

The Concept for the Foundation of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis (November 1932)

It is intended to establish an institute for research and education in Early Music, called the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. Its purpose is the study and practical dealing with all questions related to the revival of Early Music, with the goal of achieving a lively interchange between musicology and performance. The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis will share its experience through concerts and new editions, as well as in articles published in its own periodical. Through playing historic instruments and learning about stylistically accurate performance practise, students as well as professionally-active musicians will have the opportunity to increase their knowledge in the field of Early Music.

For over 80 years, musicologists have endeavored to make the works of the great masters of the past accessible. The milestones of this task are the complete editions of Joh. Seb. Bach, Pierluigi da Palestrina, Georg Friedrich Haendel, Heinrich Schütz, Jean Philippe Rameau, and others. However, these 'scientific' editions are limited in their usefulness for today's music-making. Primarily they provide a basis for research. For performance purposes they usually require some editing, as our artists rarely have the stylistic knowledge and the historically-informed sense of the spirit of Early Music which are necessary in order to interpret this repertoire. In addition, there is the question of the proper use of early instruments: for beginners it is difficult, or impossible, to distinguish between good and mediocre playing. Furthermore, research in early performance practise is far from complete. Questions concerning interpretation and style will evolve in various different ways. Here the practical musician can be helpful to the scholar; in the many problems which the historian finds almost impossible to solve, an excellent performance can reveal the intended meaning. Such reasoning shows that continuous cooperation between performers and musicologists is necessary in order to achieve results which can claim to be of general and lasting value.

Numerous, mostly unsatisfactory, efforts have been made to find a way of performing early Music which is authentic, or close to it. In addition, there are a few extraordinary examples of successful attempts. Particularly noteworthy is the life's work of Wanda Landowska, whose virtuoso technique, stylistic sensitivity, and determination reintroduced the 'taciturn' keyboard instrument of Joh. Seb. Bach's period into today's 'noisy' music world. An eminent artistic personality, she was able to show that the masters of the past were by no means inferior to us in terms of sensitivity to sound, and that music written for the harpsichord achieves its full eloquence only when played on the instrument for which it was composed.

What Wanda Landowska was able to do so competently for her instrument still needs to be done for other instruments, for chamber music, orchestral formations, as well as for solo-, ensemble- and choral singing. Achieving this is the most important goal of the new Schola.

The urgent need for such an institution is evident, considering the dominant place that earlier music has in today's concert programs. Just the name Joh. Seb. Bach is sufficient to remind us of the importance of this task for our concert life: in performing his works, as well as those of Haendel, Schütz, Palestrina and other 'old masters', numerous questions occur. Instrumentation, tempo, dynamics, phrasing, ornamentation, improvisation,

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instrumental techniques (bowing, embouchure), treatment of text, adaptation to the performance space, and stylistic concept, etc. are all issues which are baffling to most of today's musicians. Increasingly, the music of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages is capturing the attention and interest of professionals and amateurs alike, and influencing today's composers. Here it is important to initiate interaction between critical scientific research and music-making. In close cooperation between musicologists and practical musicians all questions concerning new performances of earlier compositions should be examined and tested. The result should be stylistically accurate performances on original instruments and practical editions of valuable works which have thus far been unavailable. One example is Monteverdi's 'Orfeo'. The score contains so many performance problems that all recent efforts to solve this tempting and rewarding puzzle have been inadequate or have failed entirely. Then there are the operas of Rameau and Haendel, the re-performance of which promises a significant enrichment to stage repertory. There are also many works of Purcell and Schütz which are not yet available to performers. Not to mention the treasures in many libraries, manuscripts which must first be dealt with by scholars. How wonderful it would be to see a rebirth of interest in the lute, so familiar in the period of Humanism, and to rediscover the wealth of Franco-Flemish choral music which has been long forgotten! Early polyphony, Gregorian chant, the music of the Troubadours, Trouvères and Minnesänger - so many important musical areas deserve the hard work necessary to make them available.

Dealing with this task should be made possible through the efficient organization of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. The central element of the school is the Teachers' Colloquium, in which topics of shared interest and musical problems are discussed and practical solutions sought. The teaching body must be made up of excellent teachers of all the important early instruments, as well as historically-informed singers, in order to create the variety of ensemble constellations necessary to put the results of these discussions into practise. It is especially important that these colloquia include representatives from the musicological world, whose knowledge of historical context offers new perspectives and therefore stimulates the discussion. Positive results should be presented in regular 'study-performances', primarily for the school and its friends, occasionally also selected works for the general public. Aside from this central task which involves the whole school, teaching of early instruments, singing, theoretical, historical and other subjects pertinent to the interpretation of Early Music should be offered.

Instruction should be organized in two departments, external for special subjects, and an internal one-year course, a thorough basis in music of the pre-classical period. Prerequisite for attendance of the internal program is a completed course of training at a Conservatory. A small élite choir and an instrumental ensemble made up of teachers should be at the Institute's disposition, in order to illustrate the work of the Colloquium, but also for concerts and tours, to advertise the school and its work.

The formation of a boys' choir is also planned. The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis will need to build up a specialized library of books and music, as well as an archive of recordings, in order to keep an acoustic record of the 'study-performances'. A new periodical should report on the work done at the SCB. Swiss musicologists will also be invited to contribute to this periodical, thus creating a new regularly-appearing forum for musicology in this country. It is also planned to invite the best-known artists in the field of Early Music for master classes, as well as specialized scholars for lectures.

The distinction between the aims of this new school and those of the University on the one hand and the Music School and Conservatory on the other is clear through the description of its goals. The University is a place of independent research, the results of which are used by the school. There is no danger of redundancy, as the school's focus is on musical practise, seeking only information which is relevant to accuracy in today's concert performances. Nor is the school a competitor to the Conservatory: the main goal of this institute, the technical and musical education of its students, does not consider stylistic questions concerning Early Music to be of great importance. Early instruments are rarely if ever taught there. The new school is far more to be considered a complement to the Conservatory and as a terrain for active experimentation based on the research work done at the University.

The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis differs from institutions with similar intentions in Paris, Berlin, Freiburg im Breisgau and other places in that the study of historical performance practise and teaching historic instruments is its central purpose, whereas these other institutions consider Early Music to be a secondary aspect, the primary being, for example, church music or music education. Through its exclusive focus, and its specially qualified faculty, the SCB will be able to work on a broader basis and fulfill its aims more completely.

The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis could be criticized as being useful only for specialists. However, this objection is not justified - the new institute aims to fulfill a function of universal cultural significance. Beyond the support and encouragement of development in knowledge in the field of Early Music, the school strives to go further, to assure continuing long-term pioneering. By bringing competent forces together, the school aims to achieve results of general significance, unlike the scattered insufficient attempts made thus far. In this way, the SCB can counteract the dilettantism with which related problems are often treated. The SCB opposes fads like the 'recorder and harpsichord hullabaloo', which do more harm than good to the cause they pretend to promote. It also stands up against falsifications, unfortunately all too frequent in this period of increased interest in the subject of Early Music.

Contrary to such abuses, the school aims to achieve a high standard of meaningful and tactically well-planned work by combining specialists from the fields of research and education. By no means does it intend to cultivate Early Music and the playing of historic instruments for its own benefit. It is not a matter of propagating 'museum pieces', but of reviving worthwhile musical works for performance, as well as the appropriate instruments with which to play them. Only that which can exist in a lively relationship to modern perception and which is therefore meaningful for the development of music comes into consideration. The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis thereby sets itself a challenge which will culminate in benefits not just for the local Basel music life, but also for that of all of Switzerland, indeed the whole musical world.

The Schola Cantorum Basiliensis will contribute to spreading the word that Basel is once again a place of cultural interest. Since Basel is the base of the International Society for Musicology, it is an especially appropriate location for this school. With its rich musical past, favored by its location on the border of two countries of major cultural importance, Basel has been a place of cultural and musical exchange since the Middle Ages. Particular encouragement and stimulation in the field of music came from the University and its academic circles. Basel is the place where already the great works of antiquity were

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exceptionally well cared for and appreciated, and so doubtless the cultural basis is at hand in which an institution with the goals of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis can take root and flourish.

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