

ISSN 2633-9951

Discussing BACH

Issue 10 (September 2026)

Transformation:
Images, Emblems, and Forms

Editorial Introduction

Editors

Andrew Frampton, Barbara M. Reul, and Ruth Tatlow

© Bach Network 2026

Transformation: Images, Emblems, and Forms

A discussion with Wendy Heller, Joel Speerstra, Bernd Koska, and Ruth Tatlow, moderated by Andrew Frampton

Live from the Bachfest Leipzig 2025

Recorded on Saturday 21 June 2025



Welcome to this tenth issue of *Discussing Bach*, featuring an edited conversation on the topic of 'Images, Emblems, and Forms' in the music of Bach and his contemporaries. It was recorded live at the Bachfest Leipzig in June 2025, as part of the Bach Network session on the 2025 festival theme, 'Transformation'. As noted by Peter Wollny, director of the Bach-Archiv Leipzig, this word conjures many different layers of meaning and interpretation, and it can be approached from a variety of angles in relation to Bach's music. In our session, we sought to likewise take a deliberately broad view of 'Transformation', constructing themed panels that embraced a great diversity of research topics and methodologies across three key areas.

The panel on 'Images, Emblems, and Forms', presented in this issue, exemplifies this diverse approach. As always, none of the panellists knew what the others would say beyond the overall topic, so the live discussions are spontaneous and unrehearsed. Wendy Heller speaks about concepts of classical metamorphosis, and their subsequent transformation in music in Bach's 'Hunt' cantata, BWV 208, while Joel Speestra takes a forensic look at riddles and codes in the keyboard music of Johann Kuhnau, Bach's predecessor as *Thomaskantor*. Bernd Koska then focuses on one of the most famous of musical emblems, the B-A-C-H formula, and its use in compositions by Bach's contemporaries. Musical alphabets also featured in Ruth Tatlow's presentation, which examines how Bach transformed words and pictures into music in his sacred cantatas. Since all presenters are pursuing further work based on the research discussed here, the *Discussing Bach* web page and YouTube channel will be kept updated with relevant new publications as they appear.

As with any live event, no matter how well-prepared, things do not always go according to plan, and during the recording we had to contend with several technical problems. We are therefore especially grateful to Philipp Marx and James Beckers for so expertly stage-managing the recording, lighting, and audio in Leipzig despite these challenges, and to Larry Molinaro and John Harrington for professionally editing the video. The occasional glimpse in the video 'behind-the-scenes' of the production will, we hope, only serve to underline the importance of their contribution, and capture the unpredictability and excitement of the live session. Once again, we also thank the Bach-Archiv Leipzig for their continuing support of our annual platform at the Bachfest, and for granting permission to use the audio materials.

Future issues of *Discussing Bach* will present other exciting panel discussions recorded during our programmes at the 2025 Bachfest and the 2026 Bachfest ('In Dialogue'). In 2027, we will curate a session on the Bachfest festival theme of 'Passion', celebrating the 300th anniversary of the *St Matthew Passion*; please do join us in person if you can.

In the meantime, we hope that you enjoy the presentations and discussion here, and that they will enrich your understanding of the diverse and surprising ways in which Bach and his contemporaries employed images, emblems, and forms in their music.

Andrew Frampton (Manchester, UK)
Barbara M. Reul (Regina, Canada)
Ruth Tatlow (Danderyd, Sweden)

30 September 2026

Contributors



Wendy Heller is the Scheide Professor of Music at Princeton University, USA. She specializes in the study of 17th- and 18th-century opera from interdisciplinary perspectives, and her monograph *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* won the annual book prize from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. She is currently completing a book on the reception of antiquity in Baroque opera.



Joel Speerstra is Associate Professor of Music at the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, where he teaches organ and historical keyboards. He is active as both a performer and scholar, and currently serves as a co-researcher on the ERC Synergy project REM@KE (Reconstructing Embodied Musical Knowledge at the Keyboard), with colleagues from the University of Pavia (Italy) and the University of York (UK).



Bernd Koska studied musicology, Slavic studies, and history at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Halle (Saale), Germany. Since 2015, he has served as a research associate at the Bach-Archiv Leipzig, working on a variety of projects about Bach's students and contemporaries. He is currently working on the long-term project 'Forschungsportal BACH', in collaboration with the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig.



Ruth Tatlow is an affiliated Researcher at the Academy of Music and Drama, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Her numerous publications include two monographs on compositional process and practice in J.S. Bach's music, and a third on Bach's church cantatas. She is a trustee and co-founder of Bach Network, and, until July 2026, was chair of the Bach Network Council.

Further reading

Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (University of California Press, 2003).

Wendy Heller, 'Bach and the Soprano Voice', in *Rethinking Bach*, ed. Bettina Varwig (Oxford University Press, 2021).

Bernd Koska, *Bachs Thomaner als Kantoren in Mitteldeutschland*, Forum Mitteldeutsche Barockmusik 9 (Ortus, 2018).

Katelijne Schiltz, *Music and Riddle Culture in the Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Ruth Tatlow, *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet* (Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Ruth Tatlow, *Bach's Church Cantatas*, ABS Guides (Oxford University Press, 2025).

Editorial and Production Team

Editorial Team: Andrew Frampton, Barbara M. Reul, and Ruth Tatlow

Technical Support: Larry Molinaro and Yo Tomita

Production Support: Larry Molinaro, John Harrington, Philipp Marx, and James Beckers

With thanks to the Bach-Archiv Leipzig

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 in-person 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 multimedia, web-based publication that supersedes 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 issue.

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.

BachNetwork

[Our website](#)
[Join us and receive our news](#)

Meetings in 2027

'Bach Network in Dialogue: Passion', Bachfest Leipzig 2027, Saturday 19 June, 14:00–17:00

Bach Network at the Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music, Mafra, Portugal, 21–25 July 2027

Find us as [@BachNetwork](#) on [Facebook](#)

The following individuals lead the activities of the charitable trust Bach Network.

Trustees

John Butt
Richard D. P. Jones
Peter Smaill (Treasurer)
Ruth Tatlow
Max Wong (Chair of Trustees)

Council

Thomas Cressy
Andrew Frampton (Co-Chair of Council)
Noelle M. Heber
Michael Maul
Susan McCormick
Larry Molinaro
Szymon Paczkowski
Barbara M. Reul
Yo Tomita
Tom Wilkinson (Co-Chair of Council)

© Bach Network 2026

