

Ten Years of Bach Network UK*

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The three words ‘networking, influencing, facilitating’ encapsulate the aims and achievements of Bach Network UK (BNUK) in its first ten years. At the instigation of Reinhard Strohm and together with John Butt and Ruth Tatlow, BNUK was founded in Oxford in 2004. Our motivating vision was to create an interdisciplinary forum that would attract profound discussion of Bach’s music, and bridge the scholar-performer divide. We imagined an integrated structure, powered by specialised research discussions, feeding into larger-scale meetings and being disseminated through publication. These ideas are still loosely recognisable a decade later.

One of the most liberating qualities of BNUK is that we have no binding traditions. We were founded in the twenty-first century to influence and facilitate discussion of Bach and his music today, and this gives us enormous freedom to develop our operations in any direction. Our board of trustees, currently chaired by Peter Smail, reports annually to the Charities Commission and ensures we operate within our financial means. We also have a council, currently chaired by Ruth Tatlow, which initiates and steers our scholarly activities. The council is richly endowed with the collective knowledge and experience of John Butt, Richard D. P. Jones, Szymon Paczkowski, Katharine Pardee, Stephen Rose, Reinhard Strohm, Yo Tomita and Bettina Varwig. Probably because of our multi-cultural makeup we have developed a delightfully non-hierarchical modus operandi. Every council member contributes to decision-making, while different constellations or sub-groups take initiatives. So although we are registered as a British charity, with UK in our title, our personnel and vision are international.

J. S. Bach Dialogue meetings are the physical expression of BNUK. Originally held annually in Oxford from 2005, the Dialogue meeting became a biennial event in 2010, when instead of organising our own meeting we decided to increase our presence at the biennial International Conference on Baroque Music (ICBM). The pattern of alternating our Dialogue meetings with the ICBM has proved highly successful, enabling us to facilitate the dissemination of research papers and to network with scholars with specialisations beyond Bach’s music. Our fifth Dialogue meeting was held in Edinburgh in 2011, our sixth in Warsaw in 2013, and our seventh will be held at Madingley Hall, Cambridge in July 2015. The

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meetings differ from conventional academic conferences in that every delegate makes an equally important contribution whether presenting material or not. The aim of the sessions is not to impart new information as an end in itself, but rather to allow open-minded dialogue through examining new research and chewing over questions. And it is the expertise and varied perspectives of the delegates that enrich the search for answers. Anyone keen to understand Bach's music more deeply is welcome to the meetings.

From the very beginning, our vision for *Understanding Bach* was as an open-access journal. In an attempt to kick-start a 'membership' for BNUK, we initially asked readers to sign up, but we quickly saw how this was limiting the reach of our work. The journal has been fully open to anyone since 2007, and so as to attract institutional readers searching subscription databases, we decided to list it on EBSCO hosting and in full text on RILM. *Understanding Bach* enjoys a fast-growing reputation as the only peer-reviewed, fully open-access Bach journal in the world. We actively look for ways to capitalize on this status, for example by publishing new research that might otherwise be confined to non-English or subscription-only publications. There have so far been nine annual volumes of *Understanding Bach*, with the tenth due for publication in March 2015. Full articles go through a double peer-reviewed procedure, whereas articles in the Reports section and in the Young Scholars' Forum do not. All are heard as spoken papers at our Dialogue meeting or at the ICBM, and after consideration by the council and discussion with the authors, an invitation to submit an expanded or revised version of the paper is issued. Full articles are then forwarded to an anonymous reader. Although we do not have the resources to read and process uninvited papers, our review system has proved successful in attracting and producing many excellent articles of the highest scholarship. Yo Tomita and Ruth Tatlow are the current editors.

The Bach Network UK website is vitally important as the primary platform for *Understanding Bach*, as a means of keeping the network alive and growing via the secure online e-mail signup, and as a reference point for information about our activities. As we have no membership, we are dependent upon donations for all our basic expenditures. We would love to build a fund to enable research students to attend our meetings, and have recently introduced a 'Donate' button on our website to encourage gifts of any size. Those on our e-mail list receive information about our activities two or three times each year. Our open Facebook page <www.facebook.com/BachNetworkUK> includes a variety of posts ranging from Bach discoveries, to announcements of our activities. Many of the 276 individuals who have so far 'liked' the page use it as their main contact with BNUK.

New initiatives come and go, sometimes successful, sometimes not. Our latest exercise to facilitate collegiality among Bach scholars will happen immediately after the 2015 Dialogue meeting. Realising that many delegates will be travelling to Madingley from far away, and probably wishing to use the time in England to study at the British Library or other London archives, we have reserved a block of reasonably-priced self-catering rooms within short walking distance of the British Library. We hope that this will be attractive to many like-minded colleagues

pursuing independent research and wishing to extend the time of cross-fertilisation of ideas and plans. If you are interested, please contact Matt Laube, laube.bnuk@gmail.com

Inevitably, ten years of activities create a trail that could, if we are not careful, foster expectations that gradually creep into our structures and limit our creative freedom. Personally, I hope that BNUK will remain non-hierarchical, and that in time new council members will continue to expand the vision for networking and to further facilitate communication and dissemination of ideas about Bach and his music. And one can always dream that our work as a whole will influence the direction of Bach studies, and perhaps even the direction of musicology, in the twenty-first century.