

New Evidence on Thomaskantor Kuhnau's Operatic Activities, or: Could Bach have been allowed to compose an Opera?

MICHAEL MAUL

In a lecture read in 1986, Georg von Dadelsen discussed Johann Sebastian Bach's relationship with opera, particularly treating the question whether Bach would have been successful as an opera composer.¹ In my paper I am in some respects returning to Dadelsen's topic, since I will first focus on the general conditions of opera performances in Leipzig and subsequently ask if a Thomaskantor would, theoretically, have been permitted to compose dramatic works.²

I was able to shed new light on this subject in the course of research connected with my dissertation on the first Leipzig opera house – the famous institution founded in 1693, which first stood under the direction of the Dresden *Kapellmeister* Nikolaus Adam Strungk and later was run by his heirs. The opera house presented its productions during the Leipzig trade fairs (at New Year, Easter and Michaelmas each year). Until the company went bankrupt in 1720 it performed altogether 74 different works. Georg Philipp Telemann, Melchior Hoffmann and Johann David Heinichen provided new compositions for the house; the students Johann Friedrich Fasch and Johann Georg Pisendel played in

¹ Georg von Dadelsen, 'Wenn Bach Opern geschrieben hätte', *Johann Sebastian Bachs Spätwerk und dessen Umfeld. Perspektiven und Probleme. Bericht über das wissenschaftliche Symposium anlässlich des 61. Bachfestes der Neuen Bachgesellschaft Duisburg 1986*, ed. Christoph Wolff (Kassel etc., 1988), pp. 177–83.

² This paper is based essentially on the chapters III/18–19 and IV/1 of my book *Barockoper in Leipzig* (Freiburg, 2009; *Voces: Freiburger Beiträge zur Musikgeschichte*, vol. 12/1–2), pp. 311–27 and 337–53.

its orchestra, and the young George Frederic Handel repeatedly joined its audience. In my book *Barockoper in Leipzig*,³ I reconstructed the history of the Leipzig opera house and was able to retrieve a considerable amount of its music. In addition, I found some surprising new details about the relationship between the opera house and the municipal music directorate, especially during the era of Johann Kuhnau. Thus I will start my paper by exploring Kuhnau's contacts to the Leipzig opera house.

When we read the numerous petitions, which from 1704 were addressed by Kuhnau to the Leipzig town council regarding the independent music performances at the New Church, we gain the impression that his relationship with this institution was not a friendly one. In these petitions Kuhnau claims that the New Church was reigned by a 'wild operistic spirit', since the composers active there all work for the opera house as well, and – even worse – that they create their 'easily imitable pieces' only with fleshly intentions.⁴ According to Kuhnau these composers had no idea of the true church style, and did not even possess the slightest notion of solid musical craftsmanship. These remarks did not aim at a closing of the opera house – the town council was not authorised to make this decision, as the opera performances took place with an electoral privilege; Kuhnau was more concerned with recruiting a larger band of musicians for his own church music. The music directors of the New Church, Georg Philipp Telemann and later Melchior Hoffmann, in their parallel functions as conductors of a renowned collegium musicum and as artistic directors of the opera performances, were able to offer much more attractive conditions to musically interested students than Kuhnau. For this reason Kuhnau lost many of his former students and talented singers to the opera house – for example, musicians like Christoph Graupner, Johann Friedrich Fasch and Johann David Heinichen changed sides in this conflict. Thus Kuhnau's endeavours were not successful; rather, his polemics actually worsened the situation. Some students even refused to play under the direction of Kuhnau.⁵

However, Kuhnau had not always been a harsh critic of the opera house. To the contrary: during the 1690s he was in close contact with the founder of the Leipzig opera, Nikolaus Adam Strungk. At that time he had even represented Strungk several times as an attorney in law suits (once he managed to save Strungk, who used to pay his rent for the property only sporadically, from debt-prison).⁶ Moreover, during the 1690s the genre of opera also played a role in Kuhnau's musical ambitions. This part of his artistic output has until recently remained quite obscure. We only used to know that in his novel *Der Musicalische Quacksalber* (published in 1700) Kuhnau quoted extracts from the libretto of an

³ See n. 2 above.

⁴ See the documents published in Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1879), pp. 853–68, and my comments on Kuhnau's polemic against the 'Operisten' (1709) and the reply by Johann David Heinichen in the preface of his *Neu erfundene und Gründliche Anweisung [...] zu vollkommener Erlernung des General-Basses* (Hamburg, 1711), in Maul (see n. 2 above), pp. 452–72.

⁵ Maul (n. 2 above), p. 472.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–39.

opera called *Orpheus*, which he claimed to have composed some time ago.⁷ It remains unclear, however, whether this piece was performed at all. There is no trace of it in the Leipzig repertoire; and the contemporary *Orpheus* librettos from Braunschweig (1690) and Naumburg (1701) are not identical with the excerpts given in the *Quacksalber*.

Yet, that Kuhnau indeed once performed an opera of his own composition in Leipzig is proven by another document. Johann Adolph Scheibe in his *Critischer Musicus* reports: 'The famous Kuhnau was a learned and regarding musical scholarship well-experienced man. But despite his great merits, it is known quite well how badly things went, when he once composed a Singespiel and brought it on stage.'⁸ It is generally assumed that this 'Singespiel' was not identical with the just-mentioned *Orpheus*. But which piece was Scheibe referring to? I asked myself this question, and in the course of my research came to the following surprising conclusion. I became aware of a printed libretto documenting the Leipzig performance of a 'Pastorella' called *Galathea*. This work was performed during the New Year's Fair of 1702: in other words, roughly one year after Strungk's death. Apart from the libretto,⁹ no other sources survive of *Galathea*. The piece was hitherto assumed to be a composition by Christian Ludwig Boxberg.¹⁰ This attribution, however, relies merely on the fact that the anonymous author of text and music in the preface to the libretto gives some background information regarding the genesis of the work. At first sight it seems that these remarks only match with Boxberg's biography. Consider, for example, the following passage:

The words and music of this Pastorelle are the work of an author, who created both about four years ago in Leipzig, in order to have them presented elsewhere. Since back then for certain reasons a performance did not take place, and the invention of the piece was found to be such (especially because of its brevity) that it might be pleasant to see a shepherdess, as which Galathea goes on stage, is seen with her spring merriment even in the midst of winter, that is, in the present New Year's fair on the local stage so the author has been prevailed upon to permit its performance..He, however, wishes to apologise if the music is not of the same delicacy as is usually offered to the spectators in this theatre. If he had to be honest, he had to admit that much of the piece would have to be changed if there were to be a revision of the work. However, he presently lacks the time to rewrite it, since he is too busy with other commitments.

⁷ Johann Kuhnau, *Der musicalische Quack-Salber* (Dresden, 1700), pp. 455–63.

⁸ Johann Adolph Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus* (Leipzig, 1745), p. 879.

⁹ Die | GALATHEA | In einer PASTORELLE, | Auff der Leipzigerischen | Schau-Bühne/ | in der Neuen Jahres-Meße/ | Anno 1702. | Mit Ihr. Königl. Ma- | jestät in Pohlen/ | und | Churfürstl. Durchl. zu Sachs. | Allernädigster Verwilligung | præsentiret. Printed libretto only in: Landes- und Universitätsbibliothek Halle, AB 155476, 3.

¹⁰ See Gustav Friedrich Schmidt, 'Die älteste deutsche Oper in Leipzig am Ende des 17. und Anfang des 18. Jahrhunderts', *Festschrift zum 50. Geburtstag [von] Adolf Sandberger* (Munich, 1918), 226–27.

May the reader meanwhile live happily and accord the work a benevolent eye.¹¹

One could indeed assume that these remarks refer to Boxberg: he first appeared in Leipzig as an opera composer in 1698 and until 1702 he wrote no fewer than three works for the local theatre. In addition he had provided seven librettos for his teacher Strungk.¹² But attributing *Galathea* to Boxberg has also some drawbacks. First, it remains obscure what kind of 'commitments' he had immediately before the New Year's Fair of 1702 that would have prevented him from revising his composition. Only in the summer of 1702, when he was appointed organist in Görlitz, could he have adopted this excuse. Second, Boxberg signed all prefaces in the printed librettos of his known Leipzig operas with his initials – except for the *Galathea* libretto. Why would he suddenly have wished to conceal his identity? Third, it would be surprising if Boxberg had conceded that his music lacked the delicacy of other Leipzig operas. Taking into account that Boxberg had provided most of the operas staged in the years 1700 and 1701, he would have praised his own compositions – thus violating the convention of modesty, which was obligatory in prefaces. Indeed the statement seems to indicate that the author of *Galathea* made his debut on the Leipzig stage with this piece.

In addition there are also stylistic reasons against Boxberg's authorship. The librettos signed with his initials are comparatively modern: there is a clear preponderance of da capo arias with a modest number of lines. Old-fashioned strophic arias are only used for the comic *Hanswurst* characters. *Galathea*, on the other hand, represents an antiquated type of opera for 1702. Of its eighteen arias no fewer than seven have a strophic structure. Da capo pieces are entirely absent, and among the arias consisting of only one section there are even some pieces with more than twelve lines of text.

All these observations cast doubt on Boxberg's authorship and prompt us to seek another candidate. It turns out that the obscure hints regarding the identity of the author found in the *Galathea* preface fit perfectly well into Kuhnau's biography:

¹¹ Original German text of the preface:

'Die Poesie und Music von gegenwärtiger Pastorelle, die *Galathea* genannt/ ist die Geburt eines *Autoris*, der sie vor 4. Jahren ohngefehr allhier zu Leipzig zu dem Ende verfertigt/ daß sie anders wo sollen *präsentiret* werden. Nachdem aber aus gewissen Ursachen die *Präsentation* damahls unterbleiben müssen/ und man die *Invention*, sonderlich wegen der dabey *observirten* Kürtze/ so beschaffen gefunden/ daß es nicht unangenehm seyn würde/ wenn eine Schafferin/ wie die *Galathea* auffgeführt wird/ mit ihrer Frühlings-Lust auch mitten in dem Winter/ und also in dieser Neu-Jahres-Messe auff der hiesigen Schau-Bühne sich blicken liesse; So hat man den *Autorem* dergleichen zuzulassen vermocht. Er möchte aber gerne entschuldiget seyn/ wenn sonderlich die *Music* nicht nach derjenigen *Delicatesse* schmecken solte/ die sonst auff dergleichen *Theatris* denen Anwesenden pfl eget vorgetragen zu werden. Soll er die Wahrheit bekennen/ so müste das meiste geändert seyn/ wenn itzo von neuen die Ausarbeitung dieses Werckes geschehen solte: Zu welcher Mühe er sich aber itzo bey andern Verrichtungen nicht verstehen können. Indessen lebe der Leser vergnügt/ und gönne dem Wercke ein geneigtes Auge.'

¹² See the catalogue of Leipzig operas in Maul (n. 2 above).

- four years prior to 1702 Kuhnau was indeed present in Leipzig;
- like Boxberg he was a gifted musician and poet;
- before 1702 he did not appear as an opera composer for the Leipzig stage;
- immediately preceding the New Year's Fair of 1702 he was in fact busy with other commitments, since he had taken over the cantorate of St Thomas only in the summer of 1701.

Could it thus be that *Galathea* is in fact a piece by Kuhnau? And could this work be identical with the 'Singe-Spiel' that Johann Adolph Scheibe mentioned and characterised as a disaster?

Fortunately, these questions do not have to remain unanswered. It has so far remained unnoticed that Kuhnau mentioned *Galathea* elsewhere in his largely unstudied writings.¹³ In his novel *Des klugen und thörichten Gebrauches der fünf Sinnen*, published in 1698 and recovered only in the late 1980s, one of the main characters reports about a certain 'Oper von der Galathea' as follows:

It comes to my mind that I have with me a small opera about the Galathea, which a good friend of mine has composed. I am supposed to show the score to the musical connoisseur Herr Olsson for examination, since my friend would like to hear his judgement about it.¹⁴

On the following pages, Kuhnau quotes a longer excerpt from the libretto, which proves that the 'Galathea' discussed in the novel is indeed identical with the opera performed four years later in Leipzig.¹⁵ The interpretation of this finding seems clear: the prepublication of parts of the libretto demonstrate that the anonymous author of *Galathea* is none other than Kuhnau. Why should he adorn himself in this novel with borrowed plumes and ask the fictitious Herr Olsson – a medical student – to judge the piece of a younger colleague? This would certainly have been a major affront. In addition, the statement of the *Galathea* preface that the opera was composed 'about four years ago' perfectly fits the time of origin of the novel, which was released during the Easter Fair of 1698.

What were Kuhnau's reasons, however, for inserting this peculiar passage into his novel? The answer is given by a poem – also inserted into the novel – celebrating the wedding of a 'distinguished court musician of the name of Bruno'. Within the plot of the novel, a manuscript of this poem serves as a wrapper of the *Galathea* score.¹⁶ The connection reveals itself only to the initiated: the musician,

¹³ I thank Rashid-Sascha Pegah (Würzburg), who called my attention to the passage cited hereafter. – According to the article 'Johann Kuhnau' in MGG² the novels *Der Schmid seines eignen Unglückes* [...] (Leipzig, 1695) and *Des klugen und thörichten Gebrauches der fünf Sinnen. Erster Theil: Vom Fühlen* [...] (Leipzig, 1698) are lost; but the latter is reprinted in Johann Kuhnau, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. James Hardin (Bern etc., 1992; Nachdrucke deutscher Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts, vols 57–58).

¹⁴ *Des klugen und thörichten Gebrauches der fünf Sinnen. Erster Theil: Vom Fühlen/ In allerhand lustigen Historien dem curiosen Leser zu sonderbarem Vergnügen/ anmuthig vorgestellt Von J. K. Leipzig/ verlegt Christoph Hülse/ 1698*, p. 99. See Appendix.

¹⁵ See Appendix.

¹⁶ See Appendix.

‘Herr Bruno’, and his bride, ‘warm Dorgen’ (a short version of Dorothea), are not a fictitious couple, but in fact a real one. They can be identified as Wilhelm Dietrich Brauns, the second organist at the Dresden court, and the oldest daughter of Nikolaus Adam Strungk, Dorothea Maria. The wedding ceremony took place in Dresden in the winter of 1698.¹⁷

Against this historical background the entire passage in the novel suddenly makes sense. It has to be interpreted as a sort of wedding gift: Kuhnau presented the bride and the bridegroom with a printed copy of his wedding poem and used the opportunity to draw the attention to the recently completed or still unfinished score of his *Galathea* opera. Whether this episode also happened in reality – in other words, whether Kuhnau indeed sent his *Galathea* to Dresden for examination is unknown. It is obvious, however, that the connection between wedding poem and stage-work drawn in the novel is not merely accidental, but in fact serves a special purpose. Although one may think of several different possibilities, the most likely assumption seems that Kuhnau had hoped to arouse Strungk’s interest in his opera.

It remains open why Strungk refused to perform Kuhnau’s *Galathea*. Maybe it was for reasons Kuhnau alluded to in his preface of 1702 – an old-fashioned libretto, the predominance of strophic arias. We also do not know whether this led to a rift between the two men.

After Strungk had died in 1700, Kuhnau probably offered the opera again to the company directors. Since 1701 they had in fact to struggle with a shortage of capable composers, since many of Strungk’s students had left the town in this period of reorganisation and the new star on Leipzig’s musical horizon, Georg Philipp Telemann, would only rise in the course of 1702. Thus it becomes understandable that Kuhnau used this favorable moment to bring his *Galathea* to the stage.¹⁸

It remains unclear to what degree the concealment in the preface to the *Galathea* libretto was caused by Kuhnau’s wish to obscure the fact that the Thomaskantor was working for the opera house. I do not think he could have hidden the fact altogether, and, if he had concealed or wished to conceal his identity, it certainly would have been better not to mention anything about the author of *Galathea*. I thus conclude that the Leipzig town council tolerated Kuhnau’s decision. A possible objection is that in a similar case, when Telemann was appointed music director of the New Church in the summer of 1704, the Leipzig councillor Adrian Steger demanded that the new employee henceforth give up ‘acting in the opera’. This, however, caused Telemann only to renounce his appearances as a singer on stage; his commitments as a composer for the opera house were in no way affected by his taking up a position at a municipal church.¹⁹

¹⁷ Biographical information in Maul (n. 2 above), pp. 348 and 1003-04.

¹⁸ It could be also important that during the New Year’s Fair of 1702 Girolamo Sartorio (the architect of the house) organised for the first time alone an opera production for the Leipzig stage – against the will of Strungk’s heirs (as argued in Maul, *ibid.*, pp. 337-53).

¹⁹ For biographical details see Maul, *ibid.*, pp. 704-6.

When we ask whether the Thomaskantor Johann Sebastian Bach would have been permitted to compose an opera, we first need to consider whether after 1723 there would have been an opportunity for him. Opera performances are documented during Bach's tenure here only in the 1740s, when Mingotti's troupe presented a number of works by Italian composers during the local trade fairs.²⁰ It seems to me, however, that especially in the early 1720s – that is, at the beginning of Bach's Leipzig period – there would have been good opportunities, if not even the expressed wish of several parties, to resume the performance of operas and revive the opera house that had ceased its activities in 1720.

It has hitherto been assumed that in the autumn of 1719 the Leipzig town council declared the opera house officially dilapidated. Since nobody was willing to spend the necessary 1000 thalers to renovate the building or have an interest in providing a new location, the company stopped playing in 1720. In 1729 the building eventually was sold, turned into an orphanage, and about a hundred years later completely pulled down. Newly discovered documents, however, suggest a different interpretation of the situation in the early 1720s.²¹ True, the building was in need of repair in the autumn of 1719 and its manager Dorothea Maria Brauns (the 'warm Dorchen' mentioned earlier) was so heavily indebted that she was unable to schedule any productions. In addition, the Strungk family failed to reach a consensus with the Siegfried family, who owned the property, concerning the modalities of the renovation. But the Leipzig town council avoided expressly prohibiting the performances of operas, mainly because in the following years up to 1724 the Dresden court sent several summons to Leipzig asking the town council to take care of renovating the old opera house or erecting a new building at a different location. In electoral edicts of December 1720 and 1722 we read that the court considered it an impossible situation that the electoral family could no longer listen to operas during their visits to the Leipzig fairs.²² The pressure of the court was such that in 1722 the council even had the house

²⁰ See Erich H. Müller, *Die Mingottischen Opernunternehmungen 1732–1756* (Dresden: Bertling, 1915), pp. 27, 44, 54, 59, 94–95 and Reinhard Strohm, *Dramma per Musica. Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 84–85.

²¹ For details, see Maul (n. 2 above), pp. 311–27.

²² To give an example, an unknown agent of the Leipzig council reported in December 1719 from Dresden as follows:

'Als bey der von E. E. Hochw. Rathe mir aufgetragenen Reise nacher Dreßden unter andern wegen des baufälligen Opern-Hauses zu Leipzig bey des Herrn Geheimen Raths und Vice-Canzlers von Büнау Excell. Erinnerung zu thun mir aufgetragen worden, So haben dieselben sich hierauf vernehmen laßen, wie Sie diesfals bey der Hochlöbl. Regierung ein mehrers zu verfügen nicht vermöchten, denn wenn Sie auch gleich von daraus einen Bericht ans Hochpreißl. Geheime Consilium erstatteten, würde doch wohl schwerlich eine resolution wegen Abtragung des Hauses alda ergehen, und wenn E. E. Rath es vor sich thäte, könnte es demselben leicht Verantwortung bringen, oder Er gar ein anders zu bauen angehalten werden, denn sich ereignen mögte, daß entweder des Königl. Prinzens Hoheit mit dero Frau Gemahlin Hoheit auf die Messe kömmen, oder Ihro Majt. der König selbst [...] Operisten nacher Leipzig schickten und kein Opern-Haus vorhanden wäre, unschwer zu ermeßen sey, was vor Beschwerligkeit daraus entstehen könnte, dahero was iezo mit etlichen hundert Thalern repariret wäre, hernach etliche Tausend Thaler kosten dürffe, auch welchen Ursachen man sich an Seiten des Rathes gar wohl zu fassen habe.' (Stadtarchiv Leipzig, *Tit. XXIV. A. 8 Acta Die von E. E. Hochw. Rathe in das hiesige Opernhaus verwendete Reparatur-Kosten Ao. 1729, fol. 1*).

repaired at their own expense, hoping that the dispute between the Strungk family and the owner of the property would be settled by this. However, at this time the two families fought not only about the renovation costs, but also about the open rent that had accumulated in the meantime. The owner Siegfried cited a contract effective until 1724, which specified that the Strungk family had agreed to pay for each trade fair the sum of 100 thalers as rent for the property. Since the electoral privilege to perform operas in Leipzig was solely held by the Strungk family, the situation was at deadlock and could not be resolved without any compromises between the two parties.

In this paralysed situation the Venetian impresario Antonio Maria Peruzzi appeared during the Easter fair of 1722 in the residence of the property owner Siegfried with a tempting offer – an offer which, if it had been accepted, could have been a surprising turning point in the history of the Leipzig opera. Peruzzi proposed to reopen the opera house again with the Michaelmas fair of 1722 and run it for at least three years.²³ He told Siegfried that he had already spoken with the electoral princess Maria Josepha, who was a great admirer of Italian opera, and planned to hire as soon as possible famous Italian singers, in order to be able to begin with his performances in the coming fair.²⁴

²³ The details of the arrangements between Siegfried and Peruzzi are documented in a contract and a letter by Siegfried to the elector of 10 September 1722 (Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Tit. XXIV. A. 7a: *Acta Christian Leonhard Lauben contra Fr: Anna Margareten Siegfriedin Wegen erlittenen Schadens von einer, von dem in ihrem Hofe stehenden Opern-Hause herunter gefallenen Rinne und besorgender Gefahr von dem Opern-Hause daselbst, Anno 1719*, fol. 98–105): documents first mentioned in Fritz Reuter, 'Die Entwicklung der Leipziger, insbesondere italienischen Oper bis zum siebenjährigen Kriege', *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 5 (1922), 1.

²⁴ Excerpts from Siegfried's (quirky) letter to the elector:
'Allerdurchlauchtigster, Groß-Mächtigster König und Churfürst etc. etc. etc. Allernädigster Herr! [...]

Eu: *Majestät* Allgdst. mir vergönnen werden: in tiefster *submission*, etwas umständlich zu *rapportiren*: was weiter in diesen *Affairen passiret*; Nehmlich

10.) Kurtz nach vergangener OsterMeße *a. c.* waren 2. *Italiæner* in mein Haus gekommen, hatten viel mier nicht gebührende *Complimenten* gemacht: Sie wollten gern mit mir bekannt seyn; Sollten v. müßten selben Tages annoch, mit mier sprechen; weil sie morgen nach Venedig gingen etc. Sobald ich

11.) dieses erfahren; schrieb ich ein *Italiänisch Bigl[i]etto galante, alli Sgri: sconosciuti, nel di lor'alloggiamento*; und *invitirte* sie, Abends nach 6. Uhren, ins Opernhaus, allwo ich *à l'ordinaire* meinen Studir-Platz habe; Sie kahmen

12.) *ponctuëllement*, und, nach andern *præviis discursibus* sagte der eine /: Peruzzi :/ daß Ihre Königl: Hoheit, die Durchlste Königl: vnd Chur-Prinzeßin eine sonderbahre Liebhaberin der *Music v. Italiänischen Sprachen* wären; Spihlten vortreffl ich auf der Laute v. sängen drein; Er hätte Ihnen dise Meße allhier eine kleine *Italiänische Composition* verfertigt; wofür Sie ihm gegeben: *Sessanta ongheri*; und dabey gesaget: *Se fosse Opera Italiana in Lipsia, ben verrei più volte qui. etc.* Um deßentwillen sey er

13.) Gesonnen: Alle Leipziger Meßen *Italiänische Opera* zu *præsentiren*: Wolle die außerlesenste *bande* in *Italien* zusammensuchen: In alle derer Teutzsch: *Operisten obligationes* treten: Und den *Contract*, annoch diesen Abend, mit mier, schriftlich v. besigelt vollziehen etc.

Ich antwortete:

14.) *Caro Signore! Qvesto non si può far tutt'in continente; E un'affare di conseguenza; Bisogna pigliarsi un poco di tempo; per metter'il contratto in Forma Giuridica; poiche si deve confirmare Giuridiz mé de etc.* der letzte Verlaß ware: daß er

Peruzzi's offer was by no means half-hearted; and he certainly had not promised too much. To the contrary: he immediately signed a preliminary contract with Siegfried, and then indeed went on to realise his other plans, namely to stage operas for Count Sporck in Bohemia and also appear at the opera houses in Prague, Breslau, Frankfurt, Brussels and Augsburg. It seems that even in the spring of 1724 he firmly seems to have counted on performances in Leipzig, for at that time he signed a contract with Antonio Denzio, a Venetian impresario, and engaged his troupe for performances in Prague, Dresden and Leipzig.²⁵ Had things developed as planned by Siegfried and Peruzzi, perhaps even operas by Vivaldi would have been heard in Leipzig during Bach's time. But the troupe of Peruzzi and Denzio in fact never reached the town. This was probably not so much caused by a quarrel between the two men when in Prague, but probably by the reluctance of the authorities to accept Peruzzi's proposal. In September 1722 Siegfried sent a detailed report about Peruzzi's offer to the elector at Dresden, and the court administration forwarded this letter promptly to the Leipzig town council. But following this neither the Dresden court nor the Leipzig town council made any recognisable move. Yet a reaction would have been necessary, as Peruzzi needed official permission for his performances from both sides. The silence is odd for two reasons: on the one hand, all conflicts about the Leipzig opera house would have been solved had Peruzzi taken over the direction. On the other hand, a regular performance schedule provided by the Italian musicians would certainly have been in the interest of the elector.

If we search for reasons why the officials in Dresden and Leipzig let this attractive offer pass by, we may suspect a connection with the then pending deliberations concerning the appointment of a new Thomaskantor. Johann Kuhnau had died on June 5, 1722. The town council soon found a successor: on August 11, the Hamburg music director Georg Philipp Telemann was elected unanimously as the new 'Director musices of Leipzig'. Telemann, who visited Leipzig in early August 1722, planned to take up his duties with the forthcoming Michaelmas Fair. Upon his return to Hamburg, he wrote on September 3 his notice of resignation. Yet after receiving a substantial increase in his salary, he decided in October 1722 to stay in Hamburg.²⁶

15.) Entweder wollte Vollmacht aus *Italien* schicken, oder bey seiner Widerkunfft, ezliche Wochen vor der MichaelisMeße, persöhnlich alles, *debito modo*, vollzihen etc.

Ich verfertigte

16.) Hierauf, annoch die selbe Nacht, beykommenden *Contract* sub ♂. kunnte aber mit dem *mundiren* es ohnmöglich so weit bringen: daß er nicht schon abgereiset gewesen; Und erwarte ich ihn numehro, mit Wunzsche: daß er sein *contentement* an den *reparirten* Opern-Hause finden möge. [...]

²⁵ About Peruzzi and Denzio see Daniel E. Freeman, *The Opera Theater of Count Franz Anton von Sporck in Prague* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1992; *Studies in Czech Music*, 2), pp. 23–27, 44, 46, 68, 111, 128, 281–284, and Strohm (n. 20 above), pp. 89–90.

²⁶ See Ernst Kroker, 'Bachs Berufung in das Kantorat der Thomasschule', *Aufsätze zur Stadtgeschichte und Reformationsgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 137–48; Ulrich Siegele, 'Bachs Stellung in der Leipziger Kulturpolitik seiner Zeit', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 69 (1983), 7–50, and Joachim Kremer, *Das norddeutsche Kantorat im 18. Jahrhundert. Untersuchungen am Beispiel Hamburgs*, (Kassel etc., 1995; *Kieler Schriften zur Musikwissenschaft*, 43), pp. 422–23. See also Ulrich Siegele, 'Bach and the domestic politics of Electoral Saxony', *The Cambridge companion to Bach*,

Is it possible that the Leipzig town council and the court administration in Dresden planned to keep the option open for Telemann to resume his former role in the opera house and thus to make him a multifaceted municipal Kapellmeister? This hypothetical reasoning would at least explain why in September 1722 the town council did not wish to bind themselves in long-term contracts with an Italian impresario. It was certainly known that just at the same time, when Telemann became the favourite candidate for the Thomas cantorate, he had taken over the artistic direction of the Hamburg opera house. We may therefore assume that in the Leipzig negotiations Telemann would have counted on the extra income from a flourishing opera house. At least we can assume that he would have resumed the direction of the Collegium musicum he had founded in his student days; this ensemble during the 1710s had always functioned as the local opera orchestra.

Was the fact that the town council financed the renovation of the opera house and the elector urged to recommence the performances, perhaps the true reason why two other *kapellmeisters* who had formerly been involved with the Leipzig opera house – Johann Friedrich Fasch and Christoph Graupner – also applied for the vacant Thomas cantorate, in addition to Telemann? The surviving sources do not permit more than this speculation. Nonetheless, the hitherto unnoticed efforts to revive the Leipzig opera also shed new light on the often discussed negotiations to fill the most prestigious musical post in Leipzig after Kuhnau's death.

The events in the subsequent years can be summarised quickly. In early August 1723 – roughly two months after Bach had taken on the position – the town council again received a notice from Dresden that 'His Majesty would be pleased to see if the opera house was set into a good state'.²⁷ At the same time Madam Brauns (our 'warm Dorchen') announced that she was now willing to have the house completely repaired and reopened. But her initiative again failed because of the old debts and her limited financial means. For the last time the Dresden court confirmed its interest in a functioning Leipzig opera in November 1723. Shortly later the lease between the Siegfried and the Strungk families expired. One paragraph in this lease specified that the building had to be pulled down if the contract was not renewed. The Siegfried family firmly insisted on this clause, but fought for five more years about the distribution of the costs connected with the demolition. In 1729 the entire property was sold to the adjacent Hospital of St George, and thus the former temple of the muses was turned into an orphanage. After 1725 we do not hear of any further endeavours to continue the Leipzig opera era, which altogether had lasted no less than 27 years.

To conclude: as I have tried to show, with the necessary financial means and some diplomatic skills, up to early 1724 it would easily have been possible – even for a third party – to resume the regular performances of the Leipzig opera house. That this possibility lapsed was finally caused by the lack of local investors, who

ed. John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 24–25, and Ulrich Siegele, 'Bach's Situation in the Cultural Politics of Contemporary Leipzig', *Bach's Changing World: Voices in the Community*, ed. Carol K. Baron (Rochester University Press, 2006), pp. 127–49.

²⁷ See Maul (n. 2 above), pp. 324–27.

would have been willing to take on the financial risks of the business. Had the wealthy merchants formed a consortium and had the Thomaskantor and Director musices of Leipzig joined this initiative as an artistic director (as Kuhnau seems to have done), then nobody, I feel, would have obstructed his way into the orchestra chamber of the opera house.

APPENDIX

Des klugen und thörichten Gebrauches der fünf Sinnen. Erster Theil: Vom Fühlen/ In allerhand lustigen Historien dem curiosen Leser zu sonderbarem Vergnügen/ anmuthig vorgestellt Von J. K. Leipzig/ verlegts Christoph Hülse/ 1698 (Unicum in Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg), pp. 99-102.

Daß wir aber/ mengte sich der Amtschösser mit ein/ wieder auff den vorigen *Discurs* kommen/ da der *Courtisan* seiner Liebsten so in das Gesichte gegriffen hat/ so ist es freylich ein alberer verliebter Zeitvertreib bey dem Frauenzimmer/ und kömmt nicht manierlicher heraus/ als wenn jener/ da er lange nicht gewust/ was er zur Jungfer sagen sollen/ auch sich nicht das Hertz genommen/ sie etwa bey der Hand/ oder sonst wo anzufassen/ endlich gesagt: Jungfer/ ich muß euch einmal eine Steck-Nadel nehmen. Ich besinne mich itzo gleich/ daß ich eine kleine *Opera* von der *Galathea*, die von einem guten Freunde gemachet/ und mir *communiciret* worden/ zu mir gesteckt habe/ in willens/ dem Herrn Olasson, als einem sonderlichen *Music*-verständigen die *Composition* und *Partitur* zu zeigen/ und dessen *Judicium* darüber zu vernehmen.

Darinne finde ich eben in der lustigen/ oder vielmehr absurden Person dem *Padullo*, die Gewonheit/ daß er mit denen Fäusten/ die er bißweilen/ ich weiß nicht wo/ stecken gehabt/ der Jungfer trefflich um das Maul herum löffelt. Man siehet zwar kein Frauenzimmer bey ihm/ doch hat er eine Puppe in der Hand/ an der erweist er denen Zuschauern seine Künste/ wie vortrefflich/ manierlich und verliebt er das Frauenzimmer *tractiren* könne. Ich muß aber zuvor die *Aria* lesen/ da er von seiner grossen Liebe redet/ wie ihn die erschrecklich qvähle/ und martere. Denn da lautet die 6. *Scena* des andern *Actus*, darinne er aufftritt/ also:²⁸

²⁸ The text of the Leipzig libretto of 1702 is placed here synoptically alongside the passage in the 1698 novel, for comparison.

[Passage in the Leipzig *Galathea*-Libretto, 1702:]
Scena VI. Padullus.

Ja/ ja/
Die *Hecuba*
Sitzt mir im Hertzen da/ da/ da.
Sie plagt mich/ es ist Schand und Sünde.
Der Hencker steh die Marter aus.
Ach! helfft/ daß ich ein Messer finde/
Kommt schneidet mir die Dirne raus:
Sonst geb' ich vor mein Leben keine Lauf.
Ja/ ja/
da Capo.

Und in der 10. *Scena* eben dieses *Actus* lasset er sich gegen der *Hecuba* also heraus:

Mein Cubchen/ meine Lust und Qvahl!
Mein kostbares Original
Von dieser Puppe!
(*hier kriegt er seine Puppe heraus.*)
Vergönne mir das Kürmest-Fest/
Weil du dich itzt persönlich sehen lässt/
Daß ich ein bißgen dich am Kinchen zuppe/
Und das Mein Maul dabey
Auch was zu kosten krieget.

Ja/ ja/
Die *Hecuba*
Sitzt mir im Hertzen da.
Sie plagt mich/ es ist Schand und Sünde.
Der Hencker steh die Marter aus.
Wo ich nicht bald ein Messer finde/
Und schneide diese Dirne raus/
So geb ich vor mein Leben keine Lauf.
Ja/ ja/
Die *Hecuba*
Sitzt mir im Hertzen da.
Sie plagt mich/ es ist Schand und Sünde.

...
Scen: 10.
Hecuba, Padullus mit einer Puppe.

Mein Cubchen/ meine Lust und Qvahl/
Mein kostbares *Original*
Von dieser Puppe!
Vergönne mir das Kirmest-Fest/
Weil du dich itzt persönlich sehen lässt/
Daß ich ein bißgen dich am Kinchen zuppe.
Und das mein Maul dabey
Auch was zu kosten krieget.

Diese *Opera* war in ein Hochzeit-Carmen gewickelt/ welches eben ermeldter Meister der *Opera* einem vornehmen Hoff-*Musico* zu Ehren geschrieben hatte. Und weil es von der zu allen Jahres-Zeiten die Menschen kitzelnden Liebe redet/ und sich zu unserm Fühlen nicht uneben schicket/ so wollen wir es mit hieher setzen. Es ist ein *Sonnet*, daß auf einen eintzigen Reim ausgehet:

Des list'gen *Amors* Kopff steckt voller losen Mücken:
Ein jede Jahres-Zeit weist seine schlimmen Tücken.
Wenn Florens bunte Hand die Gärten pfl egt zu schmücken;
Wenn sich vor reiffer Frucht der Aehren Stengel bücken;
Wenn wir den Vogel-Flug mit Netz und Garn bestricken/
Und den zerrißnen Peltz zum Brauche wieder flicken:
So wirckt der lose Schalck in uns ein Liebes-Jücken.
Kurtz/ jede Zeit muß sich zum Hochzeit-Machen schicken.
Herr Bruno freyt/ wenn wir die Ofen-Bäncke drücken;
Es thut ihm wohl/ wenn ihm die Schmäztgen so gelücken/ |
Daß er mag ungestört zum warmen Dorgen rücken/
Und gar zur Winters-Zeit die Liebes-Blümgen pflücken.
Der Himmel wolle stets diß edle Paar erqvicken/
Er laß uns bald davon erwünschte Früchte blicken.