjecture that the manuscript is to be connected with an eighteenth-century matriculant of the Jena University named Johann Daniel Fiedler cannot, however, be confirmed here.¹¹ The cover has been badly worn in the lower right-hand corner, where one or two possessor's names appear to have been written (possibly “del Si[gn]ore / Johann Fiedl / Adlung [?]”). The name Fiedl evidently corresponds with the “J. D. F.” named as composer of several of the chorale preludes in the second part of the manuscript and presumably identical to the “Mons. Fiedl” named on page 122.¹²

Clearly, further work will be needed to elucidate the full history and significance of the manuscript, but it is now, once again, in safe hands in the library of the Hochschule der Künste

⁷This title appears as an original ink entry at the bottom of page 157, which is headed *Zweiter Theil*, and as a pencil addition (in Spitta's hand?) at the top of page 141.

⁸The structure of this portion of the manuscript awaits closer analysis; some pages are evidently bound upside-down and out of order, but it appears that some pieces were copied with the book intentionally reversed; pages 187–88, bearing two different pieces on opposite sides of one leaf, are written upside-down with respect to one another.

⁹One title specifies “C. H. Rink,” presumably the Darmstadt organist Johann Christian Heinrich Rinck (1770–1846).

¹⁰Wolff, “From Berlin to Lodz,” 326.

¹¹See Wolff, “Zum Quellenwert,” 158n. 20.

¹²Spitta, or another owner of the manuscript, used pencil to supplement the original ink attribution “J. D. F.” on page 46 to read (probably) “Fiedl.”

Berlin. The recovery of Spitta MS 1491 renews hope that other missing Spitta manuscripts may also be recovered, and is a reminder that lost artistic and scholarly materials do occasionally resurface.