CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

In 1947 the theologian and musicologist Friedrich Smend published a study which claimed that J. S. Bach regularly employed the natural-order number alphabet (A = 1 to Z = 24) in his works. Smend provided historical evidence and music examples to support his theory which demonstrated that by this means Bach incorporated significant words into his music, and provided himself with a symbolic compositional scheme.

Since then many people have taken up Smend's theory, interpreting numbers of bars and notes in Bach scores according to the natural-order alphabet.

By presenting a thorough survey of different number alphabets and their uses in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany, Dr Tatlow investigates the plausibility of Smend's claims. Her new evidence fundamentally challenges Smend's conclusions and the book sounds a note of caution to all who continue to use his number-alphabet theory.

Dr Tatlow's painstaking research will fascinate all those with an interest in the music of J. S. Bach and German Baroque culture, and will be of particular importance for music historians and analysts.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Bach and the riddle of the number alphabet

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet

RUTH TATLOW

The right of the University of Cambridge to print and sell all manner of books was granted by Henry VIII in 1534. The University has printed and published continuously since 1584.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
New York Port Chester
Melbourne Sydney

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1991

First published 1991

British Library cataloguing in publication data

Tatlow, Ruth
Bach and the riddle of the number alphabet.
1. German music. Bach, Johann Sebastian, 1685–1750
I. Title
780.92

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Tatlow, Ruth Mary.
Bach and the riddle of the number alphabet / Ruth Mary Tatlow.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0 521 36191 5
1. Bach, Johann Sebastian, 1685–1750 – Criticism and interpretation,
2. Symbolism in music. I. Title.
ML410.B1T18 1990
780′.92 – dc20 90–1550 CIP

ISBN 0 521 36191 5 hardback

Transferred to digital printing 2005

CE

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

to
Mark

my best friend
my love
my husband

with whom I have walked
talked and laughed
for eleven years

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of illustrations *page* xi
Acknowledgements xii

Introduction 1
Bach and mathematics 2
Bach and cabbalism 3
Bach and number symbolism 4

1 Friedrich Smend 6
Smend's theory 6
Smend's sources 11
Smend and number symbolism 17
The number alphabet 27
The Smend–Jansen working method 32

2 Number alphabets 37
Early number-alphabet forms 37
Cabbalism 41
Cabbala Practica 48
Mathematical puzzles 52
Cryptography 54

3 The poetical paragram 58
The invention and early development of the paragram 59
Harsdörffer and the documentation of the paragram 71
The fruition of the paragram 82

4 A musical paragram? 103
Lusus musici 103
Johann David Heinichen 112
Johann Mattheson 115

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

5 Links to Bach 120
Bach and his poets 120
Bach and invention 124
Bach and the number alphabet 126

Appendix 1 Number alphabets 130
Appendix 2 Friedrich Smend's number-symbolism file 139
Appendix 3 The Smend–Jansen correspondence 142
Appendix 4 Solutions and translations 146

Bibliography 168
Index 178

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Illustrations

1 Martin Jansen, handwritten postcard to Friedrich Smend dated 8 June 1943 *page* 22

2 Friedrich Smend, handwritten notes, from a section headed 'Gesamt Disposition' in his number-symbolism file 30

3 Johann Andreas Eisenmenger, examples of *gematria* from *Entdecktes Judenthum* (1700) 44

4 Johann Müller, final page of *Judaïsmus* (1707) 46

5 Gustavus Selenus, title-page of *Cryptomenytices et Cryptographiæ* (1624) 55

6 Georg Philipp Harsdörffer, dedicatory paragram for Frederick III of Denmark from *Erquickstunden* III (1653) 75

7 Justus Georg Schottel, dedicatory paragram written by Harsdörffer, from *Ausführliche Arbeit* (1663) 80

8 Johann Henning, the final pages of *Cabbalologia* (1683), showing two number alphabets 83

9 Johann Friedrich Riederer, *Paragramma Cabbalisticum Trigonale auff die neue Egidier-Kirche* 97

10 Daniel Schwenter, examples of musical cryptography from *Erquickstunden* (1636) 104

11 Gustavus Selenus, an example of musical cryptography from *Cryptomenytices et Cryptographiæ* (1624) 106

The illustrations appear by kind permission of the following: Musikabteilung, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin (Illustrations 1 and 2); Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm (Illustrations 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 11); Stadtbibliothek, Nürnberg (Illustration 9).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521361915 - Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet
Ruth Tatlow
Frontmatter
More information

Acknowledgements

Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet is a revised version of my doctoral thesis, *Lusus Poëticus vel Musicus: Johann Sebastian Bach, The Baroque Paragram and Friedrich Smend's Number Alphabet Theory*, submitted to the University of London in January 1987. Without the encouragement of Professor Dr Ulrich Siegele (University of Tübingen) my research into this topic would not have begun. I am most grateful to him and to members of the Faculty of Music, King's College London, who listened carefully before commenting wisely upon the evolving ideas.

My thanks are also due to the librarians Dr Stefan Kubów (Wrocław), Dr Günther Thomann (Nürnberg), Dr Günther Klein (West Berlin), Frau Erika Rother (East Berlin) and Dr Wolfgang Goldhan (East Berlin), who made material from their libraries available, and to Dr Walther Dehnhard and Dr Wolf Hobohm for trusting me with the results of their own research.

I am grateful to the British Academy and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst for financially assisting my research period.

During the course of preparing the thesis for publication many more people have given of their time and experience. Mrs Mary Whittall and Mr Colin D. Monk expertly translated the German and Latin texts; Mr Timothy Wilcox, Miss Terry Barringer, Miss Fiona Divers and members of my family willingly assisted at different stages; but above all it was Mark and Benjamin who made the project possible with their total love, support and co-operation.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org