

Burn Vallotti!

Ton Koopman

In discussion with Claire Bracher (part II)

On recording the Complete Bach Cantatas:

Having recorded all the Bach Cantatas, I do not think that I would do anything differently, if I were to re-record them. Of course, at the time of recording there were many discussions and decisions we made about certain elements of the music. Indeed, a lot of a recording depends on the musicians you work with, and I was working with very good musicians, and ones with whom I enjoyed working.

I am not a person who works as a dictator, I am not one to say it 'should' be like this or that, and I am not trying to convince people of my way of thinking. Why force someone to do something against their will? Naturally, there will be differences between various recordings and concerts of the same music, purely by the nature of working with different musicians. If you listen to the two St Matthew Passion recordings I have done, you will notice they are quite different. I like them both.

Any recording is only ever a representation of a level of understanding of a piece at that time, and, of course, there are always questions to which you do not know the answer, or we find out the answer at a later stage, especially with all the new discoveries and great research currently being done. For example, there is all

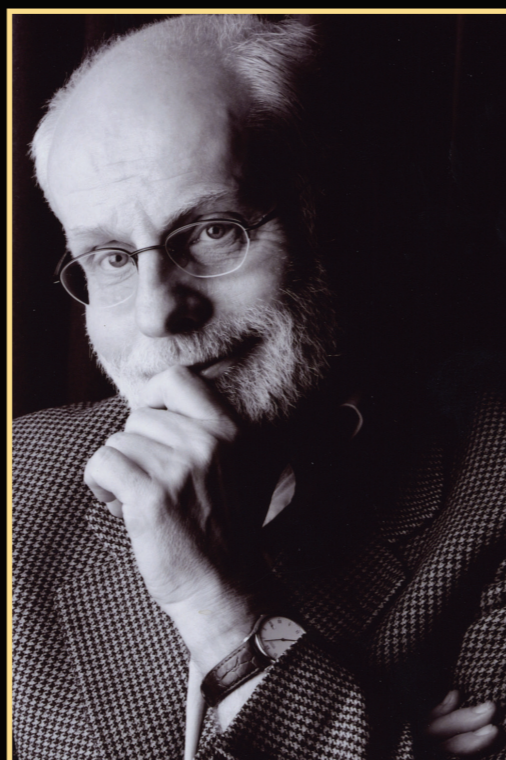


photo: Marco Borggreve

the new information which is coming to light about the violoncello piccolo perhaps not being held at all between the knees, but rather on the arm (viola da spalla). If I were to record the cantatas again, I know I would re-read through all the sources. However, for my views on the choir, I would not change my mind. I still believe Andrew Parrott and Joshua Rifkin's views on the Bach choir voicing are wrong.

Joshua Rifkin and OVPP (One Vocalist Per Part)

Rifkin (born 1944) is an American conductor, musicologist and keyboard player. In his thesis of 1981, Rifkin proposed the controversial idea that much of Johann Sebastian Bach's vocal music was performed with only one singer per voice part of the choir. At the time, this idea was widely rejected

by his colleagues and peers, but began to gain support when, in 2000, the conductor Andrew Parrott published a book arguing for the case. (*The Essential Bach Choir*, Boydell Press).

Ton Koopman is not in agreement with this theory, and there are several very public reports by Koopman, Rifkin and Parrott, which were published in the late twentieth century academic journals. We have provided links to some of the writing of these three online on our website: www.MusicaAntiqua.co.uk

On the Viola da Spalla, and the advantages of a performer taking on research over a musicologist.

I have not so far researched this topic myself, but I heard Sigiswald Kuijken play the viola da spalla in a church as a continuo instrument recently, and I found it very convincing but, equally, a cello played beautifully is also convincing. It is difficult to know, this is a new idea and the research is always done by the people who believe in it. Like any new idea, we also need people who actively disagree to be researching it as well.

As a continuo instrument, I was particularly convinced by the viola da spalla, and impressed, because the cello is sometimes a difficult instrument to be heard if you are downstairs in the church. I think that the iconographic evidence that we currently have is not strong enough that we can be 100% certain about the viola da spalla just yet, but I am not a specialist in this area, and it is the task of a scholar to search through the available evidence.

In this respect I think the good thing is that musicians are, more and more, the people who know more about these things than the musicologists, because the musicologists are not performing the music. The truth of having the music at hand, and performing it, is sometimes the instinct which helps to lead us. I remember the cantatas, where I always had photocopies of the original material, and, we were always looking from different perspectives, from that of the flute, oboe, harpsichord. I remember we were looking at the slurs written there by Bach, and there were very different views about it. So, you see, there is often not one truth, and I think if you are a player, you will come to the truth that fits well with your instrument, a truth which your instrument tells you is how something should be played.



Sigiswald Kuijken with a viola da spalla