

The Musician-Novels of the German Baroque: New Light on Bach's World

STEPHEN ROSE

One of the biggest unknowns of the German Baroque is the world-view of its musicians. Take Johann Sebastian Bach, for example. Although his compositions have been scrutinised by generations of scholars, there is little direct evidence of his beliefs or his social environment. Bach rarely aired his opinions in letters, apparently preferring to express himself in music rather than words. As Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach said, 'with his many activities he scarcely had time for the most necessary correspondence, and accordingly did not indulge in lengthy written exchanges'.¹ Even less evidence survives about the outlook of other groups of musicians, such as the town-pipers who played fanfares from the city walls, the military musicians who went on long campaigns, or the fiddlers and hurdy-gurdy players who offered entertainment in taverns and on the street.

One group of sources, however, offers insights into the attitudes of musicians at all levels of society. These sources are novels by and about musicians, such as:

- Johann Beer, *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker oder abentheuerliche Jan Rebhu* (n.p., 1677–79)
- Daniel Speer, *Ungarischer oder Dacianischer Simplicissimus* (n.p., 1683)
- ———, *Türckische-Vagant* (n.p., 1683)
- ———, *Haspel-Hannß* (n.p., 1684)
- Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Musicus vexatus oder Cotala* (Freiberg, 1690)
- ———, *Musicus magnanimus oder Pancalus* (Freiberg, 1691)
- ———, *Musicus curiosus oder Battalus* (Freiberg, 1691)
- Johann Kuhnau, *Der musicalische Quacksalber* (Dresden, 1700).

The authors of these books came from the generation of musicians immediately before Johann Sebastian Bach. Three of them (Johann Beer, Johann Kuhnau and Wolfgang Caspar Printz) worked in the same area of central Germany as Bach. Beer was concertmaster at the Weissenfels court, where Bach later had the honorary title *Kapellmeister von Haus aus*, and Kuhnau was Bach's predecessor as Thomaskantor in Leipzig. Daniel Speer inhabited a more distant region: although born in Breslau (present-day Wrocław), he travelled widely in Hungarian and

¹ *The New Bach Reader*, ed. Hans T. David & Arthur Mendel, revised by Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 400.

Romanian lands, and later settled near Stuttgart. Nonetheless, the musician-novels are sufficiently close together – both chronologically and geographically – to allow us to assemble a composite picture of the German musical environment around 1700.

The musician-novels are indebted to German popular literature of the seventeenth century. Their scatological and obscene humour is similar to that found in chapbooks (cheap printed booklets of jokes and comic anecdotes, often called *Schwankbücher* or *Volksbücher* by German scholars).² Indeed, in the 1660s and 1670s several chapbooks were published with attributions to stereotyped figures of street musicians, such as *Jan Tambour* (the drummer), *Leyermatz* (hurdy-gurdy man) or *Polnische Sackpfeiffer* (the Polish bagpiper). There is no evidence that these books were actually written by such musicians; rather, the figures of itinerant minstrels may have been included as sales ploys, perhaps because of their general reputation as entertainers. The same stereotyped musicians also make cameo appearances in Printz's writings, usually as targets of his contempt.

Another important influence on the musician-novels constitutes the picaresque writings of Johann Jakob Grimmelshausen. Grimmelshausen's novels portray the lives of rogues, delinquents and other members of the underworld.³ *Der abentheurliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (1669) features an orphan who is exposed to the worst of the brutality of the Thirty Years' War; *Die Landstörtzerin Courasche* (1670) depicts a military prostitute who ends up among the gypsies that follow armies. Particularly relevant for our purposes is Grimmelshausen's *Der seltsame Springinsfeld* (1670), where the principal character is the offspring of a dishonourable union between a runaway Greek noblewoman and an Albanian tightrope walker. In the novel, Springinsfeld recounts his life as a travelling entertainer, a military musician, and then a demobilised soldier (with a wooden leg) who earns his keep by playing the fiddle on the street and in taverns. To judge by the popularity of Grimmelshausen's novels, the middle-class reading public was fascinated by such social outcasts as Springinsfeld.⁴ The novels of Beer and Speer exploit this fascination, depicting musicians as similarly disreputable figures. Printz and Kuhnau, on the other hand, try to reverse the stereotype and show that musicians can be respectable members of society.

As part of a lowly and comic genre, novels in the seventeenth century were usually published under pseudonyms or anonymously. A major task in studying the musician-novels is to unravel the chain of pen-names, puns and cross-references that links the books to their authors. However, there is no room here for this discussion, which will appear in my monograph. Another consideration is that the term 'novel' was only applied to these writings retrospectively. The

² On the problems of finding appropriate terminology for this branch of popular literature, see John van Cleve, 'A genre in crisis: the *Volksbuch*', *German quarterly* 59 (1986), 203-15

³ On the picaresque, see Alexander A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: the Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe, 1599-1753*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977).

⁴ On the extensive readership and reception of Grimmelshausen's novels, see Peter Hesselmann, *Simplicissimus redivivus. Eine kommentierte Dokumentation der Rezeptionsgeschichte Grimmelshausens im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert (1667-1800)* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992).

title-pages of Speer's and Printz's books use the term 'Lebenslauff' (life-story); indeed, all the novels save Kuhnau's *Musicalische Quacksalber* are written in the first person, as fictional autobiographies. Hence the term 'novel' may obscure the context of oral story-telling from which these books stem; but I will retain it in this introductory essay, as convenient shorthand for the genre.

My forthcoming monograph will consider the musician-novels in their literary and cultural context, relating them to reading practices, the social status of musicians, and the growing interest in musicians' autobiographies in the eighteenth century. In this article I merely introduce the characteristics of the novels and suggest how they might shed light on the attitudes of German Baroque musicians. In particular, the novels amplify our knowledge of Bach's environment, revealing the significance of short remarks that survive in the few primary documents about Bach.

I Johann Beer and the novelist's fantasy

Johann Beer (1655–1700) was a court musician at Weissenfels from 1676 until his death. When he was in his twenties he wrote prolifically: at least seventeen of his novels were published between 1677 and 1683. This abundant output may have been stimulated by economic necessity: Beer had briefly been a student at Leipzig, where he probably met the publishers who catered for the rising demand for popular literature. In addition, Beer said that several of his novels stemmed from the stories he had told to his school friends in Regensburg, a clue to the links between oral story-telling and printed narratives.⁵ He also implied that his desire to write was compulsive, like an itch: 'I sit at my writing-table not to fill the world with fancy oratory. Instead I write for pleasure, for I am always itching between the ears with jolly caprices, and I must deal incessantly with this irritation.'⁶

Many of Beer's novels include musical scenes or short tales told by passing musicians. In *Der berühmte Narren-Spital* (1681), for instance, the protagonists visit a lunatic asylum, where one wing houses musical fools who 'have driven themselves insane by studying and meditating upon composition, solmisation and the numbering of the tones'.⁷ Musicians also appear as itinerant entertainers, particularly in *Teutsche Winternächte* (1682) and its sequel *Die kurzweiligen Sommer-Tage* (1683). Both novels are set in the castles of minor Austrian nobility, where vagrants such as travelling musicians, demobilised soldiers and penniless

⁵ Johann Beer, *Des abentheurlichen Jan Rebhu Ritter Spiridon aus Perusina* (n.p., 1679), dedication. I refer to the original editions of the novels; modern editions (where available) usually indicate the original pagination.

⁶ 'Ich sitze auch deßwegen nicht an meinem Schreib-Tisch/ daß ich mit absonderlichen Red-Arthen die Welt erfüllen solte/ sondern was ich schreib/ schreib ich zur Lust/ dann es juckt mich immer zu eine lustige Caprizzen zwischen den Ohren/ daß ich also ohne Unterlaß mit diesen Frettereyen zu thun kriege.' Beer, *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker oder abentheuerliche Jan Rebhu* (n.p., 1677–79), book 2, sig.)(2^r.

⁷ 'die sich über der Composition, über dem Solmisiren, und über Auszehlung des Thons zu Narren gestudirt und meditirt hätten.' Beer, *Der berühmte Narren-Spital* (n.p., 1681), p. 140.

students offer welcome relief from the tedium of everyday life. In *Sommer-Täge*, the protagonist Willenhag is mourning the deaths of his father and son, but 'whenever I saw a beggar or other vagrant loitering on the road or outside the castle I gave him some beer-money if he would tell me the tale of his life. Thus I dispelled my sadness, and I made a note of the best stories.'⁸

Another characteristic of Beer's writing is the way that his characters use fanciful metaphors, often involving music. In *Der politische Feuermäuer-Kehrer* (1682), a monk preaches a sermon referring to the fate of John the Baptist, who was beheaded by Herod after criticising his adultery. The monk uses a musical analogy to warn of the pitfalls of John's honesty: 'If you play the truth, you'll hit someone on the head with your bow. If you whistle repentance, they'll smash your teeth with a shawm.'⁹ Beer's musical metaphors reach a pinnacle in *Bellum musicum* (1700), an account of the battle between Princess Harmonia and the musical bunglers of Germany. Harmonia's armies consist of white and black notes, arranged in five lines like a stave. There is also a group of Greek commanders (named after the church modes) and the lieutenant Fuga (who rushes between the four members of his chief staff, named Cantus, Altus, Tenor and Bass). But some of Harmonia's forces are unreliable: Corporal Trillo takes fright and starts shaking, while the semitones aim the cannon-fire either slightly too high or too low. Later, musical scales are used as ladders to assault the walls of a fortress. When hostilities eventually cease, the musical notes that turned traitor are hung, drawn and quartered, until the quarter-notes have become sixty-fourth-notes. These elaborate metaphors would delight any trained musician; indeed, *Bellum musicum* was derived from a 1683 pamphlet that Beer devised to amuse the musicians invited to the wedding of the Weissenfels Kapellmeister, Johann Philipp Krieger.

In only one of Beer's novels, *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker oder abentheuerliche Jan Rebhu* (1677-79), is the main character a musician, and then only for the first instalment of this four-part book. *Welt-Kucker* is a picaresque novel, modelled on Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* (as is evident from the catchpenny tag *simplicianische* in Beer's title). Like *Simplicissimus*, Jan Rebhu is orphaned as a child and must therefore proceed in the world without parental guidance; he goes through a series of adventures, alternating between fortune and poverty like a ball tossed up and down by fate. 'Now we rejoice, now the shawm plays another tune. Today we are happy, tomorrow sad ... today we are healthy, tomorrow we are ill.'¹⁰

⁸ 'wo ich nur einen Bettler/ oder sonsten einen Landstreichenden Vaganten auf der Strasse/ oder vor meinem Schloßlein/ sahe/ der muste mir/ um ein gutes Tranckgeld/ seinen Lebens-Lauff erzehlen/ dadurch ich mir/ nebenst Anmerckung der besten Sachen/ zugleich meine traurige Zeit trefflich vertreiben habe.' Beer, *Die kurtzweiligen Sommer-Täge* (n.p., 1683), pp. 365-6.

⁹ 'Geige man die Warheit/ so schlägt man einem den Fidelbogen um den kopff/ pfeiff man von der Busse/ so stossen sie einem mit der Schallmeyen die Zähne ein.' Beer, *Der politische Feuermäuer-Kehrer* (Leipzig, 1682), p. 60.

¹⁰ 'Jtzt jauchzen wir/ bald giebt die Schalmey einen andern Thon. Heute sind wir frölich/ Morgen traurig ... Heut Gesund/ Morgen krank.' Beer, *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker*, book 1, p. 1.

Initially, Rebhu is taken to a court to serve as a soprano. The court, like that at Dresden, is dominated by Italian musicians; Rebhu is taught by a castrato and there are long conversations between the foreign musicians about the merits of various performers. Soon Rebhu is thrown into a series of erotic adventures, as an Italian countess and later a noblewoman, 'Squalora', try to seduce him. He is threatened with execution but escapes to Venice with the Italian countess, where they lead a life of hedonism, avoiding churches as if they were hospitals. Rebhu's adultery with the countess leads him to the brink of execution but at the last minute he is again reprieved. The execution scenes and eroticism were staple ingredients of popular literature, presumably included to attract as many readers as possible. Later instalments of the story contain other popular motifs, such as shipwreck, a desert island and Turkish battles.

In its embrace of the secular world, a picaresque novel such as *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker* offers a corrective to the emphasis on Lutheran piety in many studies of the German Baroque.¹¹ Beer's characters behave roguishly and amorally, without regard for their status or reputation. Such antics were probably intended to titillate his readers and let them experience an outcast's life vicariously. However, Beer may have also had a serious point in mind. In 1697, during a dispute with Gottfried Vockerodt about the morality of music, he argued that musicians should not be judged on their behaviour or religious beliefs, but on their musical achievements alone.¹² Furthermore, elements of the picaresque can be detected in the lives of some Baroque musicians. Perhaps the best example is the audacious behaviour shown by the young Bach, who brawled with a bassoonist in Arnstadt and got into trouble with the church authorities there. Robert Marshall has also noted how the young Bach had a taste for obscenities and *double entendres*, whether when insulting the bassoonist or in the Quodlibet BWV524 for a Bach family reunion;¹³ here is a parallel with the coarse language and racy behaviour of *Der simplicianische Welt-Kucker*. The earthy exuberance of the picaresque may thus be a significant strand in German Baroque life, as much as the Lutheran piety or personal diligence that are emphasised in many biographies of Bach.

II Daniel Speer: the musician as traveller

Daniel Speer (1636–1707) also drew on the picaresque model of the adventurer in his novels. *Dacianische Simplicissimus* (1683) recounts the life of an orphan (Simplex), who is forced by religious persecution to leave his Silesian homeland and to travel through Hungary, Transylvania and Romania. Simplex trains as a

¹¹ On the prevalence of Lutheran piety see Günther Stiller, *J. S. Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*, translated by Herbert J.A. Bouman, Daniel F. Poellot & Hilton C. Oswald (St Louis: Concordia, 1984).

¹² Beer, *Ursus vulpinatur* (Weissenfels, 1697), p. 28.

¹³ Robert L. Marshall, 'Toward a Twenty-first Century Bach Biography', *Musical Quarterly* 84 (2000), 497–525 (p. 501). I am grateful to Laurence Dreyfus for these suggestions about the picaresque.

drummer and then as a trumpeter, serving numerous noblemen in the wars against the Turks during the late 1650s and early 1660s.¹⁴ The novel lacks the irony and satire of the writings of Beer, Printz and Kuhnau; instead it reads like a travelogue, with many descriptive passages (some taken verbatim from contemporary topographies). At the time of publication its description of Hungarian lands was highly relevant, for there was great public appetite for information about these territories that had once again been invaded by the Turks (culminating in the Siege of Vienna, 1683). It is unclear how far *Dacianische Simplicissimus* is autobiographical, although some details of the narrative do coincide with the few known facts of Speer's early life (for instance, the childhood in Breslau; being orphaned at the age of seven; and travelling to avoid religious persecution). Further evidence that Speer journeyed to Hungarian lands is found in his later publication, *Musicalisch-Türkischer Eulen-Spiegel* (1688); this contains transcriptions of eastern European dances, which Speer claimed to have witnessed first-hand on his travels.

Türkische Vagant (1683) is the sequel to *Dacianische Simplicissimus* and describes the continuation of Simplex's travels, from Constantinople to the Middle East (including Lebanon, Babylon and Baghdad). This sequel has few references to music and hence is of limited interest to musicologists. Moreover, it is not autobiographical, instead being based on the travel accounts of two sixteenth-century Germans, the preacher Salomon Schweigger and the botanist Leonhard Rauwolf.¹⁵ Heavy borrowings were typical of travel literature of the time, because any literate traveller would read and be influenced by existing guidebooks. Here, however, the extent of the borrowings suggests that Speer never went to the Middle East and was merely trying to satisfy the public curiosity about that region.

By contrast, Speer's *Haspel-Hannß* (1684) moves away from travel-writing and back to the genre of the picaresque. It tells the story of Hans, a deformed orphan who embarks on apprenticeships first in spindle-making and later in music, but runs away from his master half-way through each one. Thus equipped with two half-learned trades, he travels to fifteen university towns in central Europe (among them Greifswald, Prague, Tübingen, Altdorf and Leipzig). These towns are not described with the close detail of Speer's first novel; they instead form the backdrop for Hans's pranks and thieving.

Speer's novels perpetuate the image of the musician as a social outsider; in *Dacianische Simplicissimus* and *Türkische Vagant*, Simplex's status as a stranger is intensified by his observation of foreign lands and cultures. Although Speer's novels are unusual in their focus upon eastern Europe, his descriptions of long and hazardous journeys would have been recognised by many musicians. Johann Joachim Quantz travelled as a journeyman instrumentalist and also when

¹⁴ For details of the depiction of trumpeters, see Henry Howey, 'The Lives of *Hoftrumpeter* and *Stadt Pfeifer* as Portrayed in Three Novels of Daniel Speer', *Historic Brass Society Journal* 3 (1991), 65–78.

¹⁵ Konrad Gajek, *Daniel Speers romanhafte und publizistische Schriften* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1988), pp. 60–80.

music was silenced locally during mourning periods; Franz Benda roamed between Prague, Dresden and Warsaw; many composers, including Printz, Johann David Heinichen and Daniel Gottlieb Treu, went to study in Italy. Indeed, such travels were a major reason why the reading public was attracted to the life-stories of musicians. This is already evident in the chapbooks named after stereotyped street musicians. *Der überaus lustige und kurtzweilige Scheer-Geiger* (1673) claims to include 'five hundred humorous and pleasant anecdotes, which the merry fiddler heard during his lengthy journeys in Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Poland and Italy...which have been noted down by him diligently, word for word'.¹⁶ The preface to *Der pohlische Sackpfeiffer* (1663) mentions the bagpiper's military adventures with the Cossacks and Tartars, although such escapades do not feature at all in the contents of the chapbook. Travel continued to be a theme of the many autobiographies of German musicians that were published in the mid-eighteenth century.

III Wolfgang Caspar Printz and the embattled musician

The three novels by Wolfgang Caspar Printz (1641–1717) have a more serious intent, aiming to uphold the status of instrumental musicians and integrate them within urban society. His novels are set in the world of municipal musicians – the salaried instrumentalists who undertook watchman duty, played from the towers, and supplied instrumental music in church. Such instrumentalists had a variety of titles (such as *Stadtpeifer*, *Kunstpeifer* or *Hausmann*), yet they could be found in almost every German town. Many of Bach's ancestors had held such jobs, including his father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, who served as town musician in Eisenach from 1671 to 1695. Printz himself belonged to a higher level of musician – he was cantor and court composer in Sorau – but he had experienced their world. As a teenager he learned the trombone and cornetto from the town-piper in Weiden and 'assisted him by playing hundreds of times from the tower'.¹⁷ Later, as a theology student at the University of Altdorf, he shared meals with the town-piper and again took on some of the duties of playing from the tower.

Printz's first novel, *Cotala* (1690), is cast as the fictional autobiography of a young instrumentalist from birth, through his apprenticeship and journeyman years, until he finally gains mastery, gets a permanent job and marries. The novel contains many colourful tales of pranks from Cotala's years as an apprentice. Its main focus, however, is on how Cotala must defend his profession against detractors who see music as dishonourable (*unehrlich*). In the seventeenth century a wide range of professions (including shepherds, bailiffs, hangmen, skinnners and linen-weavers) were regarded as dishonourable by urban artisans, and

¹⁶ 'Fünffhundert lustige possirliche und annehmliche Schertzreden/ welche einem wolversuchten durch Teutschland/ Franckreich/ Spanien/ Schweden/ Dennemarck/ Polen/ Italien, &c. eine lange Zeit herumb reisenden Scheer-Geiger...zu Ohren gekommen/ und von ihm von Wort zu Wort auf das fleissigste aufgezeichnet und bemercket worden.' (title-page)

¹⁷ Johann Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Hamburg, 1740), p. 261.

instrumentalists were sometimes grouped with these social outcasts.¹⁸ Cotala is the son of a wheelwright—an honourable trade—and his father opposes his musical interests as disreputable and unlikely to lead to a secure income: ‘If you don’t want to learn the wheelwright’s craft, learn what you want, but don’t become a minstrel.’¹⁹ Such parental opposition to a child’s interest in music is a common theme in musicians’ lives of the period, occurring in John Mainwaring’s *Memoirs of the Life of Handel* (London, 1760) and in Telemann’s autobiography. (When Telemann wrote a school opera, his mother and other ‘enemies of music’ prophesied that ‘I would become a juggler, tightrope walker, itinerant musician or monkey-trainer, unless music was taken away from me.’²⁰) Later Cotala defends music against insults from intellectuals and ignorant artisans. In such disputes, Cotala asserts that his trade is honest because, like those craftsmen regulated by guilds, he has learned music via an apprenticeship.

Printz’s second novel includes the life-story of Pancalus, another instrumental musician. Here there is less emphasis on Pancalus’s training and more detail about his travels in Italy, in particular his time at the court of the Marquis of Pomponio. Here the musicians find their place in the court hierarchy jeopardised by the other servants: first the tailor, then the wine steward, cooks, barbers and gardeners all claim precedence over musicians. The musicians defend their status by asserting the importance of music, pointing to its affective, religious and political power, and noting that it requires both manual and intellectual skill.

The episode allows Printz not only to rehearse arguments for the worth of musicians, but also to stress the pitfalls of court employment. Although Printz himself worked at the Sorau court, in *Pancalus* he criticised the hypocrisy of courtiers—‘the greatest art of a court-flatterer is to act and appear different from how he is’²¹—and he even claimed that courtly service was inimical to the honesty of an ‘upright German’. Printz was not alone in his misgivings about courtly service: Telemann in his autobiographies of 1718 and 1740 was wary about the volatility of courtly employment. However, other musicians, such as Johann Beer, preferred courtly life over the mediocrity of urban culture. As Beer said:

It’s much more pleasant if you’re at court at a well-set table with beautiful and lovely music, than to be invited to a wedding in town, first by a furrier, then by a tanner. At the town wedding you must settle for roasted sparrows and blackbirds rather than pheasants; you get red-and-yellow children’s sweets rather than sweetmeats; and instead

¹⁸ Kathy Stuart, *Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honor and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁹ ‘Hast du aber nicht Lust zum Rademacher-Handwerck/ so lerne/ was du wilt/ nur kein Spielmann werde nicht.’ Wolfgang Caspar Printz, *Musicus vexatus oder Cotala* (Freiberg, 1690), p. 15.

²⁰ ‘Ich würde ein Gauckler, Seiltänzer, Spielmann, Mummelthierführer &c. werden, wenn mir die Musik nicht entzogen würde.’ Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte*, p. 356.

²¹ ‘eines Hof-Schranzen größte Kunst ist/ wohl an sich halten/ und anderst scheinen/ als er ist.’ Printz, *Musicus magnanimus oder Pancalus* (Freiberg, 1691), p. 199.

of delightful music you get an earful from the minstrels, imperilling you with grave illness or deafness unless you're bled soon afterwards.²²

In the case of Printz's *Pancalus*, the rejection of courtly service was a sentiment also held by many urban artisans; it supports Printz's wish that musicians are integrated within urban society.

In Printz's third novel the eponymous protagonist, Battalus, is another instrumentalist who also travels to Italy, this time as a military shawm player. The focus of the novel is a dispute between Battalus and the so-called beer-fiddlers (freelance instrumentalists) about the right to play at weddings. Similar clashes between municipal musicians and freelancers are documented in many German towns of the seventeenth century; for instance in Eisenach, Bach's father Johann Ambrosius repeatedly complained how the beer-fiddlers were encroaching on his income.²³ In Printz's novel, the dispute is dramatised as a comedy, with the municipal musicians and the beer-fiddlers stating their claims to superiority before a judge (Musophilus). Printz created a binary division between the two groups of musicians, a division clearly biased in favour of the town instrumentalists:

<i>Beer-fiddlers</i>	<i>Municipal musicians</i>
Cannot read music	Play from notation
Happy to be paid with beer	Charge fees
Play for peasants	Play for burghers
Lower the honour of their audience	Play in church to enhance devotion
Music full of consecutive fifths and octaves	Music has correct voice-leading

As might be expected, Musophilus rules in favour of the municipal musicians, instructing that the beer-fiddlers be confined to playing at taverns, village fairs, dances and peasant weddings. Printz satirised the beer-fiddlers mercilessly; a similarly unflattering portrayal was offered by Johann Beer in his *Bellum musicum*, where Harmonia's adversaries—the musical bunglers—are identified as beer-fiddlers and small-town organists.

Yet Printz's depiction of the beer-fiddlers was a caricature, distorted for rhetorical effect. The historical evidence is that there were many overlaps between beer-fiddlers and more prestigious instrumentalists. Franz Benda said that he learned many new ideas about how to play the violin from a Jewish tavern musician in Prague. Telemann is well known for his fascination with the

²² 'Es ist viel köstlicher/ wann du zu Hofe bey einer wolgedeckten Taffel in einer wählenden schönen und lieblichen Music dich enthaltest/ als wann du in der Stadt bald von einem Kirschner/ bald von einem Weißgerber/ zu seiner Hochzeit geladen wirst/ wo man/ statt der Phasanen/ gebratene Spatzen oder Aemerlinge aufsetzet/ und/ statt des Confects/ roth und gelb gemahlten Kinder-Zucker daher bringet/ und statt der köstlichen Music/ werden dir die Spielleute die Ohren so voll kratzen/ daß/ wann du nicht bald darauf schrepffen lässt/ dir eine gefährliche Kranckheit/ oder der Verlust des Gehörs darüber zu beförchten ist.' Beer, *Die kurtzweiligen Sommer-Täge*, pp. 421.

²³ Fritz Rollberg, 'Johann Ambrosius Bach. Stadtpfeifer zu Eisenach von 1671–1695', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 24 (1927), 133–152.

‘true barbaric beauty’ of Polish and Moravian fiddlers that he heard in Pless and Kraków.²⁴ In some towns, too, the unlicensed instrumentalists were far more accomplished than the pejorative title of ‘beer-fiddler’ would suggest. In Leipzig during the 1700s these freelance musicians were performing fashionable church music at the Neukirche.²⁵

Printz’s three novels give the impression that professional musicians faced prejudice from all levels of society – whether from uncomprehending artisans, jealous court servants, or aggressive beer-fiddlers. In part this was a device of epideictic rhetoric: Printz aimed to elevate the municipal musicians by pouring scorn (*vituperatio*) on their enemies. Printz took a similar approach in his compositional manual *Phrynis Mitilenæus oder Satyrischer Componist* (1676–77; revised 1696); this treatise is presented as a travel narrative, in which the stereotypes from the chapbooks (including Leyermatz the hurdy-gurdy player, and Schergeiger the fiddler) act as foils to the qualities of a competent composer.

The disputes over the worth of music also intruded into the lives of musicians. According to Printz’s autobiography, he was the ‘target of constant arrows of persecution’ from his employers and colleagues. At one point he was accused of being a drunk and low-life; on another occasion an attempt was made to poison him.²⁶ Printz’s prickly personality might have encouraged such animosity, but Bach was also embroiled in the disputes surrounding musicians. As a child he would have been aware of his father’s economic rivalry with the beer-fiddlers in Eisenach. Later, as an organist at Mühlhausen he used very similar language to Printz when complaining about the ‘vexation’ (*verdriessligkeit*) and ‘hindrance’ (*wiedrigkeit*) he experienced from the town’s inhabitants.²⁷ Bach’s most wounding dispute occurred during the late 1730s with Johann August Ernesti, headmaster of the Thomasschule. Ernesti was inspired by Enlightenment ideals to reform the curriculum, substantially reducing the time spent on music. When Ernesti found a boy practising music, he would scold, ‘What? You want to be a beer-fiddler too?’²⁸ For Bach, such an insult would have stung deeply, not only because it put all musicians in the same category as tavern players, but because it invoked the competitors who ate into his father’s income. Printz’s novels thus participate in a long-running debate over the worth of musicians in German society.

²⁴ Douglas Lee, *A Musician at Court: an Autobiography of Franz Benda* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1998), p. 15; Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte*, p. 360. See also John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, ‘Improvised Ornamentation in 18th-century Orchestras’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39 (1986), 524–77 (pp. 545–8).

²⁵ Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs, ii: von 1650 bis 1723* (Leipzig: Kistner & Siegel, 1926), pp. 290–1.

²⁶ ‘ein Ziel aller Verfolgungs-Pfeile’. Mattheson, *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte*, p. 272; also pp. 273–4.

²⁷ *New Bach Reader*, p. 57; *Bach-Dokumente*, vol.i, pp. 19–20.

²⁸ *New Bach Reader*, p. 172; *Bach-Dokumente*, vol.iii, p. 314.

IV Johann Kuhnau and the didactic novel

Johann Kuhnau's *Musicalische Quacksalber* (1700) is the most carefully structured of the musician-novels and also the most didactic, being modelled on the 'political novels' of Christian Weise. Weise had briefly taught Kuhnau at the Zittau Gymnasium and was a highly influential writer and teacher of the period. His novels sought to teach prudent and politic behaviour to the upwardly mobile, usually by providing negative and humorous examples of clumsy self-seekers. Kuhnau applied much the same tactic to music, using the ignorance and clumsiness of the 'musical charlatan' as a foil to the qualities of the true virtuoso. As Kuhnau wrote: 'we often watch a slovenly tooth-puller instead of a skilled doctor, or listen to a bagpipe instead of an agreeable, quiet lute in order to learn how great a gulf exists between art and ignorance and how much something splendid and delicate is to be preferred over that which is rustically wild and clumsy.'²⁹ Kuhnau's tactic thus echoes Printz's use of bungling beer-fiddlers in *Battalus* or *Phrynus Mitilenæus* as a foil to the competence of municipal musicians.

Kuhnau's charlatan, Caraffa, is a German musician who conceals his incompetence by pretending to be that most desirable of commodities, a visiting Italian virtuoso.³⁰ The first half of the book recounts how Caraffa was received by a *collegium musicum* in a German town. Initially Caraffa hoodwinks the local musicians with his boasts about his virtuosity. Through various crafty ruses (such as claiming that his hand was injured by a mugger) he avoids having to perform anything complex before them. But the collegium's suspicion is aroused, and it requests him to set first a psalm and then a madrigalian verse to music; Caraffa can only complete these tasks by plagiarising existing pieces of music. Later Caraffa flees from the collegium and embarks on a picaresque series of adventures, conning a series of patrons, pupils and village musicians. He receives his come-uppance, however, in a university town where the students mock his boastfulness and reduce him to a pathetic, self-pitying figure. Eventually he repents of his former ways and embarks on a new life.

The novel ends with the 64 precepts of 'the true virtuoso and happy musician', a statement of Kuhnau's ideal conduct for a professional musician. Kuhnau outlines the skills in improvisation and composition necessary in a true virtuoso, and prescribes behaviour that is modest and pious. This didactic ending is again modelled on Weise, who often closed his novels with lists of idealised qualities. Kuhnau's precepts are a rare moment in the musician-novels where a Lutheran outlook prevails over the otherwise secular viewpoint. The precepts emphasise that music is a divine gift, to be shared freely. Musicians should not boast of their

²⁹ 'weil wir auch öffters an statt eines gelehrten *Medici* einen liederlichen Zahnbrecher/ und an statt einer annehmlichen und stillen Laute einer schwermenden Sack-Pfeiffe zuhören/ damit wir erfahren mögen/ was für eine grosse Klufft zwischen der Kunst und Unwissenheit befestiget/ und wie weit etwas vortreffliches und *delicates* dem bürgerlichen wilden und ungeschickten Wesen vorzuziehen sey.' Kuhnau, *Quacksalber*, pp. 6–7.

³⁰ *Der musicalische Quacksalber* has been translated into English by John R. Russell as *The Musical Charlatan* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1997); but, as George J. Buelow notes in his review (*Music & Letters* 79 (1998), 427–8), Russell renders many musical terms inaccurately.

skills because these are merely loaned to them by God. With such advice, Kuhnau taps into a Lutheran tradition about sharing one's talents that dates back to Martin Agricola's *Musica instrumentalia deudsch* (1529) if not earlier.³¹ Yet even here there are secular elements: the notion of a 'true virtuoso' draws on Aristotelian notions of virtue, and the premiss underlying a political novel such as *Quacksalber* is that individuals can learn the skills with which to control their destiny.

Kuhnau's novel was highly influential: his precepts were quoted (in whole or part) by several writers, including Andreas Werckmeister in *Cribrum musicum* (1700); Johann Georg Ahle in his *Musikalisches Winter-Gespräche* (1701); Friedrich Erhardt Niedt in the second book of his *Musicalische Handleitung* (1706); and by Johann Mattheson in *Exemplarische Organisten-Probe* (1719), *Das forschende Orchestre* (1721) and *Grosse General-Bass-Schule* (1731). Central to the success of Kuhnau's novel was how he cloaked his didacticism with amusing tales. Several compositional treatises of the period use a similar tactic, mingling instruction with entertainment. I have already mentioned how Printz's *Phrynis Mitilenæus* (1676-77; revised 1696) is presented as a travel narrative, with characters representing skilled and incompetent musicians. Friedrich Erhardt Niedt began his *Musicalische Handleitung* (1700), a book that Bach used in his own teaching, with a fictional autobiography which aimed to show the advantages of studying figured bass rather than organ tablature. Johann Georg Ahle (whom Bach succeeded as organist at the Blasiuskirche in Mühlhausen) wrote a series of treatises where musical matters are discussed via convivial conversations (see, for instance, his 'seasonal conversations': *Musikalisches Frühlings-Gespräche* (1695), *Musikalisches Sommer-Gespräche* (1697), *Musikalisches Herbst-Gespräche* (1699) and *Musikalisches Winter-Gespräche* (1701)).

Thus the musician-novels are interesting not only in themselves but also for their wider significance. The narrative techniques and humorous tone of the novels infiltrate many compositional treatises of the eighteenth century. In addition, the novels illuminate the attitudes of German Baroque musicians. Clearly the relationship between literature and life is complex, and care must be taken when relating the novels to the historical situation of musicians such as Bach. It is likely that the chapbooks and Beer's *Simplicianische Welt-Kucker* largely perpetuate crude stereotypes of musicians. By contrast, the satirical narratives of Printz and Kuhnau hold a distorting mirror up to the musical life of their time. This satire cannot be understood without a good grasp of the social situation of musicians. Printz's novels, with their detailed discussion of the honour of instrumental musicians, can only be fully comprehended when one considers the many documented conflicts over the status and worth of musicians. For a musician such as Bach, whose outlook is so poorly documented, the novels help us to envisage his world in its earthy, harsh and often comic immediacy.³²

³¹ Stephen Rose, 'The Mechanisms of the Music Trade in Central Germany 1600-40', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 130 (2005), 1-37 (pp. 30-1).

³² A version of this essay will also appear in the forthcoming book *J. S. Bach and his World*, ed. Raymond Erickson (New York: Amadeus Press).