

# Leipzig's Organs in the Time of Bach\*

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WHEN BACH ARRIVED TO TAKE up his post in Leipzig in 1723, in addition to his other duties he took over responsibility for all of the city's organs – not just the instruments at the two principal churches of St. Nicholas's and St. Thomas's, but also at the New Church, the St. Paul's Church at the University of Leipzig, and St. John's.<sup>1</sup> Recent opinions vary about the condition and quality of Leipzig's organs during Bach's tenure. The organs in the two principal churches were characterized by Peter Williams as “not at all without potential in their old-fashioned character,”<sup>2</sup> by Hermann Busch as “antiquated and obviously of little interest,”<sup>3</sup> and by Wolff and Zepf as organs that “served essentially as liturgical instruments,” including providing continuo and, sometimes, solo organ parts during cantata performances.<sup>4</sup> Donat's organ at the New Church and Johann Scheibe's renovation of it have

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<sup>1</sup> Sources of information on the organs in Leipzig's churches during the time of Bach include Christoph Wolff and Markus Zepf, *Die Orgeln J.S. Bachs: Ein Handbuch* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 64–74; Hubert Henkel, “Zur Geschichte der Scheibe-Orgel in der Leipziger Johannis-Kirche,” *Bach-Studien* 9 (1986): 44–50; Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J.S. Bach, III: A Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 129–35; Winfried Schrammek, “Zur Geschichte der Orgel in der Thomaskirche zu Leipzig von 1601 bis 1885,” *Beiträge zur Bachforschung* 2 (1983): 46–55; Ulrich Dähnert, *Historische Orgeln in Sachsen: Ein Orgelinventar* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag das Musikinstrument, 1980), 177–86; Werner David, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Orgeln* (Berlin: Berliner Musikinstrumenten-Sammlung, 1951), 43–6, 49–56, and 94–8; Arnold Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs*, vol. 2, *Von 1650 bis 1723* (Leipzig: Fr. Kistner & C.F.W. Siegel, 1926), 108–17; and Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, trans. Clara Bell and J.A. Fuller-Maitland, 3 vols. (London, 1884–85; reprint: New York: Dover, 1951), 2:281–90.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*, 131–2.

<sup>3</sup> Hermann J. Busch, “Orgeln um Johann Sebastian Bach,” in *Zur Interpretation der Orgelmusik Joh. Seb. Bachs*, ed. Ewald Kooiman, Gerhard Weinberger, and Hermann J. Busch (Kassel: Merseburger Verlag, 1995), 132.

<sup>4</sup> Wolff and Zepf, *Die Orgeln J.S. Bachs*, 65.

**Table 1**  
Organ Building Activity in Leipzig, 1710-c1745

Church/ organ	Work	Cost (talers)	Year	Builder	Examiner(s)
University (St. Paul's)	partly new, partly rebuilt	2996	1710-16	Scheibe	Bach
St. Thomas's					
large organ	renovation	390	1720-22	Scheibe	Kuhnau and ?
	repair		1730	Scheibe	Bach and Görner?
	repair	200	1747	Scheibe	Bach and Görner
small organ	repair	9	1720-21	Scheibe	Kuhnau and ?
	repair	15	1727-28	Hildebrandt	Bach and ?
New Church	renovation	850	1721-22	Scheibe	Schott, Görner, Gräbner
St. Nicholas's	renovation	600	1724-25	Scheibe	Bach and ?
St. John's	newly built using some older material	625	1741-43	Scheibe	Bach and Hildebrandt

generally been ignored by commentators, while Scheibe's new organs at the University and St. John's have interested organists and scholars primarily because they were tested by Bach. Because Bach's reports on Scheibe's organs have most often been read as negative, Scheibe has been judged as, at best, a mediocre builder. According to Williams, the University organ's disposition lacks focus; Busch calls it "individualistic" and "very personal," in spite of the fact that ever since Spitta, whose biography of Bach was published in 1873–80, writers have raised the possibility that the University organ may have been used by Bach for teaching and for performing his own works.

Surprisingly, little is known for certain about the dispositions of the organs in Leipzig's principal churches during Bach's tenure as cantor. For the organs at St. Nicholas's and St. Thomas's we rely on dispositions that were published in the period *ca.* 1694 to 1714 by Leipzig's city historian Johann Jacob Vogel.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>5</sup> See Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2:282-6.

disposition of the St. Paul's organ was documented in 1718 by Christoph Ernst Sicul, the University's historian.<sup>6</sup> For the disposition of the organ in the New Church we rely on the contract made with the Donats in 1703.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the literature, beginning with Spitta and continuing through Schering, David, Dähnert, Schrammek, Williams, and Wolff/Zepf, it has been assumed that these versions of the dispositions prevailed throughout Bach's tenure as cantor — that is, that there were no stop alterations made to Leipzig organs during the approximately fifty years between *ca.* 1700 and *ca.* 1755, when the St. Thomas organ was renovated.

But comparison of dispositions from different time periods and my study of archival records suggest that disposition changes were indeed made, and that these changes likely occurred during repairs or renovations carried out by Johann Scheibe, a builder valued and praised by his contemporaries who either newly built or renovated all of Leipzig's most important organs in the period from roughly 1710 to 1745 (see Table 1). As a result, Leipzig's organs during Bach's tenure were essentially "Scheibe organs." While their dispositions varied widely, the new and renovated organs reflected both the musical requirements and the musical tastes of the time. Importantly, Scheibe's work was valued and praised by his contemporaries.

## The University or St. Paul's Organ

The new organ for the University of Leipzig's church of St. Paul's was built as part of a complete renovation of the building after the university began holding regular Sunday worship services in 1710. At first the plan was simply to have Scheibe move the old organ to a new location on a west-end balcony and renovate it; cantor Johann Kuhnau and St. Nicholas organist Daniel Vetter recommended building a new case with no Rückpositiv, expanding the organ's short-octave compass, improving the wind supply, and rebuilding the Pedal reeds.<sup>8</sup> (The Posaune 16' was to be built with wooden resonators and to be voiced so that it would have the proper penetrating effect, just like the one Zacharias Thyssner had built for St. Nicholas's in 1692-94.) Adam Orazio Casparini of

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<sup>6</sup> See Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze, eds., *Schriftstücke von der Hand Johann Sebastian Bachs* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963 and 1982), 160-61 (hereafter *Bach-Dokumente* 1).

<sup>7</sup> Schering, *Musikgeschichte Leipzigs*, 117; see also Andreas Glöckner, "Die Musikpflege an der Leipziger Neukirche zur Zeit Johann Sebastian Bachs," *Beiträge zur Bach-Forschung* 8 (1990): 20.

<sup>8</sup> Johann Kuhnau and Daniel Vetter, Memorandum dated September 25, 1710, Universitätsarchiv Leipzig (UAL), Rep II/III/B/I 5, fols. 1r-7v.

Breslau was consulted and may have provided a façade design, a disposition, or comments on a proposed disposition.<sup>9</sup> Also, Gottfried Silbermann proposed that the University build a totally new organ, a plan supported by Kuhnau but severely criticized by Vetter.<sup>10</sup> After Silbermann's plan was rejected, the rebuilding project was put under the supervision of Vetter.<sup>11</sup>

Scheibe executed the work, which eventually included expanding the disposition from 37 to 54 stops (including six transmissions), in two building phases, the first from September 1710 to October 1712, the second, after a three-year hiatus, from May 26, 1715 to November 4, 1716. The result is described by Johann Adolph Scheibe, who dedicated the 1738 edition of *Critische Musicus* to his father: "The large organ in the university church in Leipzig demonstrates so much that is distinctive that even foreigners visit and hear it with immense wonder. The splendor, the force, and the exceedingly comfortable and harmonious temperament of this large instrument and all the other organs built by him demonstrate extensive experience and no ordinary skill."<sup>12</sup> According to Vetter, examiner Johann Sebastian Bach, who had found no major defects, "could not laud and praise [the organ] enough, especially its rare stops, which are of new construction and not to be found in many organs."<sup>13</sup> Scheibe himself claimed that there was one stop alone that "no organ builder could build for less than 100 talers"<sup>14</sup> — no doubt a reference to his famous "Viol di gamb naturell," which was identified as "the rarest register in the organ" in a contemporary account.<sup>15</sup> A later source describes a number of the organ's unusual stops,

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<sup>9</sup> Record of expenses, 1710-12, UAL, Rep II/III/B 1 6, fol. 224. Burgemeister assumes Casparini provided the disposition, but the relevant entry says only that he was paid "on account of the organ drawing that had been sent." Ludwig Burgemeister, *Der Orgelbau in Schlesien* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Wolfgang Weidlich, 1973), 137.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Vetter, Memorandum dated November 24, 1710, UAL, Rep II/III/B/II 6, fols. 9r-10v; and Gottfried Silbermann, Proposal dated November 27, 1710, UAL, Rep II/III/B/II 6, fols. 11r-16v.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Vetter, Memorandum dated January 28, 1718, UAL, Rep II/III/B/II 5, fols. 73r-76r.

<sup>12</sup> Johann Adolph Scheibe, *Der Critische Musicus, Erster Theil* (Hamburg: Thomas von Wiering's Heirs, 1738), unnumbered introduction: "Die grosse Orgel in der academischen Kirche zu Leipzig zeigt so viel sonderbares, daß sie auch von den Ausländern mit grösster Verwunderung gesehen und gehöret wird. Die Pracht, der Nachdruck und die überaus bequeme und wohlklingende Temperatur dieses grossen Werks und aller andern von Ihm erbauten Orgeln zeigen die grösste Erfahrung und keine gemeine Geschicklichkeit."

<sup>13</sup> *Bach-Dokumente* 1, 87.

<sup>14</sup> Johann Scheibe, memorandum, undated, UAL, Rep II/III/B II 5, fol. 68r.

<sup>15</sup> Christoph Ernst Sicul, *Anderen Beylage zu dem Leipziger Jahrbuche, aufs Jahr 1718* (Leipzig, 1718), 60.

including Chalumeau, Flûte d'Allemagne (traverso), and Sertin.<sup>16</sup> Scheibe's transmissions were also noteworthy to his contemporaries, as we know from an article on his inventions that appeared in a contemporary journal.<sup>17</sup>

Significantly, University of Leipzig memoranda make it clear that in bringing attention to certain problems with the organ in his examination report, Bach was not so much criticizing the organ as he was confirming the challenges and restrictions Scheibe had been forced to deal with: a case design (from Casparini?) that resulted in an inner layout that was too crowded, an order from the University not to build more reed stops because they would require regular maintenance, and the University's refusal to act on Scheibe's recommendation that the lower part of the new window be covered in order to protect the organ. Further, Bach supported Scheibe's request to be paid for work he had done over-and-above the contract by writing into his report to the University that Scheibe would honor the one-year guarantee he had willingly provided, but only if the University promptly and fully met his demands.<sup>18</sup>

## The New Church Organ

Church services had been held in the New Church since 1699. When the new organ by Christoph Donat and his son was completed five years later, Georg Philipp Telemann was appointed organist and Director of Music and charged with establishing a modern church practice that would appeal not only to Leipzig citizens but also to the many visitors who attended the three annual trade fairs. (Telemann was succeeded a year later by Melchior Hoffmann.) Scheibe's rebuild of Donat's organ at the New Church was undertaken just seventeen years after the new organ had been built. (By this time the music director was Georg Balthasar Schott.)

Officially labeled "a major repair," this renovation resulted in what was essentially a new organ. The wind supply was enlarged and improved and new chests were built for the Hauptwerk and Pedal divisions. All of the pipework was re-scaled (widened), re-voiced, and re-tuned, and a number of stops were altered, replaced, or newly built. The playing action was improved and the Pedal was made independent and able to be coupled to either manual division

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Smets, ed., *Orgeldispositionen: eine Handschrift aus dem XVIII. Jahrhundert, im Besitz der Sächsischen Landesbibliothek, Dresden* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1931), 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen* 18 (1732): 833.

<sup>18</sup> These difficulties are discussed in various memoranda written by Scheibe to the University authorities in the period November 4, 1716, to December 28, 1718.

**Table 2**  
Organs of Leipzig: Disposition Comparisons\*

<b>NEW CHURCH: Donats, 1704</b>	<b>Scheibe renovation, 1721-22</b>
<b>Unterwerk</b>	
Spielflöte 8'	Gemshorn 8'
--	Tertia 1-3/5', tin
Mixtur IV, metal	Mixtur VI, tin
<b>Oberwerk</b>	
Nasat 3'	Klingend Gedackt 4' "for continuo"
--	Sesquialtera II, tin
Spitzflöt 1'	Rausch Zimbel II (1½ + 1), tin
Cimbel III, metal	Mixtur III 1', tin
Vox humana 8'	Sordino 8'
<b>Pedal</b>	
Schalmey 4'	Cornet 2'

<b>ST. THOMAS, large organ: c1700</b>	<b>Before the rebuild of 1755-57</b>
<b>Hauptwerk</b>	
Spiel-Pfeiffe 8'	Gems Horn 8'
Sesquialtera II	Tertia III 1-3/5'
Mixtur VI/VIII/X	Mixtur VIII 2'
<b>Brustwerk</b>	
Sesquialtera II	Tertia 1-3/5'
<b>Rückpositiv</b>	
Lieblich Gedackt 8'	Grob Gedackt 8'
Violin 2'	Super Octava 2'
Rauschquinte II	Sesquialtera II 1-1/3'
Schallflöt 1'	Tertia 1-3/5'
Mixtur IV	Mixtur III 1'

**Table 2**

(continued)

<b>ST. NICHOLAS, Thayssner organ, 1692-94</b>	<b>Disposition as recorded by J.A. Silbermann, 1741</b>
<b>Hauptwerk</b>	
Waldflöte 2'	Waldflöte 4'
<b>Brustwerk</b>	
Quinta 3'	Quinte 1-1/3'
Sesquialtera 1-3/5'	Sesquialtera [?]
Mixtur III	Mixtur [?]
<b>Rückpositiv</b>	
Viola da Gamba 4'	Nazard 2-2/3'
Quinta 3'	Quinte 1-1/3'
Sesquialtera 1-3/5'	Sesquialter. [?]
Mixtur IV	Mixtur. [?]
<b>ST. THOMAS, small organ, c1700</b>	
<b>Scheibe's list of stops, 1740</b>	
<b>Oberwerk</b>	
Rauschquinte II 3'	Quinta 2-2/3'
Mixtur IV-X	Mixtur III
<b>Rückpositiv</b>	
Sesquialtera II	Sesquialter

\* Note: *Only discrepancies or changes relevant to the discussion in this article are included in this chart.*

(it had previously been permanently coupled to the Hauptwerk).<sup>19</sup>

In their glowing examination report, the Leipzig organists particularly stressed Scheibe's success with the Oberwerk's Viol' di Gamba, noting that Scheibe had used his "unique organ builder's skill" to imbue it with its proper gamba-like tone. They also praised the re-voiced Gedackts, now especially good for playing continuo – "graceful" is the term they use – and noted that the new mixtures and mutations made with an alloy of 87.5% tin provided the

<sup>19</sup> Contract with Johann Scheibe dated December 19, 1721, Stadtarchiv (StA) Leipzig, Rechnung der Neuen Kirche, 1721–22, Lit: A, fols. 49–60.

organ with the “proper penetrating and cutting tone.”<sup>20</sup>

As for disposition changes (see Table 2), in the Hauptwerk the four-rank Mixtur was replaced with a six-rank Mixtur, and a Tierce 1-3/5' was added as an independent stop, making it possible to add the third rank to the plenum registration and also to compose a principal chorus with independent ranks extending from 8' to 1', with or without the Tierce. There were also mixture stops added to the Oberwerk division: a completely new Sesquialtera II, Rausch Zimbel II (1½' + 1'), and a new three-rank Mixtur. New stops included the Sordino or Sertin, a mild reed that had been built by Scheibe for the first time in the University organ.

Scheibe's examiners praised and recommended him highly:

As we noted above when we gave witness that he had fulfilled the contract and had brought the organ into better condition than anyone in the beginning could have hoped, once again we would like to emphasize that to repair an organ made by another master requires greater skill than building a new one ... [Mr. Scheibe] carried out his work with great satisfaction, not only here, but also last year in the repair at St. Thomas's.<sup>21</sup>

The examiners' only regret was that even after new resonators, shallots and tongues, the Posaune 16', although adequate for an eight-foot organ, still was not as penetrating as they would have liked.

### **The Large Organ at St. Thomas's**

Scheibe's renovation at St. Thomas's took place in 1720-22, at the same time as a new Baroque altar and gilded crucifix were commissioned for the church. Scheibe was hired to build four new bellows and fully repair the large organ, but his fee was later increased from 300 to 390 talers when it was agreed he should also build 400 new pipes “for the mixture” (*400 neue zur Mixtur gehörigen Pfeifen* – a phrase I discuss below).<sup>22</sup> In 1730 Scheibe strengthened the Posaune 16', set or re-set the temperament, and thoroughly tuned the organ.<sup>23</sup> In 1739–

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<sup>20</sup> Georg Balthasar Schott, Christian Gräbner, and Johann Gottlieb Görner, Examination Report dated November 8, 1722, StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Neuen Kirche, 1721–22, Lit: A, fols. 61–8.

<sup>21</sup> Examination Report 1722, fols. 64–5.

<sup>22</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Thomæ in Leipzig, 1720–21, fol. 42; Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Thomæ, 1721–22, fol. 46.

<sup>23</sup> Johann Scheibe, Memorandum dated February 27, 1730, StA Leipzig, IX A 2, fol. 70. Quoted in Bernhard Friedrich Richter, “Über Seb. Bachs Kantaten mit obligater Orgel,” *Bach-Jahrbuch* 5 (1908): 52–3.



40 he replaced the 24-note (CD–c<sup>1</sup>) pedalboard.<sup>24</sup> And after an especially hot summer in 1746, Scheibe did a thorough repair of the organ in the Trinity season of 1747. Windchests and all the pipework were thoroughly cleaned and repaired, manual couplers were repaired, and all of the pipework was re-voiced and tuned.<sup>25</sup>

There is nothing in the 1747 contract about any pipes or stops being altered or replaced, and, as noted in the introduction, it has always been assumed that Scheibe's work in 1720–22, for which we have no contract, also did not result in disposition changes. There are at least two reasons why I believe we cannot make this assumption. First, as the contract and report of Scheibe's renovation of the New Church organ demonstrates, major rebuilds or renovations could be very thorough – one might even say invasive. Renovations routinely included strengthening wind supplies, altering or replacing stops, re-voicing, and even re-scaling. Also, the New Church renovation report refers to Scheibe's work at St. Thomas's, which the authors seem to have viewed as a similar project.<sup>26</sup> Second, while none of the relevant contracts or examination reports appear to have survived, by comparing the disposition in 1757,<sup>27</sup> after Johann Christian Immanuel Schweinefleisch's renovation, with the disposition from ca. 1700, and taking into account the stops we know were newly built by Schweinefleisch, we discover a number of discrepancies, or tonal differences (see Table 2). As Scheibe's renovation in 1720–22 was, as far as we know, the only one that involved any changes to pipework, it seems possible – maybe even probable – that Scheibe made these changes.

Because so many of the changes involve the organ's mutations and compound stops, it is worth considering what might have been meant by "400 neue zur Mixtur gehörigen Pfeifen." We know from Johann Friedrich Agricola that the term *Mixturwerke* was used to refer to principal stops that produce "a fifth or a third, or both of these together, or an entire chord on one note" – in other words, Quints, Tierces, Sesquialteras, Tertians, and mixtures of various kinds.<sup>28</sup> The term *Mixturen* is used in this way by the organists who wrote the

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<sup>24</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Thomæ in Leipzig, 1739–40, fol. 50.

<sup>25</sup> The contract is published as Appendix B, no. 8 (pp. 305–7) in Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*.

<sup>26</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Neuen Kirche, 1721–22, fol. 65.

<sup>27</sup> StA Leipzig, Riemer-Chronik, vol. 3, 1048.

<sup>28</sup> Quentin Faulkner, "Information on Organ Registration from a Student of J.S. Bach," *The American Organist* 27 (1993): 58–63.

New Church organ renovation report, who mention two new mixtures in the Hauptwerk, which can only refer to Tierce 1-3/5' and Mixtur VI.<sup>29</sup> I believe it possible, then, that Scheibe's "addition or replacement of some four hundred pipes belonging to mixture stops" – to paraphrase the scribe's succinct entry – resulted in changes to both mutations and compound stops.

### The Large Organ at St. Nicholas's

Scheibe's renovation at St. Nicholas's took place over a twelve-month period in 1724–25. His major repair of the "entirely unreliable and faulty organ" cost 600 talers, at the conclusion of which an obviously well pleased city council awarded Scheibe 40 talers as a *Gratual* for "organ building well done" as well as an additional 4-taler *Discretion* to be dispersed among his assistants.<sup>30</sup> The only description of the work we have is from the chronicle of city historian Johann Salomon Riemer, where it is reported that Scheibe "removed the pipes and increased their number by 150."<sup>31</sup>

In the absence of the contract, the disposition of the organ recorded in 1741 by Johann Andreas Silbermann becomes an especially important source. A comparison of it with Thayssner's disposition reveals at least four tonal changes – three of which involve mutations (see Table 2), and, taking the cost into account, and if Scheibe's renovation of the New Church organ and his proposal to renovate Thayssner's organ at St. Jacob's Church in Cöthen are any indication, the renovation would have been substantial. In his proposal to Cöthen in 1746–47 Scheibe requested 480 talers for work that included moving and arranging the bellows so that they could be pumped by foot, as well as strengthening them with new horse veins, re-leathering them, and making them airtight again with glue; cleaning the windchests and providing the pallet box with brass springs; adjusting and correcting the poor playing action; cleaning and re-voicing all of the pipework; replacing small pipes that had been attacked by lead sugar; and setting a "good temperament" and tuning the organ.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Neuen Kirche in Leipzig, 1721–22, fol. 70.

<sup>30</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Nicolai in Leipzig, 1725–26, fol. 53. The records thus contradict the assertion made in 1741 by "Aemilius" [Gottfried August Homilius] that "Mr. Scheibe renovated the organ at St. Nicholas's, but ruined more of it than he improved." Marc Schaefer, ed., *Das Silbermann Archiv* (Winterthur, Switzerland: Amadeus, 1994), 173.

<sup>31</sup> StA Leipzig, Riemer-Chronik, vol. 1, 161. Contrary to what Schering assumed, the organ was playable throughout the renovation.

<sup>32</sup> Hubert Henkel, "Die Orgeln der Köthener Kirchen zur Zeit Johann Sebastian Bachs und ihre

It is noteworthy there were so few changes to Thayssner's late seventeenth-century organ at St. Nicholas's. According to Silbermann's description,<sup>33</sup> Scheibe may have repaired but did not change Thayssner's four multi-fold bellows. The organ had an "old façade" – no doubt from *ca.* 1600 – that was black and gilded, with flat and pointed towers, shutters, and rich decoration. The Rückpositiv stop action had iron stopknobs that were shoved sideways within long notches. The compass remained CD-c<sup>3</sup>/CD-d<sup>1</sup>. Reed resonators were made of sheet metal, the boots of wood. The Pedal, Thayssner's addition to Lange's organ, stood "to the left on the floor, very hidden."<sup>34</sup>

That Scheibe built only 150 new pipes suggests that in 1724 the cantor and organist did not wish to make significant tonal changes to the organ. After the renovation the organ would have had pipework from three builders in its magnificent Renaissance case: ten original stops from Lange (re-scaled and/or re-voiced by Thayssner and perhaps also by Scheibe), twenty-three stops newly built by Thayssner (and perhaps re-voiced by Scheibe, including reeds, mixtures, and all of the stops in the Brustwerk and Pedal),<sup>35</sup> and four stops newly built by Scheibe.

### **The Small Organ at St. Thomas's and the New Organ at St. John's**

For the first twenty years or so of Bach's Leipzig tenure, the organ in St. John's Church was the instrument built in 1694-95 by Johann Tobias Trost of Grimma. There was no concerted music performed at St. John's, where the fourth, or least experienced, choir of the St. Thomas School, which was limited to singing chorales in unison, appeared only on the three major feasts of the church year. It is not clear when the congregation began to sing the hymns, but it may have coincided with the building of the Trost organ.

In March 1741 Scheibe agreed to build a new organ. He was paid in

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Geschichte," *Cöthener Bach-Hefte* 3 (1985): 10-11. A renovation of the organ did not occur until 1766-68.

<sup>33</sup> Schaefer, ed. *Das Silbermann Archiv*, 173.

<sup>34</sup> Thayssner's Pedal division and the organ's Renaissance decoration, including its painted doors, are visible in the watercolor painted by Carl Benjamin Schwarz (1757-1813) before the major renovation of the church in 1784-97. The painting is reproduced in, for example, Wolff and Zepf, *Die Orgeln J.S. Bachs*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> Thayssner lists the new stops he built in a memorandum dated March 1, 1694, StA Leipzig, Stift IX A 2, fol. 17v.

part by being given the Trost organ at St. John's as well as the small organ at St. Thomas's, an instrument he had evaluated the previous year. Scheibe's evaluation memorandum<sup>36</sup> reveals that the Oberwerk of St. Thomas's small organ had a short-octave bass and that the compass of the Pedal was CDE-c<sup>1</sup>; its list of stops, as Spitta pointed out,<sup>37</sup> differs from the disposition recorded *ca.* 1700 in a number of ways. The changes relevant to this discussion (see Table 2) could have been made either in 1720–21, when Scheibe was paid 9 talers 3 groschen for “repair of the small organ which had been totally unusable,”<sup>38</sup> or in 1727–28, when Zacharias Hildebrandt was paid 15 talers for bringing eight stops into playing condition.<sup>39</sup> No matter who made them, it is of interest that precisely eight stops were considered by Scheibe to be worth re-using in the new St. John's organ.

Three aspects of Scheibe's new organ for St. John's must be emphasized. First, Scheibe provided a means by which a performer could “play *Piano* and *Forte* on the same manual quite extraordinarily well;” while it is unclear exactly how he achieved this,<sup>40</sup> the invention brings to mind the dizzying array of keyboard instruments that were invented in Italy and Germany in the first half of the eighteenth century, all of which provided new methods of expression and many of which provided the possibility of playing *forte e piano*. Second, the disposition provides an interesting model for a small organ of some twenty-two stops: note the presence of Quintadenas in each division; the independent ranks in the principal choruses; the fairly well developed flute choruses in each division; the Nasat 2-2/3' and Tertian II in the secondary division; the Violon 8' in the Pedal; the absence of manual reeds. Third, Scheibe demanded, and eventually received some sixteen months later, substantial extra payment for several stops he built over-and-above the contract, apparently at a city council member's request. As Henkel suggested, this dispute may be the reason why

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<sup>36</sup> StA Leipzig, Stift IX A 2, fol. 105r-v.

<sup>37</sup> Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 2:284n172. The English translation should read: “several stops were missing [from the list]” not “several stops were taken away.”

<sup>38</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Thomæ in Leipzig, 1720–21, fol. 42.

<sup>39</sup> StA Leipzig, Rechnung der Kirchen zu St. Thomæ in Leipzig, 1727–28, fol. 41. Quoted in Dähnert, *Historische Orgeln in Sachsen*, 220n231.

<sup>40</sup> Jakob Adlung describes how Christoph Gottlieb Schröter of Nordhausen, “among others,” had accomplished being able to make a tone louder or softer while continuing to play. See Jakob Adlung, *Anleitung zur musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (Erfurt, 1758; facs. reprint, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1953), 505-6.

the organ was examined so exactly by Bach and Hildebrandt.<sup>41</sup> According to Forkel, Bach had a reputation for doing all he could to ensure that organ builders received fair remuneration. When he thought a builder would take a loss, he tried to induce those who had contracted for it to pay more – and he was in fact successful in several cases.<sup>42</sup> In this regard it is noteworthy that the story of the St. John's organ examination finds its way into several Bach biographical accounts. As the *Obituary* put it, “the complete approval that our Bach expressed about the instrument did no slight honor both to the organ builder and, because of certain circumstances, to Bach himself.”<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusions

As will have become obvious, commonly held views about Leipzig's organs are in need of revision. The church organs apparently did not remain unchanged for the fifty or so years between circa 1700, when their dispositions were recorded by Vogel, and Bach's death in 1750. Scheibe's renovations expanded wind supply; replaced windchests; improved playing actions; replaced iron parts with brass; repaired pipes suffering from tin pest; made the Pedal division independent from the Hauptwerk; replaced shallots, tongues, and resonators of reed stops; made mutations, including the Tierce, available as independent ranks; revised mixture compositions; widened scalings; re-voiced pipework, including, famously, the Violdigamba; set or re-set the temperament; and provided new stops such as the Sordino, a solo reed.

While any one of these could be expanded upon at length, I will focus here very briefly on the Tierce mutation. Werckmeister observed that the Tertian is useful, but it is even better if each of its two ranks – 1-3/5' and 1-1/3' – is available as a separate stop, because then one can construct a greater number of registrations.<sup>44</sup> He also observed that the independent Quint and Tierce were necessary “so that the overtone series is complete and the stops in the plenum

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<sup>41</sup> See Henkel, “Zur Geschichte der Scheibe-Orgel,” 44-50, for a discussion of Scheibe's St. John's organ and the examination by Bach and Hildebrandt.

<sup>42</sup> Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *On Johann Sebastian Bach's Life, Genius, and Works*, in Hans T. David, Arthur Mendel, and Christoph Wolff, eds., *The New Bach Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 441.

<sup>43</sup> *The New Bach Reader*, 306.

<sup>44</sup> Andreas Werckmeister, *Erweiterte und Verbesserte Orgel-Probe* (Quedlinburg, 1698; facs. reprint Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1970), 74.

are correct.”<sup>45</sup> Independent Tierces are a common feature of organ building in central Germany; they can be found in organs by Förner, Junge, Thayssner, Christoph Contius, Scheibe, Finke, Silbermann, Hildebrandt, and Trost. As Johann Adolph Scheibe put it in his defense of mutations and mixtures, they are necessary “in order to better fill the church and support the congregation.”<sup>46</sup>

It is tempting to link the modern aesthetic of the organs at the University and the New Church with the progressive quality of the concerted music being performed there. At both of these churches there was participation by performers from Leipzig’s *Collegia musica* where the latest, most advanced church music was performed. It is also tempting to see the organs at the two principal churches of St. Nicholas’s and St. Thomas’s as linked to their more traditional church music programs. In fact, though, Thayssner had already thoroughly updated the organ at St. Nicholas’s, even while preserving the spectacular Renaissance case; Scheibe’s renovation modestly improved it. At St. Thomas’s, too, the large organ was regularly updated and improved, and even at St. John’s, officially on the outskirts, by 1745 there was a new and innovative organ.

Finally, and importantly, we must also revise our opinion of Johann Scheibe. Here was a builder who was innovative, reliable, and more than competent: he apparently was an artist at getting certain stops to sound the way they should. Scheibe was praised by Bach when he examined Scheibe’s *magnum opus* instrument at St. Paul’s, he was praised by the city’s three principal organists for his very successful renovation of the Donats’ organ in the New Church (they also noted his success at St. Thomas’s), during Bach’s tenure as Thomascantor he carried out the major renovation of Thayssner’s organ at St. Nicholas’s and was awarded a handsome gratuity by the city for his work, and his organ for St. John’s Church, examined by both Bach and Hildebrandt, was found to be well built and without fault. On two occasions, at both St. Paul’s and St. John’s, Bach actively supported Scheibe’s requests for payments over and above the contracted fee.

In short, when we talk about the organs of Leipzig during the time that Bach was cantor at St. Thomas’s, we are talking about organs either built or renovated by Johann Scheibe, each instrument up-to-date in its own particular way, all of them meeting the requirements of the musicians who played and relied on them.

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<sup>45</sup> Andreas Werckmeister, *Organum Gruningense redivivum* (Quedlinburg, 1705; reprint Mainz: Rheingold-Verlag, 1932), § 28.

<sup>46</sup> Johann Adolph Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1745), unnumbered introduction.