

21st-Century BACH on BBC2/BBC4. Series 1

by John Scott Whiteley

As a guide to the BBC2 / BBC4 series, I have provided a list of all the programmes in the first two series at the end of this article. For the rest, I shall attempt to clarify some of the many questions I have been asked about the first series of *21st-Century Bach (The Complete Organ Works)*, which has now been transmitted once on BBC2 and three times on BBC4. Series 2 is now at its online stage, and the aim is to cover what may be described as the 'core complete works' in six series, each containing roughly 125 minutes of music.

I would like to begin by thanking all those that have taken the trouble to write to me about Series 1. I have been delighted to receive over a hundred letters, some of which appeared in the pages of *OR*, and although I have not been able to answer most of them, I would like to express my gratitude for what is, by and large, marvellous support for this project. The questions that I have been asked fall essentially into four categories: visual effects, the instruments and the registrations, practicalities concerning the making of the programmes, and interpretation. The following attempts to elucidate one or two points under the first three of these headings. The subject of interpretation is so wide that I have to omit reference to this here. Instead I have provided a necessarily selective 'Performer's Bach Bibliography' at the end.

Visual effects

There have certainly been more comments about these than anything else in the series, so I begin by trying to show how they relate to the musical content, and that they are not merely arbitrary. While all the effects were the work of the producer, Norman Stone, his inspiration began not only with the music but also with the basic notions of revealing how the organ lives and breathes as a musical instrument, and how it is played. From the musical angle, the words and seasonality of the chorales for the chorale-settings provided a rich field on which to draw, as well as the intricacy, arithmetic and symmetry of Bach's designs. Light became significant, since there was filming during bright daylight, during the evening and at night. (Since there have been frequent misunderstandings – not least those presented by the national press in the early stages – I ought to add that the only involvement of Damian Hirst was in producing the opening titles.)

Glowing candlelight, as if a German Christmas, lit the Christmas sequences from the *Ob*. To achieve this 200 candles were placed around the gallery at Freiberg, although I think you probably only see two or three! The light is more brilliant for the 'angel scales' of *Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar* (607), while the tapered vertical movement of the manual keys in *Jesu, meine Freude* (610) is intended to connect with the shape of a

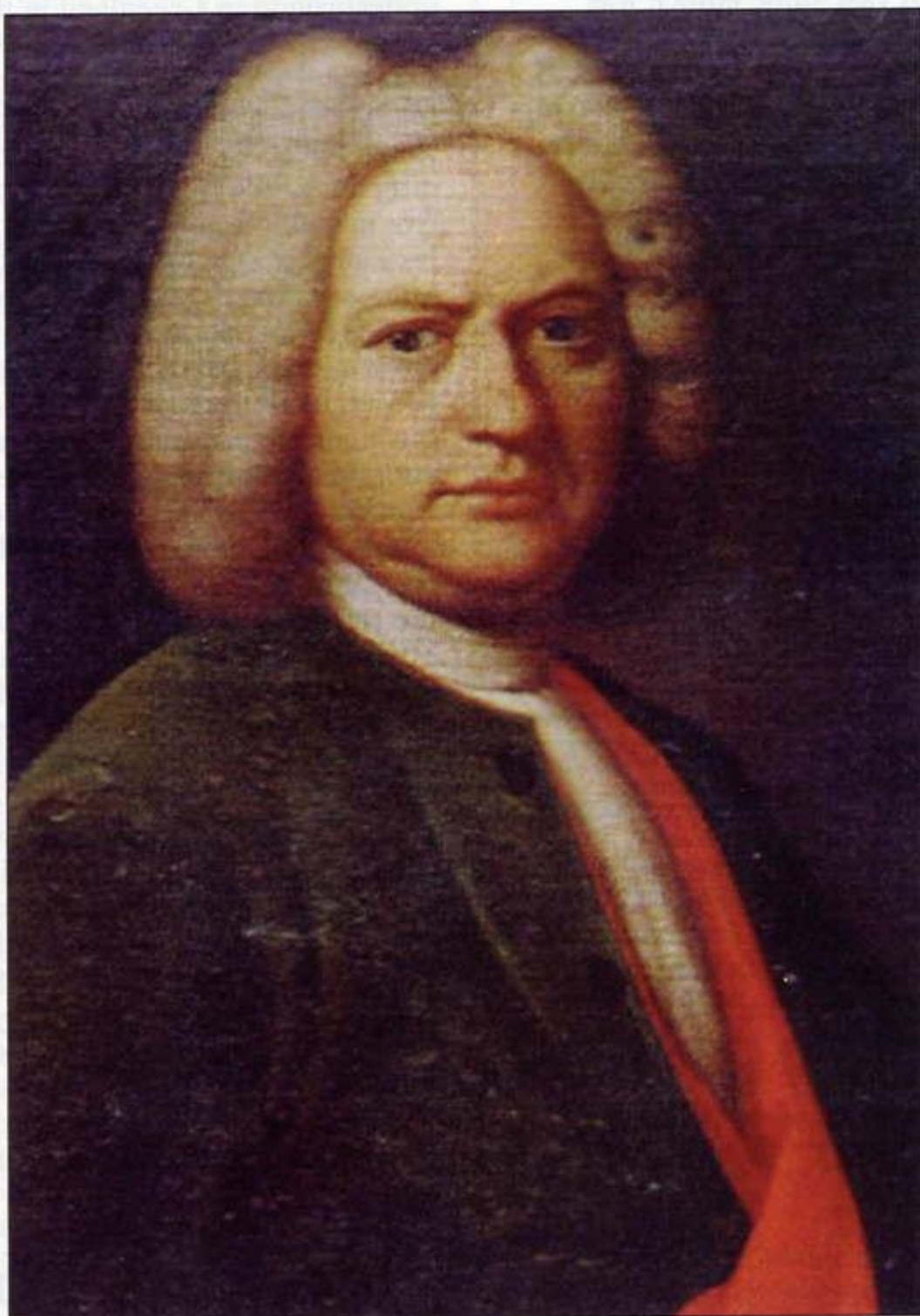
Christmas tree. Also Victorian is the presentation, as if voluntaries, of *Puer natus in Bethlehem* (603) and *Der Tag der ist so freudenreich* (605), with a Dickensian 'Christmas-to-come' for the concluding piece of Programme 16, *Vom Himmel hoch* (606). Images of a cherub, as if the Christ-child, begin and end this sequence.

For *Das alte Jahr* (614) and *In dir ist Freude* (615), two distinct halves represent the lament at the passing of the old year, and the welcoming of the new. The stillness for 614 is perceived through the eyes of an approaching observer passing the church's many candles (only 60 in Arnstadt!) and finally arriving by the organ console at the close. The Dickensian imagery continues for 615; here even the candles are new in the representation of a joyous celebration. The rotary mechanisms of the bells (Glocken) and their hammers are seen over and over again (ostinato) while church bells (one of only two instances in the whole series of non-location footage) fade in and out; conclusion with the Glocken's 'star on high'.

In Programme 4, a similar half-light – that of Advent – surrounds the Freiberg organ case for *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* (659). The ornamental line is reflected in shots of decoration on both the organ case and vaulting at Freiberg; there is one glimpse of the top of the 'short' Silbermann pedalboard, ending at C. In the free works, interior, organ-action shots in fugues tend to contrast with magisterial views of organ cases and architecture in preludes. (537, 565, 531, the first two with moonlight) In the prelude to the 'Wedge' fugue (548) there are various sequences aimed at attempting to parallel the music with views juxtaposing the exquisite Baroque decoration of the organ case with the austere simplicity and strength of the architecture of the church. The 'Wedge' notion invited numerous possibilities, the main idea being the tapered reflections. Rather than merely showing wedge-shaped designs as the fugue subject was announced, these were intended to have a cumulative effect as the fugue progressed. The music desk was

removed and replaced with a large mirror so that many shots have their inbuilt reflections. These first appear at the end of the exposition, following which all kinds of reflections appear: split-screens of the organ case, manuals, stops and even hands. At the da capo the idea is driven out as the manuals appear in moving vertical wedge shapes. There is also a much-publicised 'balloon' shot – as mentioned by *Radio Times* – covering the whole organ case from above, which would otherwise have been very difficult to film at Naumburg.

The use of the (somewhat unsteady) 'balloon' cameras can also be seen at the end of the *Prelude in A Minor* (569) and during the 'Lüneburg' *Prelude and fugue in C Major* (531). (The styling 'Lüneburg' was my own, by the way, but I have subsequently



J S BACH (JJ Ihle portrait, Eisenach)



Console at Neuenfelde (Series 2)

seen this elsewhere in England and in Germany. The North German influence suggests that this makes more sense than 'Arnstadt' or the naïve 'Trumpet' nickname, and is a more logical way of identifying a C Major prelude and fugue when the others – 545 and 547 – generally retain their 'Weimar' and 'Leipzig' tags.)

The idea of C Major brilliance gave rise to white light, daylight and high contrast for 531. The 'Great' *Prelude and fugue in G Major* (541) also involves images of everything brilliant: the gilding of the organ case, everything white, bright vistas of the Wenzelkirche and organ case. Here, the *spielfuge* invited close-ups of fingers, as well as views of the tracery in the stone and glass of the windows, again intending to reflect the intricacy of Bach's astonishing counterpoint.

There are several instances of fugal entries matched by staggered visual entries of each part of a split-screen. To reflect the contrapuntal entries in *Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn* (648), the screen is divided into four. As each voice enters a new quarter of the screen appears. The quartered screen continues for much of the programme, producing some bizarre effects in places, but intending to reflect the structure of the music. We also tried this for the 'Little' *Fugue in G Minor* (578), in which the fugal episodes (development) coincide with developed multiple-screen images.

Rather less structured is the 'variations on a theme' approach to the visual sequences in the chaconne, the *Prelude in A Minor* (569), while the less obvious use of the Cymbelstern for the last movement of *Sonata VI* (530iii) has its only excuse in the forward-looking nature of this movement, which anticipates something of the late 18th century when there was a fascination

for mechanical *objets d'Art*, including those that played music. Thus, with a degree of artistic licence, there are not only views of the mechanics of the organ, but also of the mechanism of the Cymbelstern: the star mounted at the top of the central tower of pipes, the rotating drum, the hammers and the bells themselves. Internal views of bellows, stop-action, key-action, windchests are all prevalent in the programmes, as well as console details, such as the vertical handles of the *Schiebekoppeln* (shove couplers – the handles that slide the keyboard to engage the coupling mechanism), which can be seen in Programme 8 shortly after the start of *Ach bleib bei uns* (649), at the ends of each keyboard.

Some effects are obvious, others more subtle. Programme 12 (*Liebster Jesu*, 730 and 731) begins in a monochrome 'black & white' for the plainer 730, with the colour adorning 731 later. A relatively miniaturist approach is here shown with pin-hole shots and close-ups. For the Kyrie-Christe-Kyrie sequence (669, 673 *alio modo*, 671) of *Clavier-Übung III*, the camera moves from shots of grandeur and brightness in 669 to a much smaller field of view around the immediate console area for the more miniature 673, and out again to organ-case views from below, as if towards heaven for 671. It was intended that Bach's use of mirror-counterpoint in 671 be reflected in shots through the mirror above the console, but you have to look extremely hard to see the split seconds when this occurs!

Double reflection of a different kind occurs in *Erbarm dich mein* (721), Bach's representation of the penitential psalm (51) here mirrored in the Christ iconography in the Wenzelkirche. The slow approach towards the image of Christ above the high altar intends to dramatise Bach's drawing of everything from theological inspiration.

Instruments and Registrations

The three German organs of Series 1 were chosen because of their historic authenticity. (Bath Abbey was the pilot programme, made separately.) The captions that open each programme explain the links with Bach. I have been asked if these organs were difficult to play. The general answer is: not particularly after becoming acclimatised. Some of the problems are detailed later, under 'Practicalities', but I would point out in this context that the North German organs used for Series 2 were much more of a problem. Schnitger's short manual octaves render scales in the lowest half-octave nightmarish for those unused to playing G, F, G#, F#, E to obtain the downward scale, G, F, E, D, C, for example. The omission of the modern lowest two notes at the low end of the pedalboard means that in order to get low D you must play D# – which facilitates some passages, in fact.

Space will not permit my listing of all the registrations used. Instead, since various specific questions have cropped up, I cite one or two selected general principles, with sample registrations at the end of each paragraph. Well-tabulated, collated information on contemporary registration sources can be found in Kooiman's book, listed in the brief bibliography below.

Yes, I did use the 32-foot reed at Naumburg for the prelude to the 'Wedge' (548i). This 32-foot reed is, sadly, only a replica of that known to Bach himself. It is modelled on Hildebrandt's extant 16-foot Posaune, but its blend beneath the Hw+Rp plenum combinations is astonishing in the Wenzelkirche, sounding, not like something from Armageddon, but almost like a clearly-defined Violone. Here is certainly an example of the *gravität* described as a desirable quality by JSB.

I attempted to use some of Silbermann's recommended combinations at both Freiberg and Naumburg. For *Christum wir sollen loben schon* (611) the "Zum Tremulanten" combination of Silbermann had to omit the pedal 16s, which would not balance at Freiberg. (The thumbing-down of the alto line here was possibly pioneered by Schweitzer and others, but Bach's title on P283, the *Ob* holograph, indicates he intended the *Ob* partly as

possibly an aid to developing technical problems – such as thumbing-down, perhaps.) *Ach bleib bei uns* (649) is heard as if Silbermann's "Tertien-Zug", a trio with two equal manual voices, but without the pedal reed. This registration was to a degree experimental, however, attempting to draw some of the best sounds from Hildebrandt's ravishing palette.

- 611 [Freiberg] Ow Gedackt 8 + Quintadehn 8, Schwebung,
Hw Principal 8, Ped Octav Bass 8
649 [Naumburg] Rp Rohr-Floete 8, Vagara 4, Octava 2, Rausch-
Pfeife
Hw (c.f.) 8.8.8 Spitz-Floete 4, Sesquialter
Ped Subbass 16, Violon Bass 8

Jakob Adlung's relatively comprehensive information has often been cited, particularly with regard to the Naumburg organ. Quentin Faulkner has recently produced some fascinating information from Bach's pupil, J F Agricola, also. Soft, multiple 8-foot combinations are endorsed by Agricola as well as by Adlung. Agricola, probably referring to the Trost organ at Altenburg, advises Gedeckt, Rohrflöte, Quintadena and Fugara as four 8-foot voices that sound 'beautiful and strange' when used together. This was the basic idea behind *Erbarm dich mein* (721).

- 721 [Naumburg] Rp Rohr-Floete 8, Quintadehn 8, Hw Gedakt 8,
Pedalcoppel, Tremulant

The printed registrations of G F Kauffmann, Bach's contemporary and rival, are perhaps less frequently applied. I adapted some of his suggestions at Arnstadt for *Puer natus in Bethlehem* (603), *Jesu meine Freude* (610), *Das alte Jahr* (614) and *Liebster Jesu* (731). In the latter Wender's wonderfully alive Brustpositiv Nachthorn and Still gedackt (71 pipes are from Wender) give an inkling of the tonalities that could have existed in Kauffmann's organ at Merseburg, and for Bach in some of the organs at Mühlhausen. The registration of the second movement of *Sonata VI* (530ii) was also suggested by Kauffman, whose Vox humana combinations are sometimes balanced with two 8-foot registers such as Gedeckt and Gemshorn. Kauffmann also condones the habit of playing an octave lower on a 4-foot register, especially for the LH in trios. 614 adapts the use of this.

- 731 [Arnstadt] Bp (rh) Still gedackt 8, Nachthorn 4
Ow (lh) Gemshorn 8, Ped Sub Bass 16, Pedal
Coppel
530ii [Naumburg] Rp (rh) Rohr-Floete 8, Quintadehn 8, Ow (lh)
Vox humana 8, Hohl-Floete 8, Ped 8

'Further afield' approaches were employed more frequently in Series 1 than they have been in Series 2. For obvious reasons, application of French principles tends to suit the *alio modo* pieces of *Clavier-Übung III* rather than their large-scale counterparts. Thus, a French Grand jeu was used for *Christe, alle Welt trost* (673, alio modo), while *Kyrie, Gott Vater* (669) is treated according to Scheidt's recommendations for a solo *cantus firmus* line. Plenum registrations appear in a number of guises; in 'blocks', for example, for the different sections of the *Prelude in A Minor* (569) following practices close, in all probability, to Buxtehude.

Practicalities

The late transmission times of the BBC2 programmes have often been mentioned, though many have said they set the VCR and watch them later (= earlier!) BBC4 transmitted most of them at 7 pm, of course, and two compilation programmes allowed viewing of the whole series in two separate hour-long transmissions earlier this year.

The glasses simply arose because of dazzle, and as for what has been described as my 'scary' entrances, I can only refer you to the producer, who has felt that a more atmospheric approach is better than a compulsory verbal introduction that may 'blind you with science'.

The recording and filming take place in a relatively short time (series one in eleven days, series two in thirteen days) but the planning and preparation take very much longer, of course. Directors, music producer, first camera and myself begin meetings about six months before the shoot. About two months later there are preliminary visits to each venue, following which each programme is designed according to ideas from Norman Stone, producer/director, and my own synopsis for each musical work. The business of coordinating the schedule then begins. How this is done is still beyond my comprehension, but there is a so-called on-going process between the venue contacts, the liaison in Germany and the production assistants. About three weeks before we leave the draft schedule arrives. It is, of course, impossible! A week or so later, following telephone calls measurable in days rather than hours, we have a workable routine for the series.

A week before the recording begins, I am the first to leave in order to rehearse at each venue. By the time John Warburton, the music producer arrives, four days later, I have already spent several hours at each organ. I have discovered that *Herr Christ, der einge Gottes Sohn* (601) will not fit on the Arnstadt organ. Despite the checking of compasses, this has slipped through the net. (Yes, there is a pedal top C sharp in this piece!) John agrees that *Puer natus in Bethlehem* (603) will be a good substitute. I explain that the huge distance of the two-octave pedal leap at Naumburg – in the last movement of *Sonata VI* (530) – is practically impossible. (John tries to reassure me by mumbling a comment about the excellent state of German hospital technology ...) We then have more serious discussions regarding problems of balance, organ tuning, microphone position and so on.

The day before we begin, Norman Stone arrives with the production assistants. The camera teams arrive and there are seemingly endless discussions about lighting, timing, schedule adjustments and camera movement and allocation. All move into the church (the first location was actually the cathedral at Freiberg) the evening before. Three or four days are allotted to each location, with the sound recordings on the first day and filming during the following two days.

With as many as seventeen cameras operating at any one time,



Lüneburg, Johanniskirche (Series 2)

the potential for chaos seems enormous, but so professional have the teams been that I was often unaware that a camera was there at all. All cameras are completely still for the sounding recordings, but after that, during the miming to playback, they emerge from just about everywhere. This has resulted in a vast amount of footage; sometimes as much as ten hours for a ten-minute programme.

Every so often I am called to do one of the walk-ins (ten takes for some of them in Naumburg when the temperature was 33°C), or suddenly I have to film pulling a stop out, opening the music or sitting down at the organ (again ten times or more!). Fewer takes were necessary for the recording of the Cymbelstern at Naumburg, which was actually recorded on its own and superimposed in order to recreate the balance heard in the church. A similar procedure was followed with the Glocken at Arnstadt for *In dir ist Freude* (615). With the exception of the 'Wedge' fugue, none of the sound recording was done from memory. The parts of the miming to playback that involved the removal of music desks was from memory, of course.

Norman Stone took three months to edit the whole of Series 1. The onlines and audio post-production took another two weeks, and, having begun filming on 15 August 2002, the seventeen programmes of Series 1 were delivered to the BBC on 15 December, exactly four months later. Many have asked about a DVD. ARTV tell me that it will certainly happen, but that there are problems to be resolved. Only two of the six series have been made, and so whether to issue DVDs of these series individually, as a whole or in groups has proved to be something of a stumbling block. My only advice at present would be – continue to use the VCR!

Series 2 of **21st-Century Bach** should be transmitted on BBC2 in late 2004 or early 2005. Many things have changed, not least the instruments, which are those at: the Johanniskirche, Lüneburg, the North German town where Bach was at school; Neuenfelde, the church where Arp Schnitger is buried; the Jakobikirche, Hamburg, where Bach auditioned in 1720; the Groote Kerk, Haarlem, which has nothing to do with Bach, except that the date of this magnificent organ is contemporary with Bach's composition of *Clavier-Übung III*, some of which has been recorded at Haarlem. Rather than using the performer *per se* as part of the visual effects, it is intended that such shots now focus as much as possible on points of technique. In some of the new programmes, the organ is treated more as an orchestra, pedal entries coinciding with shots of the pedals, the Rückpositiv shown when it is being used, and so on. The camera potential has been extended, with greater control over the balloons – which we hope will be obvious! – the use of more fixed cameras and the use of an endoscopic camera fed into windchests, reed boots and so on.

I must conclude, however, with a further vote of thanks – the first one to go into print – to all who have assisted in the making of the programmes in both series: Martin Singleton and Mike Fox (cameraman for Alan Whicker); music producer, John Warburton, himself an accomplished organist and by whom I am frequently reminded I must call by his correct title *Tonmeister*; Kate West and Nicole Zscherny, our 'lifelines' during what were sometimes 16-hour working days; the kind organists, Peter King, Dietrich Wagler, Irene Greulich, Gottfried Preller, Joachim Vogelsänger, Karl-Bernhardin Kropf, Rudolf Kelber, Jos van der Kooy and all those of the administration departments of all the churches for allowing us to film and record; Norman Stone, whose indefatigable drive and enthusiasm not only produced the programmes but also brought unstintingly genial leadership; all those at ARTV, not least the brilliant, hyper-active cauldron that is Victor Lewis-Smith; Virginia Duff and all those further down the line at the BBC, including most notably, Jane Root, Roly Keating and David Jackson, all of whom shared our vision in wishing to bring the music of this unbelievable, transcendental composer to a wider audience.

21st-Century BACH. Series 1	Programme Number
Sonata VI (530) – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	11
'Lüneburg' Prelude & fugue in C Major (531) – Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	13
'Great' Fantasia & fugue in C Minor (537) – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	5
'Great' Prelude & fugue in G Major (541) – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	10
Prelude & 'Wedge' fugue in E Minor (548) – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	7
Toccata & fugue in D Minor (565) – Bath Abbey	1
Prelude in A Minor (569) – Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	15
'Little' Fugue in G Minor (578) – Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	14
Orgel-Büchlein: 603 <i>Puer natus in Bethlehem</i> – J S Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	16
Orgel-Büchlein: 605 <i>Der Tag der ist so freudenreich</i> – J S Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	16
Orgel-Büchlein: 606 <i>Vom Himmel hoch</i> – J S Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	16
Orgel-Büchlein: 607 <i>Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	2
Orgel-Büchlein: 608 <i>In dulci jubilo</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	2
Orgel-Büchlein: 610 <i>Jesu, meine Freude</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	2
Orgel-Büchlein: 611 <i>Christum wir sollen loben schon</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	3
Orgel-Büchlein: 612 <i>Wir Christenleut</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	3
Orgel-Büchlein: 614 <i>Das alte Jahr vergangen ist</i> – J S Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	17
Orgel-Büchlein: 615 <i>In dir ist Freude</i> – J S Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	17
Schüler Choräle: 648 <i>Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn</i> – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	8
Schüler Choräle: 649 <i>Ach bleib bei uns</i> – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	8
'Great 18 Chorales': 659 <i>Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	4
Clavier-Übung III: 669 <i>Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	6
Clavier-Übung III: 673 <i>Christe, alle Welt Trost</i> (Alto modo) – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	6
Clavier-Übung III: 671 <i>Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist</i> – Dom St Marien, Freiberg	6
Individually-transmitted settings:	
721 <i>Erbarm' dich mein, O Herre Gott</i> – Wenzelkirche, Naumburg	9
730 <i>Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier</i> – Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	12
731 <i>Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier</i> – Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche, Arnstadt	12

21st-Century BACH. Series 2	
Sonata IV (528) – Jakobikirche, Hamburg	26
'Concertato' Prelude and fugue in D Major (532) – Jakobikirche, Hamburg	27
Toccata and fugue in F Major (540) – Groote Kerk, Haarlem	31
'Great' Fantasia and fugue in G Minor (542) – Groote Kerk, Haarlem	30
Clavier-Übung III: Prelude and fugue in E flat Major (552) – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	18
Toccata, adagio and fugue in C Major (564) – Jakobikirche, Hamburg	28
Passacaglia in C Minor (582) – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	21
Orgel-Büchlein: 622 <i>O Mensch, beweine dein Sünde gross</i> – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	22
Orgel-Büchlein: 624 <i>Hilf Gott, dass mir's gelinge</i> – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	20
Orgel-Büchlein: 639 <i>Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ</i> – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	19
Orgel-Büchlein: 641 <i>Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein</i> – Johanniskirche, Lüneburg	20
'Great Eighteen Chorales': 664 <i>Trio super Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr</i> – St Pankratius, Neuenfelde	24
Clavier-Übung III: 677 <i>Fughetta super Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr</i> – Groote Kerk, Haarlem	29
Clavier-Übung III: 678 <i>Dies sind die heiligen zehn Gebot</i> – Groote Kerk, Haarlem	29
Individually-transmitted setting: 727 <i>Herzlich tut mich verlangen</i> – St Pankratius, Neuenfelde	25
Canonic Variations on <i>Vom Himmel hoch</i> (769) – St Pankratius, Neuenfelde	23

Instruments

Series 1
Bath Abbey: Hill, Norman and Beard (1895-1972) rebuilt and restored by Klais (1997)
Freiberg, Dom St Marien: Gottfried Silbermann (1714 & 1738)
Naumburg, Wenzelkirche: Zacharias Hildebrandt (1743-46), restored by Eule (1996-2000)
Arnstadt, Johann Sebastian Bach Kirche (formerly the Bonifatiuskirche): Johann Friedrich Wender (1699-1703), restored by Otto Hoffmann (1997-99)
Series 2
Lüneburg, Johanniskirche: Matthais Dropa 1712-14, restored by Rudolf von Beckerath 1953/76
Neuenfelde, St Pankratius: Arp Schnitger 1688-91, restored by Paul Ott 1938
Jakobikirche, Hamburg: Arp Schnitger 1689-93, restored by Jürgen Ahrend 1986-93
Haarlem, Groote Kerk: Christian Müller, 1738, restored by Marcussen & Son 1961