

ISSN 2633-9951

Discussing BACH

Issue 8 (January 2025)

Choral Total:
Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas

Editorial Introduction

Editors
Andrew Frampton, Barbara M. Reul, and Ruth Tatlow

© Bach Network 2025

Choral Total: Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas

A discussion with Daniel R. Melamed, Ruth Tatlow, and John Butt, moderated by Noelle M. Heber

Live from the Bachfest Leipzig 2024

Recorded on Saturday 15 June 2024



Welcome to this eighth issue of *Discussing Bach*, featuring an edited conversation on the topic of ‘Analytical Perspectives on the Bach Cantatas’, recorded live at the Bachfest Leipzig in June 2024, as part of the Bach Network session on the 2024 festival theme, ‘Choral Total’ (styled as *CHORal TOTAL*).

This unusual theme has many allusions within its eleven letters, whether one reads it in German or English. It can imply a comprehensive coverage of chorale cantatas, or of chorales themselves. That makes sense, as the 2024 festival celebrated the 300th anniversary of Bach’s chorale cantata cycle and the 500th anniversary of the first Lutheran hymnal. The title can also be understood more broadly to refer to choruses and choirs—and that is even before one considers the different meanings

of the word 'Total'. For this reason, we decided to use the original festival title and to let the reader puzzle out the allusions, in typical eighteenth-century manner.

As with previously published issues of *Discussing Bach*, the presentations in the video were unrehearsed, with none of the panellists knowing what the others would say, beyond their overall topic. The subtitle of this session was 'How We Got into this Kind of Analysis, and How to Get out', which required the speakers to condense almost two hundred years of reception history into three 8-minute slots. Each panellist was charged with examining one aspect of Bach analysis and to suggest new ways forward: Daniel R. Melamed tackled the analysis of Bach's music, Ruth Tatlow discussed theology, and John Butt considered performance practices. As if this challenge was not enough, two of the panellists were also struggling with a particularly virulent festival flu bug—hence the occasional sniffs and nasal tones.

We are very grateful to Philipp Marx for stage-managing the recording and lighting in Leipzig, and to Larry Molinaro and John Harrington for expertly editing the video. We also thank the Bach-Archiv Leipzig for giving Bach Network this valuable platform at the Bachfest, and for granting us permission to use the audio materials. Most of the presenters are pursuing further work based on the research discussed here: as always, the *Discussing Bach* web page and YouTube page will be kept updated with new publications on the topic as they appear.

Also recorded during our programme on 15 June 2024 was a panel discussion on church cantatas after Bach. It will be published as the ninth issue of *Discussing Bach* in Spring 2025. At the next Bachfest in June 2025 we will be curating a session on the festival theme of 'Transformation'. To that end, panels are planned on a variety of topics, including the understanding of classical metamorphosis in Bach's time, and the transformation of Bach's music across geographic and cultural borders.

In the meantime, we hope that you will enjoy the presentations and discussion in this current issue, together with their accompanying written materials. Our aim is that it will be a catalyst for you to engage in deeper discussion with others, and that it will help you gain a richer understanding of what lies behind our understanding and experience of Bach's music today.

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

13 January 2025

Contributors



Daniel R. Melamed is Professor Emeritus of Music in musicology at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, USA. His research interests focus on J.S. Bach, Mozart-era opera, and music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is director of the Bloomington Bach Cantata Project, and co-author, with Michael Marissen, of the Bach Cantata Texts project (<https://bachcantatatexts.org>).



Ruth Tatlow is a Visiting Researcher at 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 (forthcoming). She is co-founder of Bach Network and chair of the Bach Network Council.



John Butt holds the Gardiner Chair of Music at the University of Glasgow and is music director of the Scottish-based Dunedin Consort with whom he has made award-winning recordings. His numerous scholarly publications have focused on the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and on the complexities of performing historical works today.

Further reading and listening

Discussing Bach 7 (September 2024), 'The Future of Bach Performance',
<https://bachnetwork.org/discussing-bach/db7/>.

Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach: With Their Librettos in German-English Parallel Text*, rev. and trans. Richard D. P. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Robin A. Leaver, *Bach's Theological Library* (Neuhausen: Hänssler-Verlag, 1983).

Ruth Tatlow, *Bach's Church Cantatas* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming 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, and Philipp Marx

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](#)

Upcoming meetings in 2025

'Bach Network in Dialogue: Transformation', Bachfest Leipzig 2025, Saturday 21 June, 14:00–17:00

Bach Network at the Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music, Birmingham, UK, Wednesday 16 July–Sunday 20 July 2025

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

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

Trustees

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

Council

Ruth Tatlow (Chair)
Andrew Frampton
Noelle M. Heber
Michael Maul
Larry Molinaro
Szymon Paczkowski
Barbara M. Reul
Stephen Rose
Yo Tomita
Tom Wilkinson

© Bach Network 2025

