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Discussing BACH

Inaugural issue

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Bach and Emotion:
'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'

Editorial Introduction

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Bach and Emotion: *'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'*

A discussion with Ruth Tatlow, Bettina Varwig, and John Butt

Recorded on Tuesday 9 June 2020

The logo for BachNetwork, featuring the word 'Bach' in a black serif font and 'Network' in a red script font.

JOHN BUTT | RUTH TATLOW | BETTINA VARWIG

discuss Bach and Emotion

'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Discussing Bach* featuring a live conversation about Bach and emotion. The discussion was originally devised for a conference that fell victim to the restrictions and cancellations of 2020. When our friends at the Leipzig Bachfest replaced their 2020 festival with a virtual Bach Marathon on the topic *'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'* we offered to contribute our round table discussion, and to incorporate the phrase *'Zur Recreation des Gemüths'* as a subtitle. This frequently cited phrase comes in a statement that Bach used in teaching: 'The goal of music is nothing other than to be the glory of God and the recreation of the mind/spirits'.

The 'Bach and Emotion' video now has a second life, as the focus of our own new publication venture, *Discussing Bach*. Three well-known Bach scholars explore the question of where and how one might locate the emotional potential of J. S. Bach's music, drawing on historical methods and discourses as well as on insights from current performance practice. Under the heading of 'affect', the emotional qualities of Bach's music have been a topic of sustained scholarly discussion since at least the early twentieth century. Arguably that discussion has advanced only haltingly since George Buelow's critique of the traditional *Affektenlehre* back in the 1980s. Meanwhile, over the past thirty years or so historians have increasingly embraced the emotional dimension of past events as a productive new area of inquiry, alerting us not only to the fact that emotions and their expression are historically contingent, but that these affective forces played a much more vital part in shaping historical realities than has often been acknowledged.

The panel members propose several new, historically grounded approaches to the question of emotion in Bach's music, building on some of the frameworks developed in recent emotions history. Conversely, they consider what the study of music (and Bach's music in particular) might fruitfully contribute to the writing of emotional histories.

Each participant presents a short position statement on an aspect of the topic which is then briefly discussed by the others. Bettina Varwig begins by reflecting on the place of music within the history of emotions and the ways in which new approaches to Bach's music can reshape certain key narratives about early modern affect. Ruth Tatlow then explores the role that musical proportions were understood to play in generating emotional response, illustrating her points from the history of resonating numbers and resonating form. Finally, John Butt considers the emotional content in Bach's music in terms of concepts of embodiment, specifically the ways in which dance allusions are nested in the music on an astonishing variety of levels.

It has been a privilege to work alongside my co-editors Yo Tomita and Barbara M. Reul to envision and produce this brand-new publication. We hope that it will be a catalyst for much more discussion about emotions in music, and inspire readers and listeners to a deeper appreciation of Bach's compositions.

Ruth Tatlow (Danderyd, Sweden)
Yo Tomita (Newtownabbey, Northern Ireland)
Barbara M. Reul (Regina, Canada)

28 October 2020

Contributors



Ruth Tatlow is a Visiting Research Fellow at Uppsala University based in Sweden. At the time of the recording she was also a Fellow at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study.



Bettina Varwig is a Lecturer at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Emmanuel College working mainly on music of the early modern period, with a strong interest in Bach.



John Butt is Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, working on Bach and other fields. He is also active as a performer, particularly as music director of the Scottish-based Dunedin Consort.

Further reading and listening

Butt, John. 'Bach and the Dance of Humankind', in Davinia Caddy and Maribeth Clark (eds.), *Musicology and Dance* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 19–48.

Butt, John. *Bach's Dialogue with Modernity: Perspectives on the Passions* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Tatlow, Ruth. '[Reading Belief through Structural Ordering, 1700–1850](#)', Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study online lecture from 31 March 2020.

Tatlow, Ruth. *Bach's Numbers: Compositional Proportion and Significance* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Varwig, Bettina. '[Heartfelt Musicking: the Physiology of a Bach Cantata](#)', *Representations*, 143/1 (2018), 36–62.

Varwig, Bettina. '[What 18th-century music could do to listeners' bodies](#)', a British Academy blogpost from 9 June 2020.

N.B. Updates on the topic in the form of new publications by the three panel members will be given on the *Discussing Bach* webpage.

About Bach Network and *Discussing Bach*

[Bach Network](#) was founded in 2004 to create a forum to talk about Bach's music. Early conversations evolved into [Dialogue Meetings](#), which became Bach Network's primary physical means of discussion. From these meetings came our online journal *Understanding Bach*, where the fruit of new research discussions could be studied and enjoyed. What was missing from the written journal articles was the immediacy of the dialogue conversation and questions. This is where *Discussing Bach* enters the picture.

Discussing Bach is a brand-new multimedia, web-based publication superseding Bach Network's open access journal [Understanding Bach](#) (2006–17). Featuring scholars engaged in ground-breaking research, each issue of [Discussing Bach](#) comprises:

- Editorial Introduction;
- Link to the live video discussion with optional subtitles;
- Authorised Transcript of the live discussion;
- Further reading and listening;
- Topic-specific articles may also be published as part of the number.

Citation style: Each of the above components will require a different citation style. Please follow carefully the instructions given in your preferred style guide.

Copyright: Bach Network holds the copyright to the discussion to protect the intellectual copyright of the researchers' ideas, some of which will be unpublished at the time of recording. Authorised subtitles are provided to facilitate accurate citation.

Future issues: The aim of *Discussing Bach* is to stimulate discussion of new research insights. Scholars are selected to contribute because of the impact of their latest research discoveries, as well as their peer-reviewed publications, whether already in press or under contract, and/or because they are sponsored by a competitive research programme.

Topics planned for forthcoming issues include 'Bach and Redemption' and 'Bach and the competition for Thomaskantor'.

BachNetwork

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Upcoming meetings

Tenth Dialogue Meeting, Madingley Hall, Cambridge. 18–22 July 2022

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Bettina Varwig

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