



THE GLOBAL BACH COMMUNITY

Volume 3, Issue 1

Fall 2003

Traveling with The Bach Choir of Bethlehem

by Samuel T. Swansen, President

The Global Bach Community

In July The Bach Choir of Bethlehem toured England and Scotland and performed a series of well received concerts in St. Albans, Oxford, York, Edinburgh, Cambridge and London.

The Trip afforded opportunities for discussions among the Board leadership of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem, The Washington (DC) Bach Consort, and The Bach Festival of Philadelphia as to ways we could collaborate to strengthen each other.

We heard the finalists of The St. Albans International Organ Competition outside London. The winner is promoted by an agent and is available for tours. One of the previous winners, Martin Sander, organist at Westminster Abbey, has performed with The Bach Festival of Philadelphia and will be returning to Philadelphia in April, 2004.

The winners of the competition were Herman Jordaan from South Africa and Robert Houssart, a Dutchman currently based in the UK.

Jordaan, aged 27, won the Interpretation Competition, which is sponsored by the Williams School of Church Music. He was born in Pretoria, South Africa, where he is active as a church, concert and chamber musician. He has studied in South Africa and the Netherlands and is currently working

continued on page 2

The Global Bach Community

has its web site at

www.bach-net.org

Following in Shakespeare's Steps

While traveling with the Bach Choir of Bethlehem in London, we had a chance to visit the replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theater on the south bank of the Thames River.

The Theater has been painstakingly reconstructed with an adjoining building for educational programs and a gift shop with Shakespeare memorabilia. The main problem with the reconstruction was to get an authentic thatched roof approved in a city that suffered a disastrous fire in 1666 and has banned thatched roofs ever since.



Complementing the UK organization is a Friends of the Globe Theater organization created in the United States to solve the problem of lack of deductibility for income tax purposes of gifts to a non-US charity. The "Friends of" organization was organized in Illinois and maintains an office in New York City where it raises tax-deductible money destined for the Globe Theater and sponsors educational programs in the United States in support of Shakespeare's legacy.

This is a successful model that we in The Global Bach Community would do well to emulate: We

continued on page 2

Traveling with The Bach Choir of Bethlehem

continued from page 1

towards his Master of Music degree at the University of Pretoria. In the final he played pieces by Bach and Duruflé as well as music from his native South Africa: two movements from the Afrika Hymnus by Stefans Grové. In addition to a cash prize of £5,500 he wins recital engagements at some of the most important organ venues in Europe, including St Paul's, Chartres, Worms and St Albans Cathedrals, an agent's representation in the USA for a year and a solo recording. He also won the prize for the most enjoyable performance in the final as voted for by members of the audience.

Robert Houssart, aged 24, who won the improvisation Competition, is a Dutch national and is currently Assistant Director of Music at Gloucester Cathedral. His winning performance was a 20-minute improvisation on two themes, one of which was Ravel's Bolero, which he was given 40 minutes before he began to play. He wins £4,000 and recital engagements in St Albans, Liverpool Metropolitan, Gloucester and Salisbury Cathedrals and Ste Clothilde, Paris.

For more information on St. Albans, see the website at: www.organfestival.com.

Following in Shakespeare's Steps

continued from page 1

already have a Thomaskirche and don't need to build a replica of it. There is a nearby building that houses the Bach Archiv, now headed by GBC's Advisory Committee Member Christoph Wolff and the Bose Museum. I am informed, however, that the Thomaskirche has suffered from the "blessing" of the demise of the wall between East and West Germany. The German government has done a "mini-Marshall Plan" in the former East Germany where Leipzig and other Bach cities are located. As a result, gentrification has set in and most of the Thomaskirche congregation has scattered to the Leipzig suburbs causing a shrinkage of membership and financial support for Thomaskirche. Discussions are going on now as to how The Global Bach Community can create a US-based "Friends of" organization to enhance support for this organization.

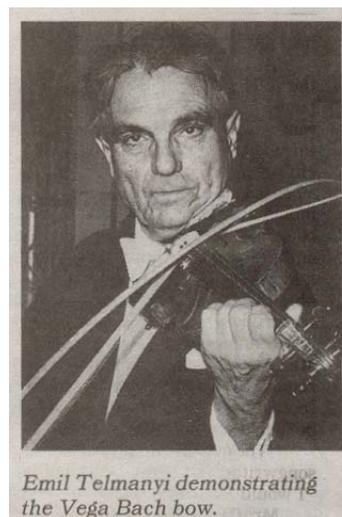
-- Samuel T. Swansen

The Bow of Bach's Dreams? Not Quite

from *The New York Times*, August 10, 2003

By Jeremy Eichler

How was Bach's music performed during his own lifetime? The question has inspired impassioned debate and meticulous scholarship, not to mention one of the more bizarrely misguided yet fascinating musical inventions of the early 20th century: the "Bach Bow," designed to render three or four notes of a chord at once without requiring the player to roll the bow across the strings and thereby arpeggiate the chord. A reminder of its strange story and even stranger sound comes in a new two-CD Testament reissue of the Hungarian violinist Emil Telmányi's famous 1954 recording of Bach's solo sonatas and partitas, using the Vega Bach bow he championed.



Emil Telmányi demonstrating the Vega Bach bow.

With its giant convex arch, its thick ribbon of hair and its thumb-operated tension-adjusting mechanism, the Vega bow looks like a gadget you might find on display at a Sharper Image store in 18th century Leipzig. It was in fact built in the 1950's by Knud

continued on page 3

The Bow of Bach's Dreams

continued from page 2

Vestergaard as the culmination of years of bow makers' attempts to "reconstruct" the bow that Bach intended to be used in performing his dense polyphonic music for solo violin.

In fact no such bow ever existed in Bach's day. This absurd historical canard developed, paradoxically, out of a strict fidelity to Bach's written score, where four-note chords are routinely notated as if they were to be played all at once. The impossibility of that task with a modern or Baroque bow led to the speculation that the composer had something else in mind.

Telmanyi was the best-known advocate of the odd invention, and this recording allowed him to spread the word. At first, the playing may seem familiar enough, as in the opening Allemande of the D minor Partita, where Telmanyi uses his bow at a high tension, enabling him to play one string at a time as usual. But skip ahead to that partita's closing movement, the heavily chordal Chaconne, and prepare for something radically different. Telmanyi has loosened his bow's tension, allowing the hair to grip three or even all four strings at once, making the violin sound more like a dark-hued and mysterious organ or, as others have heard it, an accordion. Certain passages in the G minor fugue sound as if they were being played by multiple violinists.

The set is worth a listen for its sheer novelty, and for the entertaining aural illusion of a super-powered player, capable of breaking the physical laws of the instrument. Yet ultimately, the Vega bow is instructive not for its success but for its failure. For all the textual fidelity it allows, the bow has a way of neutering and deracinating the music. Indeed, by "verticalizing" the harmonies, the bow treats the instrument as if it were a keyboard. But part of the genius of Bach's solo violin music lies precisely in the tension it creates between the real and the ideal, the chords on the page and the ways they must be rendered on a melodic instrument.

Moreover, the broken triple- and quadruple-stopped chords function in important rhythmic and expressive ways. As recordings of these works by, say, Nathan Milstein and Henryk Szeryng demonstrate, the vigorous broken chords can themselves make the music thrillingly propulsive. With Telmanyi's equipment, which does not allow

for sharp attacks, the music sounds entirely static.

Finally, the story of the Bach bow is a reminder of how the zealotry for historical accuracy can lure us down blind alleys, away from history and toward sheer fantasy. This, at least, is an intriguing fantasy, whose curiosity value alone makes it worth a return visit.

Britain: Recognition at Home



from *The New York Times*,
September 1, 2003

With Judi Dench as its patron, a new British association held its inaugural conference on Friday at De Montfort University in Leicester, England. The organization is the British Shakespeare Association, and, the BBC reported, it says that while more than 100 countries, from the United States to China, have organizations dedicated to Shakespeare, it is the first in Britain. Julia Briggs, a professor, Shakespeare expert and founder of the association, said: "We simply thought, 'This is mad.' We go to all these national Shakespeare association meetings, but we don't have one in Britain." She said the association is open to everyone with an interest in the subject. "We want it to be Shakespeare for everybody." Dame Judi, who won an Academy Award for her performance in "Shakespeare in Love" (1998), joined the Royal Shakespeare company in 1961 and owns the full-scale replica of the theater used in the film.

Letters to the Editor are Welcome.
Please address them to:

The Global Bach Community
8419 Germantown Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19118
bach@bach-net.org

Rosalyn Tureck, R.I.P.

from *The National Review*, August 11, 2003

By William F. Buckley

She died (finally) on July 17. As it happened, only a few minutes after a Tureck tribute at the Mannes School in New York at which the audience – more accurately the congregants – heard her playing on video and tapes, listened to a lecture or two about her accomplishments, and on to two young pianists who tried to communicate her authoritative style. They played, of course, J. S. Bach. She and Bach devoted their lives to each other.

I approached her in the late Sixties, inviting her to appear on *Firing Line* to discuss a recent jab at Bach by a young protester in Los Angeles who had raged at a public rally that Bach had nothing to say to modern life. I knew her, as everyone who listened to Bach did, as the greatest living interpreter of his works. She had played the whole piano repertory, old and new – David Diamond wrote a piano sonata for her. Her first public performance in Chicago was done at age nine, and after intensive studies with fine artists in Chicago and at the Juilliard School, she began her exhaustive career, giving, gradually, only all-Bach programs. She played in every part of the world, earning, always, standing ovations, and taught music and musicology at Oxford, Yale, and Cal Tech.

We became friends, and she appeared five times on *Firing Line* programs, on one of them defending the role of the performing artist against the claim that technology had anachronized the live recital, a claim flamboyantly advanced by Glenn Gould. There was nothing here to be confused with fuddy-duddyism: She was receptive to explorations at every level, even mastering the (New Age) Theremin after some years of study with its developer. She performed on the harpsichord and, indeed, on the clavichord and organ, but was supreme on the piano, writing, collaterally, technical papers and books on performance and musical structure.

In 1977, she undertook at Carnegie Hall to play the Goldberg Variations before dinner on the harpsichord, and to play them after dinner on the piano, intending to display the strengths and individuality of the two instruments, at her singular hands. To do that one thinks of singing Tristan in the afternoon and Siegfried in the evening. At a reception – held at our quarters after the event – she declined to shake hands (dear Rosalyn could sometimes be attracted to personal drama). The Goldbergs are thought of as her signature piece. When she was 17, she undertook to learn this formidable work (I once timed her in it – 118 minutes). After seven weeks. She agreed to perform it for fellow students at Juilliard. Her teacher simply assumed that she would rely on the music, but she didn't even bring it to the piano, tucking away only a few three-by-five cards giving the beginning

bar of each of the 32 variations. “I never actually looked at them,” she told me.

But playing the Goldbergs at my house (for the second time), seven or eight years ago, she told me she would want the music in front of her, in the event she wished to consult the score on one or two variations; though she never in fact did. She was then 80, so it was for over 60 years that she carried the music in her head, that and 35 hours of other music of Bach. That performance was the last of seven she gave for me. The first, in 1975, was “a birthday present.” It was recorded, and, with two later recitals at home in Connecticut, combined to produce two CDs, “great works of J. S. Bach,” which still circulate. But the surprise came when in 1995 she called to ask whether I would like her to play for me and my wife and guests the program of Romantic music she would perform a week later in Buenos Aires. Her audience was flabbergasted as she went through without music an hour of Mendelssohn, Brahms, Schumann, and Debussy, music she hadn't played for 40 years, playing it now faultlessly and masterfully, from that huge repertory she carried in her head.

Four weeks ago I had a telephone call from a friend of Mme Tureck. He spoke from the hospital to tell me that she was dying and probably would live only another day, in the event I wanted to send her a farewell note, which he would take her from his e-mail. “She has just finished her autobiography and will have the manuscript sent to you before the weekend. But if you want to write to her you need to do it in the next half hour, because I have to go out, and she isn't expected to survive.” I completed a hasty note, which, via her attentive friend, she acknowledged warmly.

“I don't know the details of your incarceration,” I wrote, “not even whether there is any music at your bedside. There is, if you are interested to know, music at my bedside: the 48 [Preludes and Fugues] performed by Rosalyn Tureck. The recordings are truly sublime, and every time I experience any of it I am reminded of your incomparability. How fine to know that you have been of service to the greatest genius of all time, and how proud he'd have been to hear you perform.”

She lived another eight weeks – not, really, a welcome extension of life – with the assertive cancer that killed her.

Meanwhile, I had got to the last page of her 600-page book. It ends, “I gave a talk on my eightieth birthday to the North American nations which was aired from Washington, D.C., telephoned from London, in which I spoke of my musical development, and ended with the words, ‘I am still growing.’ Today, almost eight years later, I still can say, with equal conviction, I am still growing.” I, a mere listener, know what she meant by that, while doubting there is anywhere to grow in the art she developed in playing Sebastian Bach.