
BOOK REVIEW: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON BACH

John Eliot Gardiner, *Music in the Castle of Heaven: A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*

London: Allen Lane, 2013

ISBN: 978-0-713-99662-3. 630 pp., incl. ill., pl., mus. exx., index

Yo Tomita, Robin A. Leaver and Jan Smaczny, eds, *Exploring Bach's B-minor Mass*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013

ISBN: 978-1-107-00790-1. 314 pp., incl. ill., tab., mus. exx., indices

Andreas Loewe, *Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion (BWV 245): A Theological Commentary. Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, vol. 168*

Leiden: Brill, 2014

ISBN: 978-90-04-26547-9. 330 pp., incl. ill., tab., bibl., indices

Reviewed by Andrew Frampton

Johann Sebastian Bach has traditionally been thought of as a less enticing biographical subject than many other composers of equal fame and stature. His life story fails to supply the kind of juicy details that appeal to the popular image of a tortured genius: unlike Mozart, he was not a renowned prodigy who rose to the heights of fame and then suddenly died; nor, like Beethoven, did he suffer from deafness and mental illness against which he continually battled. Indeed, as the conductor John Eliot Gardiner acknowledges in the preface to his book *Music in the Castle of Heaven*, 'Bach the musician is an unfathomable genius; Bach the man is all too

obviously flawed, disappointingly ordinary and in many ways still invisible to us' (p. xxv). Gardiner's mission in this formidable tome is to make the invisible visible, and show us that 'emphatically, Bach the man was not a bore' (p. xxxiv). In this, he certainly succeeds.

The book's subtitle is *A Portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach*, but those expecting a comprehensive, well-balanced overview of J.S. Bach's life and music will be disappointed. Gardiner himself acknowledges his focus is on 'the music I know best—the music that is linked to words' (p. xxxii). In my view, this is not to the book's detriment. Gardiner's experience does not lie with *The Well-Tempered Clavier* or the organ fugues, and there are plenty of other volumes for those seeking detailed treatments of the instrumental works. His expertise comes from a life of performing, studying and thinking about Bach's vocal music, crowned by his Bach Cantata Pilgrimage of 2000. This monumental project saw his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists perform the entire corpus of Bach's church cantatas in liturgical sequence over the course of a year, giving him and his colleagues a unique and deeply personal perspective on these still under-appreciated works.

In many ways, therefore, this is as much a book about Gardiner as it is about Bach. His own journey with the composer forms a narrative thread that runs throughout the volume from the first page of Chapter 1. Gardiner takes as his point of departure the famous 1748 Haussmann portrait (now in the Bach-Archiv Leipzig), which was given to his parents for safekeeping during the Second World War. As he writes, 'I grew up under the Cantor's gaze ... Every night on my way to bed I tried to avoid its forbidding stare' (p. 1). We learn how Gardiner came to know Bach's music as a child growing up in Dorset, and how his musical development was shaped by figures such as Wilfred Brown, Imogen Holst and Nadia Boulanger, leading to his passion for early music at Cambridge and the foundation of the Monteverdi Choir.

The book is structured thematically rather than historically, although the chapters do follow a very loose chronological order. Chapter 2 whisks us firmly away from Gardiner's personal musings, presenting a wealth of historical information about Germany at the end of the seventeenth century, the time of Bach's birth. This sets up a useful broader context for an exhaustive examination of the history of the Bach family in a chapter titled 'The Bach Gene.' Here and in later chapters, Gardiner searches for clues to the origins of Bach's genius and makes some interesting observations about his upbringing and development. Drawing on recently uncovered evidence about a culture of 'rowdiness and thuggery' amongst the schoolboys in Eisenach, he argues for a revised reading of Bach's character as a youth, stating that 'there is no reason to turn our backs on the plentiful evidence ... which caused the Eisenach Consistory so much concern ... nor to take it on trust that Bach was a paragon of rectitude' (p. 168). This, he suggests, may be the real reason behind Bach's school absences, rather than the illnesses of his parents as has been traditionally assumed. There is even the suggestion that Bach may have suffered at the hands of the cantor at Ohrdruf, Johann Heinrich Arnold, whom Gardiner describes as a 'villain' and who was apparently dismissed for sadistic bullying. This all serves to support the author's picture of the confrontational, 'incurable' Bach, the fallible man who got into a swordfight with a bassoonist (a tale Gardiner relates with considerable relish) and whose 'recurrent refusal to accept authority' (p. 158) landed him in trouble several times during his career. In Chapter 7, Gardiner constructs another portrait, an image of the 'composer at work' as he attempts to trace Bach's compositional thought processes from the surviving sketches and other documentary evidence. Again, though, the author does not shy

away from characterising Bach as a 'wilful and headstrong' composer (p. 219) who was not afraid to ignore convention and advice when it suited him.

Gardiner is at his best, though, when discussing the music itself, and this forms the true heart of the book. In Chapter 5, he details Bach's earliest forays into church music, beginning with a discussion of the 1707 Easter cantata *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, BWV 4. This is no dry formal analysis, however: much like his liner notes to the Pilgrimage recordings, the text radiates Gardiner's deep knowledge of and enthusiasm for this 'spellbinding' music (p. 134). From here, he takes us through *Aus der Tiefe* and the *Actus Tragicus* onwards into Bach's activities in Weimar and Cöthen. Subsequent chapters are devoted to extensive discussions of the great Leipzig cantata cycles, which Gardiner expertly grounds in the cyclical rhythms of both the natural and liturgical seasons, followed by the Passions and the Mass in B minor. He unravels the myriad musical and theological interconnections in this vast body of work, helping him (and us) to make sense of Bach's underlying themes and intentions. His vivid descriptions guide the reader through complex details of counterpoint, harmony, form and text, without recourse to many musical examples. Moreover, he makes connections with music from both before and after Bach's time, from Palestrina and Monteverdi to Mozart, Beethoven and Berlioz. Take, for example, his comments (p. 343) about the opening of the *St John Passion*:

No opera overture of the first half of the eighteenth century that I know comes closer to anticipating the moods of those to *Idomeneo* or *Don Giovanni* than the opening of Bach's *John Passion*; nor is there a better direct ancestor to Beethoven's three preludes to *Leonore*. For pictorial vividness and tragic vision, the turbulent orchestral introduction is without parallel. Like a true overture, it beckons us into the drama ... The relentless tremulant pulsation generated by the reiterated bass line, the persistent sighing figure in the violas and the swirling motion in the violins so suggestive of turmoil, even of the physical surging of a crowd—all contribute to its unique pathos. Over this ferment, pairs of oboes and flutes locked in lyrical dialogue but with anguished dissonances enact a very different kind of physicality, one that can create a harrowing portrayal of nails being driven into bare flesh.

Reading Gardiner's lavish prose, one cannot help but be swept up by his enthusiasm for this music.

Gardiner is well-known for his forceful personality as a conductor, and his writing, too, has its own distinctive character: it is highly spirited, blisteringly intelligent and unashamedly subjective. Opinions or topics that do not suit the trajectory of Gardiner's discussion are quickly seen off. The contentious issue of the size of vocal ensembles in performances of Bach's music, for example, is given little more than a passing mention, the author stating dismissively that, '[these works] have proved that they can survive treatments as different as the old massed-choir Victorian rituals (with their strong whiff of sanctimoniousness) and, at the other extreme, the minimalist nostrum of historically informed practice (HIP)' (pp. 431–2). Furthermore, Gardiner's efforts to reveal the personalities of his subjects from the scant evidence result in some highly fanciful descriptions: for instance, he describes Johann Ambrosius Bach as '[gazing] out of his portrait like a prosperous brass-player—fat-chinned, full-nosed, lazy-eyed, stubborn and evidently fond of drink' (p. 61). This is nothing more than Gardiner's own inference, and yet it is delivered with such expert conviction, and around so much scholarly material, that it carries with it a certain—unjustified—air of authority. The

book is peppered with such colourful language—another example is the description of the Haussmann portrait (p. 546)—and although entertaining, it risks blurring the lines between scholarship and indulgent speculation.

Another curious feature of the book is the presence of both numbered endnotes and a plethora of unnumbered footnotes (marked with various symbols). Whilst the former fulfil their usual task of citing scholarly material, the latter seem to be a way for Gardiner to sneak in various bits of scholarly information or numerous side remarks that could not be fully developed in the text. These footnotes are often very interesting, but his comments can sometimes add another layer of complexity to his discussion that can be confusing, especially for readers who are not Bach specialists.

The book is beautifully illustrated with numerous black-and-white illustrations and a generous number of colour plates, among them several facsimiles of documents, manuscripts and maps relating to Bach and his world. There are also large colour reproductions of both the 1746 and 1748 Haussmann portraits, helpfully placed side-by-side for comparison, and charts illustrating the Lutheran liturgical year and Bach's first and second Leipzig cantata cycles. Mention must also be made of an extensive chronology and glossary at the back, the latter providing useful definitions of both basic musical concepts and more esoteric terms (including several German expressions that freely garnish the text).

Without doubt, this is a remarkable book, albeit one that seems to not be quite sure of its own identity. Part academic study, part personal testimony, it is neither a scholarly work in the strictest sense nor an accessible popular biography. Gardiner's prose is highly elaborate and littered with references to literature and art, sometimes to the point where one is slightly overwhelmed by analogies. Ultimately, however, this book is a reflection from one of the most remarkable and pioneering musicians of our time on the composer with whom he is most closely identified, a summation of a lifetime's experience. It is Gardiner's headstrong, intelligent and elegant criticism that makes his book so unique and captivating, and an excellent companion to his (or any other) recordings of the vocal works.

In contrast to Gardiner's sweeping and highly personal view, *Exploring Bach's B-minor Mass* takes a wide-ranging look at what is perhaps Bach's greatest yet most enigmatic composition. As the editors note in the preface, the book had its genesis in the international symposium 'Understanding Bach's B-minor Mass,' held in November 2007 at Queen's University Belfast. Twenty-four papers on a range of themes relating to the B minor Mass were presented at this event, and were published (along with reprints of other relevant key materials) in a two-volume set of discussion books, now long since out of print.¹ This new publication now makes the best of the research presented at the symposium available to the wider scholarly community. Fourteen of the papers from the symposium were selected for publication in revised form as essays for the present volume, which is organised into four sections: 'Historical background and contexts,' 'Structure and proportion,' 'Sources' and, lastly, 'Reception.'

The volume opens with Christoph Wolff's essay, 'Past, present and future perspectives on

¹ *International Symposium, Understanding Bach's B-minor Mass: Discussion Book*, vol. 1: Full Papers by the speakers at the symposium on 2, 3 and 4 November 2007, ed. Yo Tomita, Elise Crean and Ian Mills (Belfast: School of Music & Sonic Arts, Queen's University Belfast, 2007); *International Symposium, Understanding Bach's B-minor Mass: Discussion Book*, vol. 2: Resource Book, ed. Yo Tomita and Tanja Kovačević (Belfast: School of Music & Sonic Arts, Queen's University Belfast, 2007).

Bach's B-minor Mass' (Chapter 1). Wolff takes a broad view of the work, presenting a lucid overview of the major facts surrounding the work's genesis and its subsequent performance history. He also considers the history of scholarship on the Mass, noting that, 'the study of the original sources of the B minor Mass [has] had the greatest impact on modern Bach scholarship' (p. 8). In the following chapter, Robin Leaver gives an excellent summary of the terms 'Catholic' and 'Lutheran,' showing that the practical divisions between the two are far less clear-cut than has been traditionally thought. Janice Stockigt's paper (Chapter 3) situates the 1733 *Missa* in the context of various mass settings by Bach's Catholic contemporaries in Dresden, especially those by Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745). Stockigt makes some useful stylistic comparisons between Bach's *Missa*, which may have been written for performance in Dresden, and Zelenka's mass movements, noting many similarities (large-scale structure and scoring) as well as differences (notably length and some questions of instrumentation). Although information is given regarding the Dresden *Hofkapelle* instrumentalists Bach may have had in mind when composing the *Missa*, it is a shame that some of the more detailed musical analysis of similarities between the music of Zelenka and Bach, with supporting musical examples, has been omitted from this version of the paper.

The connection of the B minor Mass to eighteenth-century Dresden styles is further explored in an insightful essay by Szymon Paczkowski (Chapter 4), which seeks to explain why Bach included a polonaise dance movement ('Quoniam tu solus sanctus') in this work. Paczkowski gives a detailed historico-musical analysis of the significant role the polonaise played in Dresden musical life, drawing on examples from composers such as Hasse, Heinichen and Zelenka (supported with some excellent musical examples), and also addresses theological questions surrounding the 'Quoniam' text. His argument that the use of the polonaise, considered in the Polish-Saxon court of Dresden as a 'royal dance' (p. 82), fulfilled a dual liturgical-secular function, is certainly persuasive, and provides an important basis for further research into the symbolism of dance forms in Dresden sacred repertoire from this period. Rounding out Section I is Michael Maul's paper (Chapter 5), which postulates that the complete Mass may have been intended for performance in Vienna in the late 1740s. Maul acknowledges that his conclusions rely on a certain amount of speculation; nonetheless, the detailed archival evidence he offers in support of his hypothesis is persuasive and makes for fascinating reading.

Each of the three chapters comprising Section II is concerned with the overall structural design of the B minor Mass, and are essentially works of speculation and interpretation rather than dealing with hard historical evidence. It has been previously recognised that there are structural proportions within the Mass that are clearly deliberate and symbolic—for example, the 3 × 3 symmetrical 'arch' design of the *Symbolum Nicenum*, a feature noted by Melvin Unger (Chapter 7) that serves as a starting point for his wider discussion of chiasmic elements in this section, particularly regarding the 'Crucifixus.' Chapters 6 and 8, by Ulrich Siegele and Ruth Tatlow respectively, are both concerned with numerical analysis, and, to their credit, draw on several important historical sources to justify their arguments. Siegele's chapter, modestly titled, 'Some observations on the formal design of Bach's B minor Mass,' presents the reader with a virtuosic set of calculations primarily concerning bar numbers and their duration. Admittedly, these sometimes feel as though they warrant praise for their mathematical ingenuity rather than what they truly reveal about Bach's intentions. He concludes his chapter by stating that, 'the whole was an essential issue in [Bach's] conception [of the work] ... The bar numbers

produce consistent evidence: Bach designed the B minor Mass as a whole; in fact, he conceived it as a single work' (p. 124). This gives the impression that the entire preceding analysis is a very complicated way of proving something that has already been convincingly established by other, more concrete means, such as musical and manuscript analyses. Tatlow's argument rests on a very different set of calculations, and consequently produces quite different—but nonetheless very interesting—results concerning proportion and bar totals. It is ultimately left to the reader to decide which analytical system is the most persuasive, for they are quite separate entities and by no means designed to agree. The reader needs no convincing of the solid analytical work that underpins each of the models, but, after digesting all three chapters, one cannot help feel that even J.S. Bach could not possibly have consciously attempted to imbue the work with so many proportional relationships.

Since the nineteenth century, the musical text of the B minor Mass itself has been surrounded by controversy. As Uwe Wolf explains in his fascinating essay 'Many Problems, Various Solutions: Editing Bach's B-minor Mass' (Chapter 9), one of the earliest editions, that of the old Bach Gesamtausgabe from 1856, was produced without access to the autograph, forcing the editorial board of the Bach-Gesellschaft to reissue the volume several years later with amendments. And, as is well known, the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* edition that appeared a century later was also beset with problems and contained numerous mistakes and errors of judgement on the part of its editor, Friedrich Smend. The sources for the B minor Mass are particularly challenging to work with, and Wolf gives an expert insight into the many problems of textual criticism involved in editing the work, framed by the conclusions drawn from his own edition recently published in the revised *Neue Bach Ausgabe (NBA)*.² Particularly interesting is his discussion of Joshua Rifkin's edition,³ which he criticises as being too heavily reliant on the autograph score at the expense of valuable information from the so-called 'Dresden' parts of 1733. Wolf's editorial approach also involves the use of results from a new X-ray ink analysis of the autograph, something that Rifkin rejects.

Whilst Wolf, as an editor, is mainly concerned with analysing primary sources, Tatiana Shabalina (Chapter 10) reminds us of the importance of secondary sources as witnesses to the dissemination and reception of Bach's music after his death. In a comprehensive source study, she traces the history of a late-eighteenth-century manuscript copy of the B minor Mass recently discovered in St Petersburg. Ulrich Leisinger (Chapter 11), meanwhile, examines a copy of the B-minor Mass once owned by Haydn, which leads him to suggest that Mozart (via Baron Gottfried von Swieten) may have had access to the score and thus it may have acted as the inspiration for his C minor Mass, K. 427. Leisinger's subsequent argument is centered around various stylistic observations about the two works in comparison with other Viennese models, supported by contemporary evidence about Mozart's interactions with the music of Handel and Bach. Certainly, there are undeniable similarities between Bach's 'Crucifixus' and Mozart's 'Qui tollis,' as indeed there are between the latter and 'The People Shall Hear' from Handel's *Israel in Egypt* (p. 240). But this does not prove that Mozart was thinking specifically of the B minor Mass; as Leisinger himself comments, the C minor Mass more generally is a

² Johann Sebastian Bach, *Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke, Revidierte Ausgabe*, vol. 1, *Messe in h-moll*, ed. Uwe Wolf (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2010).

³ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Messe h-Moll*, ed. Joshua Rifkin (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2006).

retrospective work that alludes to musical styles of the past, and the similarities could simply be as a result of Mozart's broader interest in 'the ancient style' (p. 239) from a variety of sources. So, although a relationship between the two Bach and Mozart masses is indeed a 'tempting and tantalising premise' (p. 243), it again sadly mounts to no more than informed speculation.

The last three chapters trace various individual histories of the Mass during the course of the nineteenth century. Anselm Hartinger considers Mendelssohn's interactions with the B minor Mass as seen through his own score, now located in the Bodleian Library, and Katherine Pardee undertakes a fascinating exploration of the work's reception in nineteenth-century England. Finally, Jan Smaczny's paper gives some insights into performances of the Mass in mid-century Prague.

When it comes to the B minor Mass, this volume clearly shows that, as Szymon Paczkowski notes, 'questions and conjectures far outweigh firm answers' (p. 54). Nonetheless, the extraordinary breadth and depth of studies presented here place it at the forefront of current scholarship on the B minor Mass, and make it an indispensable reference for all Bach scholars.

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the B minor Mass was lauded as one of Bach's greatest compositions: Hans Georg Nageli called it 'The Greatest Musical Work of Art of All Times and Nations.' However, this was not the case for all Bach's major vocal works. For a long time Bach's *St John Passion* was regarded as the poor relation to the *St Matthew Passion*; indeed, Philipp Spitta called it 'far inferior' to the latter work.⁴ Since the twentieth century, though, the *St John Passion* has come to be regarded on equal terms with the *St Matthew*, and has been the subject of several extensive studies. The most important of these is Arthur Mendel's exhaustive *Kritischer Bericht* to his edition of the work for the *NBA*, which appeared in 1974.⁵ Mendel's pioneering work has been the foundation for all scholarly writings on *St John Passion* since that time, including Alfred Dürr's monograph *Johann Sebastian Bach: Die Johannes-Passion*,⁶ which was subsequently translated into English.⁷ Dürr's volume is essentially a scholarly handbook for the entire work, guiding the reader through its historical background, source transmission, musical structure and elements of textual meaning. However, Dürr did not comment in detail on deeper aspects of the work's text, and other studies in English have likewise concentrated mainly on musical, rather than theological, matters.

Two recent publications have aimed to fill that gap. One is Eric Chafe's 2014 volume *J.S. Bach and Johannine Theology: The St John Passion and Cantatas for Spring 1725*, which expands on his ideas of 'tonal allegory' in these works and is written very much for the specialist.⁸ Another, also published in 2014, is *Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion (BWV 245): A Theological Commentary*, by Andreas Loewe. A historian and theologian by training, Loewe presents a readable, highly informative theological companion to the *St John Passion* that is

⁴ Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Work and Influence on the Music of Germany, 1685–1750*, trans. Clara Bell and J. A. Fuller Maitland, vol. 2 (London: Novello & Co., 1899) 526.

⁵ Arthur Mendel, *Kritischer Bericht* to Johann Sebastian Bach, *Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke*, Serie II, Band 4: *Johannes-Passion* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1974).

⁶ Alfred Dürr, *Johann Sebastian Bach: Die Johannes Passion: Entstehung, Überlieferung, Werkeinführung* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1999).

⁷ Alfred Dürr, *Johann Sebastian Bach's St John Passion: Genesis, Transmission and Meaning*, trans. Peter Branscombe (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

⁸ Eric Chafe, *J.S. Bach and Johannine Theology: The St John Passion and Cantatas for Spring 1725* (Oxford: OUP, 2014).

more approachable than Chafe's text. His book is divided into two main sections: 'Composer and Work' and the 'Commentary', which includes a new translation of the complete libretto.

Part One introduces the reader to the *St John Passion* in the context of Bach's theological and compositional world. This necessitates presenting a certain amount of information that will already be very familiar to those well-versed in Bach biography and scholarship, but for the most part Loewe wisely confines his discussion to issues of theology that are directly relevant to the *St John Passion*. The exception to this is Chapter 3, which constitutes a fairly basic introduction to Bach's cantatas. In contrast to the surrounding chapters, this discussion feels oddly out of place in a book otherwise devoted exclusively to the *St John Passion*. The information presented, which has no particular focus on theology, is widely available elsewhere, as are most of the primary source references. I agree that a brief discussion of the cantatas in order to situate the *St John Passion* in the broader context of Bach's Leipzig sacred music may be warranted, particularly for readers who are not musicologists, but an entire chapter seems excessive.

Chapter 6, which precedes the commentary proper, presents a new study translation by Katherine Firth of the complete libretto. The translation attempts 'to be as close to the word choice, grammar, sequence and structure of the original libretto as possible, within the bounds of comprehensible English' (p. 100), and as far as I can see it more than succeeds. It is accurate, highly readable and superbly laid out. Particularly useful for non-native German speakers are the copious footnotes that clarify subtleties of meaning or point out interesting linguistic features to deepen understanding. There are very few questionable word choices: one can be found in the text of 'Zerfließe, mein Herze,' where the word 'Zähren' (tears) is rather unpoetically translated as 'brine' (p. 131).

The translation supports the theological commentary itself, which makes up the largest portion of the book at over 150 pages. This is a movement-by-movement guide to the *St John Passion* focusing on how both the text and the music convey theological ideas. Naturally, the discussion of the music involves some overlap with other guides (notably Dürr's book), and the discussion of musical concepts and gestures is not always convincing. But musical analysis is not the real aim here: the great strength of Loewe's commentary is in the connections he makes to theological concepts and writings from the Early Modern period in order to illuminate aspects of the text. For example, in relation to the aria 'Von den Stricken meiner Sünden' ('From the Cords of My Sins'), he discusses an orthodox Lutheran concept that, 'believers' sins are like the cords that bind Jesus' (p. 163), and uses as a case study the opening chorus from the famous *Passion* libretto by Barthold Heinrich Brockes. In the course of his analysis, Loewe quotes from a sermon by the seventeenth-century Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhand and writings by the Jena theologian Johann Michael Dilherr (a contemporary of Bach) to underline further his point (p. 164). The recitative following this aria is a brief ten-word verse about Simon Peter and another disciple following Jesus, which might ordinarily pass most casual listeners by. Loewe, however, draws our attention to the concept of *Nachfolge*, the 'cost of discipleship' as related to Peter following Jesus, and links it to events earlier in the Book of John that are outside the text of the *Passion* (pp. 164–5). These are just two examples of the valuable insights provided by Loewe's commentary. As the footnotes make clear, his work makes a great deal of German-language material, from both primary and secondary literature, available to English readers for the first time. Even for specialist Bach scholars, who will be

familiar with the references to scholarship found in the *Bach-Dokumente* and the *Kritischer Bericht* to the *NBA* II/4, Loewe's assimilation of such a large amount of German theological material will prove an invaluable asset.

There are some irritating typographical and editorial quirks: to name a few, the persistent reference to the 'Neue Bachausgabe', rather than the customary *Neue Bach Ausgabe*; the archaic description of 'Bach's necrologue' (fn. 1, p. 1), as opposed to the standard English 'obituary'; and the designation of a single paragraph of text, a brief general note about the relationship of the commentary to Mendel's *NBA* edition, as 'Chapter 5' (p. 99), which could surely have been integrated with Chapter 7 as a kind of 'sources consulted' section. An unfortunate number of errors have been allowed to creep through, ranging from misspellings to contradictory statements (for example, fn. 2, p. 1, where Loewe refers to 'two previous studies' about the *Passion* but actually lists three).

Despite these minor shortcomings, Loewe's book fills an important gap in the English-language literature on the *St John Passion* for musicologists, theologians, performers and listeners alike. It should ideally be used as a supplement to other resources, such as Dürr's monograph and (as Loewe recommends) a full or vocal score.

These three books represent very different aspects of, and approaches to, the study of Johann Sebastian Bach and his music. They are not all designed only for scholars, but none is without scholarly merit, despite individual failings. Gardiner takes a grand but deeply personal view of Bach and his music, giving the reader his unique insight into music that he has known and conducted for so long; Tomita, Leaver, Smaczny and their colleagues present a wide-ranging volume of remarkable scholarly essays that constitute the most comprehensive and current reference work on the B minor Mass; and Loewe offers a different and fascinating perspective on a familiar work through the lens of Lutheran theology. All three volumes make very important and worthwhile contributions to the current Bach literature. They should find a place on the shelves of every serious Bach scholar, student and enthusiast, and are highly recommended.

About the Reviewer

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