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BACH E L'ITALIA

TURIN, 26–28 NOVEMBER 2020

In the year 2020, marked by the sudden and unexpected outbreak of the pandemic, the international conference ‘Bach and Italy’ represented a positive moment of scholarship, musicianship and exchange. According to many participants and listeners, its value went beyond the strictly scholarly dimension of a high-level musicological conference, since it also provided a powerful sign of hope for the world of culture and music, as well as a welcome opportunity for social interaction.

The project was initially conceived by Maria Borghesi (a musicologist who recently obtained a PhD with a thesis on the reception of Bach in Italy, soon to be published by Dohr Verlag) and me, Chiara Bertoglio. Our original plan was to organize a ‘traditional’ conference, which should have taken place in Turin; for this reason, the co-organizers were the Conservatorio Statale di Musica Giuseppe Verdi di Torino and the Istituto per i Beni Musicali in Piemonte, two institutions based in the city, along with the association we co-founded, JSBach.it.

When the pandemic started to spread worldwide, in spring 2020, we realized that by November we would still be under its threat, and we considered all options, including postponing or cancelling the event. However, the high quality of the abstracts that had already been submitted convinced us that the conference had to take place, albeit digitally. Our next decision was to waive all registration fees and to opt for free online broadcasts on social media, rather than send Zoom links to registered participants for a private ‘closed’ event. This was not an easy choice, for both financial and copyright-related reasons. (Given that YouTube and Facebook are able, in real time, to identify copyrighted audio or video recordings and stop their broadcast, there was the risk that the automated algorithm could have interrupted our broadcast of extracts of copyrighted material – even though we had previously obtained all permissions. This occurred once during the conference, but fortunately all the remaining sessions went smoothly.) However, it proved the right decision: many donations, as well as public and private sponsorship (from organizations including the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo, the Royal Musical Association, *Music & Letters*, Inner Wheel and the General Consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany – Milan) allowed us to cover costs. The overall participation went well above our rosiest expectations.

Moreover, the conference had a deep educational value. Music lovers and enthusiasts followed it very faithfully, while many others who could not participate during live broadcasts took the opportunity of watching the videos later. Those who did follow the conference live participated actively in the debate; we had imagined rather short discussions following the presentations, but sometimes the levels of interest and curiosity were so high that debates lasted more than one hour after the speakers’ presentations. Many university departments and secondary schools incorporated our programme into their curriculum and disseminated our videos to their students as required watching.

Some figures and statistics (which are still coming in) bear witness to this: the conference included twenty-one events, comprising eleven sessions, two keynote speeches, three roundtables and many lecture-recitals, with eighty international speakers. Overall, the events reached almost eighty thousand viewers; each single event was followed (live) by an average of one hundred viewers and was later watched by an average of three thousand viewers within three days of the end of the conference. The opening ceremony, with speeches by Maria Borghesi and me and a concert by the Quodlibet String Trio performing Bruno Giuranna’s transcription of the Goldberg Variations, reached thirteen thousand viewers; after that, the most viewed event was a roundtable given in Italian (‘Bach sulla scena italiana’), while the session with the most numerous views was ‘Bach e la pedagogia in Italia’ (one thousand YouTube views in just four days). All keynotes and roundtables, as well as the opening and closing ceremony and interviews with Kenneth Hamilton and Michael Heinemann, were provided with subtitles (in Italian for the events spoken in English, in English for those spoken in Italian).



The conference committee – Maria Borghesi and me, Kenneth Hamilton (Cardiff University), Michael Heinemann (Hochschule für Musik Dresden), Stefano Leoni (Conservatorio Statale di Musica Giuseppe Verdi di Torino), Michael Maul (Bach Fest and Bach-Archiv Leipzig), Ruth Tatlow (Uppsala universitet and Bach Network) and Yo Tomita (Queen's University Belfast and Bach Network) – designed the sessions by taking into account the bidirectionality of the concept 'Bach and Italy'. On the one hand, the suggested theme included the influences or inspirations which Bach derived from Italy; on the other, it covered many aspects of reception history.

These intertwined dimensions were taken into consideration in the closing keynote speech by Raffaele Mellace (Università di Genova), who traced Bach's interest in Italian music and explored some key facts and figures about the reception of his music in Italy. His presentation also included case studies that focused on the presence of Italian operatic features in some vocal works by Bach. The other keynote address, by Michael Maul, discussed three main stages in the composer's life, demonstrating that his interest in Italian music was pervasive, continuing and constant, and that 'Herr Bach' liked to fashion himself, at least occasionally, as 'Signor Bach'.

The three roundtables included guests from the worlds of scholarly research, music performance and management. The first, 'Bach's Sacred Works in a Catholic Country', was presented in English by Jeremy Begbie (Duke University), Ton Koopman (Amsterdam Baroque Choir and Orchestra, Bach-Archiv Leipzig), Michael Marissen (Swarthmore University) and Richard Rouse (Pontifical Council for Culture). Marissen argued that anti-Catholic feelings can be discerned in Bach's sacred output and in his reading habits, maintaining that to downplay this dimension means to ignore an important component of Bach's worldview. By way of contrast, Begbie discussed the role of Bach's music in the thought of two twentieth-century Catholic theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI). Ton Koopman spoke about his experience as a Catholic performer of Bach's works, arguing that their confessional dimension is less pronounced and ultimately less important than their Christian content, while Rouse discussed the role of Bach within the dialogue of cultures in today's Vatican.

The second roundtable involved representatives of Bach societies worldwide. Christine Blanken (Bach-Archiv Leipzig) proposed an overview of the archive's activities in the field of research, digitalization and dissemination; the presentation by Daniel R. Melamed (Indiana University), who is currently President of the American Bach Society, aimed instead at answering the question 'who is the audience of a Bach Society today?', pointing out the resources available in and complex or problematic aspects of today's musical world. His views were complemented by those of Willemijn Mooij (Netherlands Bach Society – All of Bach), who discussed data about the followers of their digital project on Bach performance, followed by Ruth Tatlow, who offered a brief history of the Bach Network and of its vision as a meeting-point of scholars and musicians.

The third and last roundtable, presented in Italian, included practitioners of historically informed performance (Rinaldo Alessandrini and Lorenzo Ghielmi), a musician who performs Bach on modern instruments (Bruno Canino), a choir conductor and manager (Claudio Chiavazza), a composer who presents broadcasts for Italian public radio (Giovanni Bietti) and the manager who organized the first (and so far only) performance in Italy of all of Bach's cantatas, sacred and secular (Maria Majno). These roundtables saw lively debate on many aspects and were unanimously considered as epoch-making events in the history of Italian Bach reception.

Two of the sessions focused on Bach's reception of the Italian tradition, starting with the 'seconda prattica', discussed by Enrico Baiano (Conservatorio di Musica Domenico Cimarosa – Avellino), and touching on composers such as Vivaldi, Marcello and Pergolesi. A presentation by Fabrizio Ammetto (Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico) shed new light on the source history of BWV1052, while another by Stefan Michels (Johannes-Gutenberg-Universität Mainz) discussed Bach's adaptation of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* within the framework of the history of emotions. A further paper by Alberto Sanna (Early Music as Education, Liverpool) pointed out that the concept of imitation is more appropriate than that of influence when considering Bach's view of Arcangelo Corelli.



With regard to the reception of Bach in Italy, new discoveries were also discussed by, among others, Matteo Messori (Conservatorio Statale di Musica Niccolò Paganini, Genoa, and Conservatorio Gaetano Donizetti di Bergamo), who brought evidence of early interest in Bach in central Italy, by figures ranging from Padre Martini to Filippo Maria Gherardeschi and Johann Paul Schulthesius; by Markéta Stedronská (Universität Wien), who discussed the reception of Bach and Palestrina in nineteenth-century Vienna; and by Fulvio Berti (Scuola di Teologia di Tortona), whose paper illuminated the role played by Francesco Lurani Cernuschi, a late nineteenth-century nobleman, in promoting the first performances of some of Bach's sacred works in Italy by translating their sung texts into Italian.

Eftychia Papanikolaou (Bowling Green State University) offered an interpretation of Gaspare Spontini's performance in Berlin of excerpts from Bach's Mass in B minor within the framework of nationalism and related issues, and Vasiliki Papadopoulou (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) analysed the interpretative views and approaches of Italian editors of Bach's violin works. A particularly interesting panel focusing on Bach in Italian cinema was presented by a research group of the Fondazione Levi (Venice), led by Roberto Calabretto. The role of Bach's music in the filmography of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Ermanno Olmi, among others, was contextualized within the larger history of the reception of Bach by international directors. Other sessions that attracted the audience's attention were those on Bach's role in both musical and general education in Italy; on Bach in Italian music of the 1960s (progressive rock and computer music) and 'Bach on air' (concerning the presentation of Bach's work on radio during the Fascist regime and in contemporary documentary films); and another on Bach and the organ tradition in Italy, with a particular focus on Cecilianism.

The conference's musicological events were complemented by many musical performances, both within the sessions (a particularly striking aspect was the high participation of scholar-performers, who presented numerous lecture-recitals) and as evening concerts (with the participation of the Maghini Consort, Accademia del Santo Spirito and Trio Quodlibet, as well as a jazz ensemble led by Giovanni Petrella and the Early Music Youth Orchestra conducted by Alberto Sanna).

The overall picture emerging from the conference was that of a hitherto understudied but very promising field of research, in regard to both Bach's reception of Italy and Italy's reception of Bach. The general enthusiasm with which presenters and audience alike greeted this online event will encourage the activity of the still young association which organized it, namely JSBach.it. We are already working on the publication of a volume that reflects critically on the conference, and we hope that the positive signals observed during this event will translate into a renewed interest in research into 'Bach and Italy'.

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BEETHOVEN THE EUROPEAN
 LUCCA, 4–6 DECEMBER 2020

This conference, presented online by the Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini in Lucca and the journal *Ad Parnassum*, was an exciting and enriching event that set a high benchmark for Beethoven research in its marking of a very special moment: the composer's two hundred and fiftieth birthday. Whilst Covid