PREFACE

This book presents the first impression of a hitherto unknown and unnamed musical manuscript, in the possession of the Eisenach collector, Manfred Gorke. Unfortunately the manuscript is no longer complete. It contains, — on three folio sheets, sewn one into the other, and folded together so as to form six leaves — twelve pages of the score of an amusing Quodlibet for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and figured Continuo. The beginning, together with the title, and also the end are missing; they were written on one, or (judging by the thread which secured them), at the most two outside leaves, which enclosed what remains, and are — it is to be hoped not for all time, — lost. What has remained to us, apparently the kernel of the whole, has nevertheless structure and form, in its suite-like method of procedure, and therefore even as a 'torso' is worth a performance. In any case, there is plenty of life in the original and blunt rhymes, which, in true Quodlibet fashion, succeed one another in motley confusion, and in the music, bubbling over with sparkling merriment. A rogue laughs out of these 272 bars, evenly divided up with the ruler, the writer of which is unmistakably the young Johann Sebastian Bach! All the distinctive details of the handwriting, the paper, the watermark correspond in the smallest particular with the official characteristics of the autograph of the early Mühlhausen "Ratswechsel-Kantate", (Cantata written on the occasion of the re-election of town councillors in Mühlhausen) of the year 1708, "Gott ist mein König". ("God is my King".)

We find the clue as to when Bach wrote down the Quodlibet in the text, Page 33, Bar 249 ff: "In this year we have two solar eclipses". As a matter of fact, two solar eclipses in such quick succession were visible in Germany at the beginning of the 18th century. They were both partial, and occurred on the 2nd of April and the 25th of October of the year 1707.*) Accordingly, if we take the wording literally ("we have", not: "we had two solar eclipses"). the Quodlibet must have been composed before the 25th of October 1707.

But the text betrays still more. On Page 9, Bar 69 ff we find: "O, what a sour face Salome is pulling"; and Page 31, Bar 237: "Bona dies Meister Kürschner"! ("Good day, Master Skinner"!) Salome here is none other than Bach's sister, Maria Salome, who, married to the Master-Skinner, Johann Andreas Wiegand since the 24fh of January 1700, lived in Erfurt. In 1707 there was probably some fête or festivity at her house, perhaps even a small 'family gathering', when Sebastian, coming from Dornheim and Arnstadt, immediately after his marriage to Maria Barbara on the 17th of October, paid a visit to his Erfurt relations. He did not stay long. His duties in Mühlhausen, on which he had but just entered, called him, and before the 23rd of October he arrived there again. The design and contents of the Quodlibet make it appear highly probable that it was just on the occasion of this visit of Bach's to Erfurt that it was sung, especially as further details of the text also seem to point to a definite interpretation in this sense. See Page 2 Bar 9 ff: "Tell me, who comes riding in there, carrying a large wheel on his back?" . . . . ' O how clumsily the fellow rides, has a mourning-cloak around him. Ergo tanto instantius debemus fugere terrena quanto velocius auffugiunt caduca et vana"; Page 12, Bar 85 ff: "When one sits with a spinning-wheel upon a great black horse, thereunto does a mourning-cloak not suit at all, of course"; and Page 14, Bar 103 ff: "Grand wedding, great joy!" Bach gives the word "Heart" only in pictorial illustration, and not in letters.

It is difficult to set aside the possibility that, with these and many other passages in the text, allusions are being made to Sebastian's own wedding. On the 10th of August 1707 his uncle, his mother's brother, Tobias Lämmerhirt (also a skinner) had died in Erfurt, and in his will, which was opened on the 18th of September, had left him fifty guilders; more than half his salary as newly-appointed organist in Mühlhausen! Bach could take home his bride, Maria Barbara, without anxiety. Might not such a piece of unexpected good luck be sufficient to explain why a certain somebody sits on the "high horse" (a black steed) with the spinning-wheel, the symbol of the marriage-dowry, behind him,

*) Neither in 1706 nor 1705, nor yet in 1708, 1709, or 1710 were there two solar eclipses, visible in Germany in one year. For the ascertainment of this astronomical fact, I am indebted to Professor Dr. Alexander Wilkens, Director of the Observatory in Munich.

and rightly feels that "the mourning-cloak" does not really fit in with the "grand wedding" and "great joy"? What a remarkable coincidence!

And now, one last point. What Spitta expressed originally only as a supposition: that the "stranger-maiden" whom once in Arnstadt, during an organ-practice, Bach had allowed to sing, up in the organ-loft, was probably Maria Barbara, this supposition has come to be tacitly accepted as an established fact in Bach bibliography. Something of the kind might arise from the second recitative of the Quodlibet, very comical in its effect, Page 27, Bar 214ff, where again there is mention of a maiden: "Dominus Johannes citatus ad Rectorem Magnificum hora pomeridiana secunda propter ancillam in corona aurea. Students are very merry, as you all know". . . . The "Golden Crown" was the name of the house in which Bach lived while organist in Arnstadt (at any rate, it would appear, in 1706 and 1707). But — is he also the "Dominus Johannes"? And who is the maiden (ancilla)? As Rector Magnificus, only the then Rector of the Arnstadt "Gymnasium" (or Grammar-school), Johann Friedrich Treiber, would come into consideration. Relationships with him were not lacking, for the pupils of the Grammar-school took a large part in the church music. It is kown that, in the summer of the year 1705, while wandering through the town from the direction of the palace with his cousin, (Terry suggests in the first place Barbara Katharina, but again another time Maria Barbara) Bach was obliged to fight out a violent quarrel with the bassoonist Johann Heinrich Geyersbach, contemptuously called the "Zippelfagottist", a scholar of the Grammar-school, already 23 years old, and had to appear before the Consistory Court to defend himself for this. So that Geyersbach too can not be the Dominus Johannes. The immediate juxtaposition of the line "Students are very merry" with the latin recitative makes it highly probable that Master Johannes together with his maiden are to be sought, not in Arnstadt but in Erfurt, where not only students and Rector Magnificus of the University were to be found, but even several houses bearing the name "Golden Crown"; but that does not bring us any further. The persons sought remain just as unrecognised as the doughty pilot of the kneading-trough, whose tragi-comical trip on the water echoes all through the Quodlibet.

Who may have sung the lovely Tenor Air, "O ye thoughts", (Page 8, Bar 45ff) reminiscent of the manner of Philipp Heinrich Erlebach, — the court conductor of the Royal Orchestra at Rudolstadt at that time — amid the continual interruptions, shouted by the different remaining voices alternately, of "Backtrog! Backtrog!" ("Kneading-trough!")? Who were "Urschel", and the "Master-Tailor', and what did "at the Urben's" mean? How did the whole piece begin, and how did it end?

Thus the discovery results as follows: The Quodlibet, with its marriage-festival mood, can only have come into existence in the days between September the 18th and October the 17th, 1707. Probably composed in Mühlhausen and written on Mühlhausen paper, it is the earliest hitherto known musical autograph of Johann Sebastian Bach. The first performance of this wedding-music probably took place in Erfurt.

As regards style, this piece of the young Bach — frequently interspersed with popular turns — in which there is no trace of the beginner, has, without doubt, the closest affinity with the "Ratswechsel-Cantata" of the year 1708.

It is perhaps upon the precious pages of score preserved to us that the remembrances of Sebastian's two eldest sons, handed down by Forkel, of their forefathers' family gatherings, enlivened by music, are founded. Forkel's statements show, however, that the score (which possibly was part of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach's inheritance, and is not mentioned by Carl Philipp Emanuel) had remained unkown to him.

Only now do we understand in some measure how the old Bachs used to sing their merry Quodlibets, and why it was that "not only they themselves could laugh most heartily in doing so, but also provoke just as hearty and irresistible laughter in everyone who heard them".

The present first printing presents the score in modern orthography, but except for one single note, recognizable at once as a mistake in writing, it was not necessary to alter anything in the autograph. Only the very first crotchet in each vocal part, which contained the last syllable ("Steiss") of the lost first pages, is omitted (Soprano a', Alto f', Tenor c', Bass F).

Brackets and small type indicate the very few additions and the thorough-bass accompaniment, which has been worked out.

Max Schneider

(Translated by Mevanwy Roberts)