



philosophies of Kant, Reichardt's defence of Gluck had a profound impact on the perceptions of nineteenth-century critics such as A. B. Marx and E. T. A. Hoffman. Not only did Reichardt's writings raise Gluck's reputation as a composer, but they also inspired future generations of composers to consider Gluck's defiance of compositional rules as inspiration for escaping the bounds of artistic expectation.

Those in attendance at the conference were inspired to redraw the map of Gluck scholarship and embrace a more pluralistic view of the composer's entire oeuvre. As scholarship in this vein progresses, Gluck should increasingly be understood as a composer fully active within and appreciative of the musical cultures of his time, and just as willing to self-borrow and engage with his performers as he was to reform the dramatic aspect of opera. For young scholars, the present author included, it was an invaluable opportunity to hear high-calibre scholarship on a topic that still offers much opportunity for future study.

ANNALISE SMITH

<annalise.smith@gmail.com>



doi:[10.1017/S147857061500024X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S147857061500024X)

C. P. E. BACH TRICENTENARY CONFERENCE: C. P. E. BACH AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY KEYBOARD CULTURE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD, 29–30 NOVEMBER 2014

There was a time when C. P. E. Bach's music was mostly interesting as a connection between periods of music history. Indeed, perhaps no composer was done a greater injustice by such un-useful terms as 'pre-classical', meant to place Bach in various grand narratives and often forcing him into the role of bearing the spirit of his father to the Viennese classics. Such fussy periodizations of eighteenth-century music history are now mostly passé. So it was a pleasure to attend this conference, held at the Faculty of Music of Oxford University, at which speakers explored the varied terrain of Bach's place in eighteenth-century keyboard culture without for the most part framing their arguments in terms of influence and legacy. They examined this most fascinating (and in some ways enigmatic) of composers on his own merits.

The conference, ably hosted by Oxford PhD students Joe Davies and Andrew Lamb with support from their mentor Susan Wollenberg, opened with a session on Bach as 'Theorist and Practitioner'. The first speaker, John McKean (University of Cambridge), deftly located the *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* in the context of earlier German keyboard treatises. At the end of this session Joshua Walden (Peabody Conservatory / Johns Hopkins University) took on the cadenza in Bach's work as hermeneutic instrument – in other words, as a tool for demonstrating interpretation. I found this subtle argument compelling; Walden drew liberally on contemporary non-musical texts on the art of interpretation or *Auslegung* (for instance by Johann August Ernesti and Johann Martin Chladenius), and left us with a strong sense of how one interpretative utterance can comment on another. The middle paper of this session stood out in both its immediate context and that of the conference as a whole. Sheila Guymer (University of Cambridge) demonstrated how she had used qualitative ethnographic methods to explore interpreting Bach through the eyes of Malcolm Bilson, a celebrated advocate of the composer's works. The video interviews shown with Bilson at the piano were fascinating, but the attempt to draw firm conclusions about what Guymer called Bilson's 'sense-making' did come across as slightly jarring to those of us who know him as a most mercurial artist, especially in his performances of so mercurial a composer as Bach.

I opened the next session myself (Thomas Irvine, University of Southampton) with a paper on C. P. E. Bach and the 'Chinese taste'. Although Bach may well have been exposed to plenty of *chinoiserie* during his time at the court of the Frederick the Great, his music, and the texts he set, never make reference to China. But there is a connection, I argued, in that Johann Nikolaus Forkel's glowing review of the third collection of sonatas and rondos for 'Kenner und Liebhaber' appears in the same number (1784) of the *Musikalischer Almanach für Deutschland* as his summary and critique of the first extensive published account of Chinese



music by the Jesuit scholar Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot. If one reads the two texts together, it appears that Forkel – who seems anxious in his review to play down Bach’s tendencies towards the non-discursive – sees in Chinese music a decadent and inferior product. He finds it simplistic, illogical and ephemeral: a lot of culture and not so much Enlightenment, as Moses Mendelssohn remarked of Chinese culture in general the same year (‘Die Sineser [haben] viel Kultur und wenig Aufklärung’, *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 4 (1784), 195). Yonatan Bar-Yoshafat (Cornell University) picked up, in the next paper, on a similar issue. He examined the early E minor keyboard concerto H418 (1745), a work full of twists, turns and ambiguities, as an example of just the kind of ‘self-reflexivity’ that made Forkel so nervous. Keith Chapin (Cardiff University) finished the session with a thoughtful historical contextualization, stretching back long before the late Enlightenment, of the concept of the sublime, which functions so often now as a kind of shorthand for the direction in which C. P. E. Bach’s works seem to be ‘pointing’. In the context of the previous two papers Chapin’s point was especially well taken. The sublime was a far more complex, even ambiguous, concept than we would have it be, in our haste to find goals for composers to ‘work towards’.

After a delightful tour of the idiosyncratic Bate Collection of Musical Instruments (housed in the Faculty) we returned to Denis Arnold Hall for the first of two keynote lectures, by Matthew Head (King’s College London). In the course of the next hour Head brilliantly situated Bach’s Fantasia ‘in tormentis’ H278 in the context of late eighteenth-century medicine. The fantasia, Head argued, models (tormented) sensation in music – indeed, perhaps Bach’s own suffering from the painful gout that kept him from playing the organ. The stakes are high here: such fanatical embodiment flies in the face of the kind of compositional ‘sense-making’ (to borrow a term from earlier in the conference) that Forkel found so important in Bach’s music. It also challenges the late Enlightenment taboo on the kind of radical materialism that could lead to Spinozism – that is, the philosophical position that we are all trapped in a world of physical bodies ungoverned by Providence – or worse. After Head’s talk we returned to the Bate Collection for a fine performance of compositions by J. S. Bach, Telemann and C. P. E. Bach by David Gerrard, played mostly at the clavichord.

The next day’s proceedings began with the second keynote lecture, this one by Annette Richards (Cornell University). Her talk made a fitting complement to Head’s. Taking Goethe’s 1777 self-parody the *Triumph der Empfindsamkeit* as a point of departure, Richards embarked on a rich exploration of how feeling functioned in Bach’s intellectual world, drawing on the literary texts that circulated in it and personalities whose likenesses Bach kept in his celebrated portrait collection. The contrast between the texts in the public sphere and pictures in a private one served as metaphor for the collision of public and private sentiment that is at the heart of both Bach’s expressive idiom, particularly in his works for the keyboard, and the work of authors like Goethe and Lessing.

The conference proper drew to a close with a session summing up the place of the keyboard works in wider contexts. Susan Wollenberg examined Bach’s clever compilation strategies in the ‘Kenner und Liebhaber’ sets. Estelle Joubert (Dalhousie University) used contemporary reception documents to expand on the point that Richards had made in her keynote lecture: as far as the critics were concerned, Bach, like Lessing, was a ‘moon among lesser stars’. Between these two papers Hans-Günter Ottenberg (Technische Universität Dresden) drew attention to Bach’s place between the competing demands of south and north German approaches to keyboard music. Much of Ottenberg’s early work was done in the days of the old German Democratic Republic, so his inspiring attention to detail and charming manner were new to many of us. Speakers and listeners then made their way to the Holywell Music Room for a fortepiano recital by John Irving (Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Dance and Music), which closed the conference. His programme, beautifully executed, consisted entirely of works by Haydn. I for one, having spent the previous forty-eight hours entirely in the company of Emanuel Bach, found myself in another world.

THOMAS IRVINE

<t.a.irvine@soton.ac.uk>

