

Musical
OFFERING

*to His
Royal Majesty in Prussia*

most humbly dedicated

by

Johann Sebastian Bach

INTRODUCTION

KANSAS STATE COLLEGE OF PITTSBURG

Department of Music

presents

Johann Sebastian Bach's

MUSICAL OFFERING

(Original and Final Versions)

for

the 225th anniversary of its dedication

to

King Frederick the Great of Prussia

(7th July 1747)

*

Arranged by Eric Vaughn

for

Flute, String Quartet, and Pianoforte

Isa Bentzen, Flute

Linda Vollen, Violin I

Markwood Holmes, Violin II

Lewis Hoyt, Viola

Becky Schwenke, Violoncello

and

George Mann, Pianoforte

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8:00 p. m., Tuesday, 11th July 1972

IN COLLEGIUM MUSICUM

McCray Auditorium

INTRODUCTION

This evening, two different versions of Johann Sebastian Bach's Musical Offering will be performed: first, what is probably his original version, eight movements of fugue, canonic fugue, and canon, in an order, a chiastic pattern, which exhibits an apparent symmetry, analogous to that of visual architecture (as with other major works of Bach, including the cantata, Christ lag in Todesbanden, of 1707, and the Goldberg Variations, of 1742); and, second, the result of Bach's impetuous revision of the work in the midst of publication (all of which was done within a span of less than sixty days), a final version which abandons that concentric pattern, with its outward show of balance and proportion (just as visual as aural in conception) to project an arc of fully twice the length (involving the addition of four movements of a self-contained sonata and four extra canons), in a climactic pattern nearer to dramatic form and structure than to architecture, one possessing to a high degree that forward thrust of rhythm and propulsion, that motivic implication which informs the greatest works of instrumental music, the epitome of temporal art.

However, the impetuosity of Bach's revision brought into being a first edition which included--one within the other!--both original and final versions, seemingly an ill-assorted potpourri of random pieces, rather than an elegant and ordered set. And so it was regarded, even by such Bach authorities as Philipp Spitta, such enthusiasts as Albert Schweitzer, until the publication of Hans Theodore David's practical edition and companion work, J. S. Bach's "Musical Offering": History, Interpretation, and Analysis, in 1945, in which the author sought to reconstruct what he conceived Bach's ultimate design to be. Following his pioneering effort, a number of other historians, musicians, and theorists have taken a similar path, occasionally being led to entirely different conclusions concerning Bach's ultimate design, so that several different versions of the work have since been published or performed, and some of them recorded.

Although David's practical edition has become something of a standard, and has remained in print, his History, Interpretation, and Analysis, upon which the order of his edition is based, has been out of print for a number of years (so that performers have too easily assumed that David's order is the order given to the work by Bach). Within the last few months, it has been reprinted in an inexpensive paperback edition, thus once again accessible to one and all for further study.

In the meantime, continuing research on the work has produced at least one remarkably new view of its nature: at the thirty-sixth annual meeting of the American Musicological Society in Toronto, November 1970, a paper was read (and later revised and published in The Musical Quarterly, September 1971, under the title "New research on Bach's 'Musical Offering' "), in which Christoph Wolff, editor of the forthcoming Neue Bach-Ausgabe edition of the work, presented much new documentation and his findings concerning the history, text, order, and performance problems of the work, which either nullify or severely undermine a major part of David's reconstruction.

A determination of the full extent of Wolff's discoveries, and their ultimate significance and value, must await the publication of his new edition; nevertheless, some estimation of the work, some understanding of its nature and its place among the greater works of Bach, may be afforded by a survey of the documents at hand.

In the Berlin Spenerische Zeitung, 11th May 1747, appeared the following report:

We hear from Potsdam that last Sunday (7th May, a date whose significance will become apparent later) the famous Capellmeister from Leipzig, Herr Bach, arrived with the intention of hearing the excellent royal music at that place. In the evening, at about the time when the regular chamber music in the Royal apartments usually begins, His Majesty was informed that Capellmeister Bach had arrived at Potsdam and was waiting in His Majesty's antechamber for His Majesty's most gracious permission to listen to the music. His August Self immediately gave orders that Bach be admitted, and went, at his entrance, to the so-called "forte and piano," condescending also to play,

in person and without any preparation, a theme to be executed by Capellmeister Bach in a fugue. This was done so happily by the aforementioned Capellmeister, that not only was His Majesty pleased to show His satisfaction thereat, but also all those present were seized with astonishment. Herr. Bach has found the subject propounded to him so exceedingly beautiful that he intends to set it down on paper in a regular fugue, and have it engraved on copper. On Monday, the famous man was heard on the organ in the Church of the Holy Ghost at Potsdam, and earned general acclaim from the auditors attending in great number. In the evening, His Majesty charged him again with the execution of a fugue, in six parts, which he accomplished just as skillfully as on the previous occasion, to the pleasure of His Majesty and the general admiration.

In dispatching the Musical Offering to King Frederick, Bach gave it the following dedication:

Most Gracious King!

In deepest humility, I herewith dedicate to Your Majesty a Musical Offering, the noblest part of which derives from Your Own august hand. With awesome pleasure, I still remember the very special Royal Grace, when, some time ago, during my visit to Potsdam, Your Majesty's Self deigned to play to me a Theme for a Fugue on the clavier, and, at the same time, most graciously charged me to carry it out in Your Own most august presence. To obey Your Majesty's command was my most humble duty. I noticed very soon, however, that, for lack of necessary preparation, the execution of the task did not fare as well as such an excellent Theme demanded. Therefore, I resolved, and promptly pledged myself, to work out this right Royal Theme more fully, and then to make it known to the world. This resolve has now been carried out as well as possible, and it has none other than this irreproachable intent, to glorify, if only in a small point, the fame of a monarch whose greatness and power, as in all the sciences of war and peace, so especially in music, everyone must admire and revere. I make bold to add this most humble request: may Your Majesty deign to dignify the present modest labor with a gracious acceptance, and continue to grant Your Own most august Royal Grace to

Your Majesty's

most humbly obedient servant,
the Author.

Leipzig, 7th July
1747

In a supplement to the Leipziger Zeitungen, "Extract der eingelauffenen Nouvelles," of 30th September 1747, Bach announced that the Musical Offering would soon be put on sale:

As will by this be known, the fugues on the Royal Prussian theme, promised in the newspapers of Leipzig, Berlin, Frankfurt, and other (cities) of 11th May last, have now gone to press, so that they may be obtained from the author, Capellmeister Bach, at the upcoming St. Michael's Fair, as well as from his two sons in Halle and Berlin, for one thaler. The composition includes 1) two fugues, one with three (and) the other with six obligato voices, 2) a sonata for flute, violin, and continuo, and 3) various canons, among which is found a canonic fugue.

In a letter to his cousin, Johann Elias Bach, 6th October 1748, he wrote,

I cannot oblige you with the required copy of the Prussian fugue for the time being, since the edition was exhausted just today (as I have had printed only a hundred copies, most of which were given gratis to good friends). But I shall have a few more printed between now and the New Year's fair; if Herr Cousin, you still desire to have a copy then, you have only to give me notice by mail and add a Thaler, and the request shall be complied with.

Two years after Bach's death, in a letter to Meinrad Spiess, a member of the Society of Musical Sciences, which Bach had joined in June 1747, its founder, Lorenz Mizler, wrote,

But what the late Herr Bach played for the King of Prussia is engraved on copper, and to be had in Leipzig: it has three pieces, a trio, a ricercar, and (a) fugue, and I shall write to Leipzig, so that you may obtain it at the Easter Fair.

Four years after his death, an obituary prepared by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola appeared in Vol. IV, Part I, of Lorenz Mizler's Musikalische Bibliothek, from which the following two excerpts are taken:

In the year 1747, he (Bach) made a journey to Berlin, and, on this occasion, had the opportunity of being heard at Potsdam by His Majesty the King of Prussia. His Majesty himself played him a theme for a fugue, which he at once developed, to the particular pleasure of the Monarch, on the pianoforte. Hereupon, His Majesty demanded to hear a fugue with six obligato voices, which command he also fulfilled, to the astonishment of the King and the musicians there present, using a theme of his own. After his return to Leipzig,

he set down on paper a three-voiced and a six-voiced so-called ricercar, together with several other intricate little pieces, all on the very theme that had been given him by His Majesty, and this he dedicated, engraved on copper, to the King.

(Among) the works we owe to this great composer are . . . Two fugues, a trio, and several canons, on the above-mentioned theme given by His Majesty the King of Prussia, under the title Musical Offering.

On 26th July 1774, Gottfried van Swieten wrote, of a conversation he had had with King Frederick, the following note concerning Bach's visit to Potsdam:

He (Frederick) spoke to me among other things of music, and of a great organist named Bach, who has been for a while in Berlin. This artist (Wilhelm Friedemann?) is endowed with a talent superior, in depth of harmonic knowledge and power of execution, to any I have heard or can imagine, while those who knew his father claim that he, in turn, was even greater. The King is of this opinion, and, to prove it to me, he sang aloud a chromatic fugue subject which he had given this old Bach, who, on the spot, had made of it a fugue in four parts, then in five parts, and finally in eight parts.

Most extended and informative of all surviving documents, and unquestionably the most faithful, in spite of the time which had elapsed between the occasion and the account, is Johann Nicolaus Forkel's On Johann Sebastian Bach's Life, Genius, and Works, 1802, as translated by A. C. F. Kollman (?), who had obtained a firsthand account of the entire occasion of Bach's visit to Potsdam from the two sons:

(Bach's) second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, entered the service of Frederick the Great in 1740. The reputation of the all-surpassing skill of Johann Sebastian was at that time so extended that the King often heard it mentioned, and praised. This made him curious to hear and meet so great an artist. At first, he distantly hinted to the son his wish that his father would one day come to Potsdam. But, by degrees, he began to ask him directly why his father did not come. The son could not avoid acquainting his father with those expressions of the King's; at first, however, he could not pay any attention to them because he was generally too much overwhelmed with business. But, the King's expressions being repeated in several of his son's letters, he at length, in 1747, prepared to take the journey, in company of his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann. At that time, the King used

to have every evening a private concert, in which he himself generally performed some concertos on the flute. One evening, just as he was getting his flute ready, and his musicians were assembled, an officer brought him the written list of the strangers who had arrived. With his flute in his hand, he ran over the list, but immediately turned to the assembled musicians, and said, with a kind of agitation, 'Gentlemen, old Bach is come.' The flute was now laid aside; and old Bach, who had alighted at his son's lodgings, was immediately summoned to the Palace. Wilhelm Friedemann, who accompanied his father, told me this story, and I must say that I still think with pleasure on the manner in which he related it. At that time, it was the fashion to make rather prolix compliments. The first appearance of J. S. Bach before so great a King, who did not even give him time to change his travelling dress for a black cantor's gown, must necessarily be attended with many apologies. I will not dwell here on those apologies, but merely observe that, in Wilhelm Friedemann's mouth, they made a formal dialogue between the King and the apologist.

But what is more important than this is that the King gave up his concert for that evening and invited Bach, then already called the Old Bach, to try his pianofortes, made by Silbermann, which stood in several rooms of the Palace. The musicians went with him from room to room, and Bach was invited everywhere to try them and to play unpremeditated compositions. After he had gone on for some time, he asked the King to give him a subject for a fugue in order to execute it immediately, without any preparation. The King admired the learned manner in which his subject was thus executed extempore; and, probably to see how far such art could be carried, expressed a wish to hear also a fugue with six obligato parts. But, as not every subject is fit for such full harmony, Bach chose one himself, and immediately executed it to the astonishment of all present in the same magnificent and learned manner as he had done with that of the King. His Majesty desired also to hear his performance on the organ. The next day, therefore, Bach was taken to all the organs in Potsdam, as he had been before Silbermann's pianofortes. After his return to Leipzig, he composed the subject which he had received from the King in three and six parts, added several intricate pieces in strict canon on the subject, had it engraved, under the title of Musicalisches Opfer (Musical Offering), and dedicated it to the inventor.

A later excerpt from the same source reads:

The theme received from the King, . . . appears here, first, as a three-part clavier fugue, under the name of Ricercar, or with

the superscription Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta. Secondly, the composer has also made of it a six-part Ricercar for the clavier. Then follow Thematis Regii elaborationes canonicae of various kinds. Fourthly and lastly, a Trio for the flute, violin, and bass, upon the same theme, is added.

Obviously, Forkel's account, which ultimately derives from Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel, with whom he had been in continual correspondence from 1774 through 1775, is the most detailed, and, with all due allowance for anecdotal decoration, is entirely believable, especially for establishing Bach's motivation in the subsequent events. Of great significance are the following points:

1) it was the King himself, who, through Carl Philipp Emanuel's letters to his father, repeatedly solicited Bach's visit to Potsdam;

2) only after some delay, was Bach able to arrange time to undertake the journey, in the company of Wilhelm Friedemann;

3) the King was so excited at the arrival of Old Bach, who was greeted not as a casual stranger, but, rather, as an honored guest, and so eager to hear him play, that he did not give him time to rest or to change his travelling attire for a cantor's gown, but, abandoning the evening concert, immediately took him on a guided tour of all the Silbermann pianofortes in the Palace, with the court musicians following from room to room as audience--and what a gathering it was: Bach's two sons, Capellmeister to the Prussian Court Carl Heinrich Graun, the King's famous flute instructor Johann Joachim Quantz, the great authority on fugue Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, and two of Bach's own students, Johann Friedrich Agricola, then Composer to the Prussian Court, and Johann Philipp Kirnberger, Court Musician to the King's sister, Princess Amalia (who may herself have been there), all of them profound admirers of Old Bach;

4) presumably overwhelmed by his reception, and having played impromptu on the pianofortes to an appreciative and highly discriminating audience, Bach requested a theme from the King upon which he might improvise a fugue, without preparation;

5) after the King had played a theme on the pianoforte, Bach improvised a fugue thereon, probably of three, but of something less than six voices, to the wonderment of all;

6) the better to test Bach's skill, the King asked him to improvise a six-voiced fugue; but

7) Bach was forced to excuse himself on the ground that the King's theme was not suitable for such close harmony, and, instead, improvised a fugue upon another theme, his own, again to the wonderment of all.

The Spenersche Zeitung, 11th May 1747, provides the date of Bach's auspicious arrival in Potsdam, Sunday, 7th May, as well as the fact that the composer had found the King's theme so beautiful, that he intended to set it down in a regular fugue, and have it engraved.

The dedication from the Musical Offering provides the date of its delivery to the King, 7th July, 1747, but adds Bach's confession "that, for lack of necessary preparation, the execution of the (improvisation) did not fare as well as such an excellent Theme demanded," and that he, therefore, had "resolved, and promptly pledged . . . to work out this right Royal Theme more fully, and . . . make it known to the world," thus confirming the report of 11th May.

Bach's announcement in the Leipziger Zeitungen, 30th September, 1747, provides the date of the general publication of the work, St. Michael's Fair, but, in again confirming the report of 11th May, suggests that Bach considered more than a single fugue "on the Royal Prussian theme" to have been promised in the newspapers of Leipzig, Berlin, Frankfurt, and other cities (was Bach himself the source of that report so widely published?), so that, in working out the theme more fully, Bach had come to include in the "elaboration" two fugues, a sonata, and various canons!

If Bach had felt some inadequacy in his improvisation upon the King's theme (an inadequacy in no way reflected in the other consistently laudatory accounts), and, if his confession of that feeling of inadequacy was sincere (and there is not the slightest ground to doubt it), how much greater a feeling of inadequacy must he have suffered, in such an august gathering, at being forced to admit his inability to carry out a six-voiced fugue upon the King's theme: perhaps, then, he took his promise as a double-vow, first, to obey the King's "command" to carry out a six-voiced fugue upon the Royal Theme, however tardily (though the haste

with which he brought the work to publication would almost deny time's passing), and, second, to set down a record of the fugue which he had improvised upon the Royal Theme, but a record purged of that degree of fault which he alone had sensed, which had compelled him to decline the King's command to carry out a six-voiced fugue.

Thus the use of the title "ricercar," that is, "to seek again," would have been at once a gesture of apology and a playful boast, as though he would again approach the King, to say, "Now Your Majesty may take another look! This is what I can do with a little preparation!" Thus, too, the superscript acrostic on the term, "Regis Iussu Cantio Et Relique Canonica Arte Resoluta," or "At the King's command, the song--that is, the two fugues--and the remainder--the various canons--resolved with canonic--imitative--art," may originally have served as title for the work in its entirety, as though, in seeking to fulfill the King's command, he had been led beyond the narrow range of "fugue" into the broader field implied by "ricercar." And thus the final version of the work, including a sonata for the flautist King to play, in quantity and quality, would more than compensate the failure of a moment.

But why was Bach so much in haste to bring the work to publication? Why did he attempt to complete, in slightly more than fifty days, the composition, engraving, printing, and inscribing of the work, so that it would reach the King on Friday, 7th July 1747, exactly two months after his visit to Potsdam?

Undoubtedly, Bach's feeling of inadequacy in his improvisation of a fugue and at his inability to carry out a six-voiced fugue upon the King's theme, together with his public declaration of intent to work it out more fully and have it published, prompted urgency; nevertheless, the date itself must have had significance for Bach; and that it was two months exactly from the date of Bach's arrival in Potsdam is the very clue to the discovery of that significance.

Bach had arrived in Potsdam on Sunday, 7th May 1747,

- 1) the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, but also
- 2) the seventh day of the fifth month of
- 3) the forty-seventh year of
- 4) the seventeenth century,
- 5) the seventh year of the King's reign, his first Royal Sabbatical, and the thirty-fifth year of his age!

Five sevens are thirty-five! And the contrapuntal mind of Bach--as research in the symbolism of his choral-preludes has revealed--delighted in a mystic play of numbers! Thus, the date of Bach's arrival may have had both ceremonial and numerological significance for him (and for the King, as well), especially since he dated the dedication of his Musical Offering (and presumably had it delivered to the King), 7th July 1747, which was a Friday, the fifth day of the week, symbolically the very day of sacrificial offering for Christians, but also

- 1) the seventh day of
- 2) the seventh month of
- 3) the forty-seventh year of
- 4) the seventeenth century,
- 5) the seventh year of the King's reign, and the thirty-fifth year of his age!

Five sevens are thirty-five! And the numerological order is even more perfectly expressed! The coincidence of ceremonial and numerological significance on 7th May 1747 would, in itself, have been remarkable, but that, exactly two months later, the coincidence might once again occur must have fired Bach's imagination: thus, in working out the Royal Theme more fully, Bach set down two fugues, first, the Ricercar a6, which, in July, symbolized fulfilment of the King's command, and, second, the Ricercar a3, which symbolized the fugue Bach had improvised upon the Royal Theme in May, but purged at last of that degree of fault which he alone had sensed.

Unfortunately, the haste with which Bach sought to bring the work to publication also brought about confusion and disorder in its First Edition: the Musical

Offering which the King received presumably consisted of five sections (which since have been dispersed), three of them in oblong (that is, horizontal) format, two of them upright (vertical). In oblong format were included:

1) the title page and dedication, which, probably for lack of time, had been set in type (unlike the second, third, and fourth parts of the Clavierübung, whose title pages had been engraved by Bach himself);

2) a page, presumably intended to follow the preceding pages, with the inscribed acrostic, "Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta," and four pages of engraving, with the three-voiced fugue, in keyboard score, entitled "Ricercar," and, added to the lowest system of the fourth, a puzzle canon, with the title, "Canon perpetuus super Thema Regium," or "Perpetual canon upon the King's theme," the two sections together intended as the opening section of the work; and

3) seven pages of engraving, with the six-voiced fugue, in open score, entitled "Ricercar a6," and, added to the last five systems of the seventh page, two puzzle canons, one entitled "Canon a2," with the additional phrase, "Quaerendo invenietis," or "Seeking, ye shall find," and the other, "Canon a4," with the signature of the engraver of the eleven pages in score, "J. G. Schübler, Sc," in the corner lower-right, the section rather obviously intended as the closing of the work.

In upright format were included:

1) twelve pages of engraving (three groups of four each), in a different hand from that of Schübler, making up a set of parts-- "Traversa," "Violino," and "Continuo"--to a sonata da chiesa in four movements, with a "Canon perpetuus" added at the end; and

2) a page with the inscription, "Thematis Regii Elaborationes Canonicae," or "Canonic elaborations of the King's theme," and two pages of engraving in the second hand, a set of six canons, numbered "1" to "5," with the sixth entitled "Fuga canonica," and the set itself entitled "Canones diversi super Thema Regium," or "Various canons upon the King's theme," a thoroughly balanced and symmetrical set most probably presenting Bach's original conception.

In sum, the only truly disconcerting aspects of the First Edition are the double nature of the format and the appearance of four canons as addenda at the ends of unrelated sections of the work; all considered;

1) had the work consisted of nothing but the Ricercar a6, which Bach most probably composed before the rest, immediately upon returning to Leipzig, it would have satisfied the King's expectations;

2) had it consisted of no more than the two ricercari, it would not only have satisfied the King's expectations, but also have added a charming memento of the occasion of their meeting;

3) had it consisted of the Ricercar a3, the set of six canons, and the Ricercar a6, presumably the original version of the work, at which point the acrostic on RICERCAR would apply to the entire work, and quite aptly may be placed immediately preceding the Ricercar a3, where it appears only in the dedicatory copy, it would not only have far exceeded the King's expectations, but also have offered a remarkably well-planned and symmetrical three-part work of some twenty minutes duration, whose only peculiarity would have been the mixed format of its presentation and the need for additional instruments for the performance of some of the canons;

4) had it even consisted of the Ricercar a3, the four-movement sonata, the set of six canons, and the Ricercar a6, it would have offered a work of singular character, as well-proportioned, if not as outwardly symmetrical, as the three-part version, but with a special appeal to the flautist King;

5) had the canons which Bach added to the work when he revised it, in the midst of the engraving, been properly included with the others, redistributing the final ten as Bach presumably intended, in two sets of five, two new plates would necessarily have been engraved: one plate would have provided space sufficient for the title of the first set of five, and for the set itself, and a second, for the title of the second set, and the first four canons of that set, as well as the beginning of the fifth, the canonic fugue, the rest of which had been engraved already as the second page of the original set of six canons; but

6) the engravers, lacking either funds to purchase extra plates or (more likely) time in which to reëngrave the section thus revised (perhaps with both conditions appertaining), were compelled to enter, here and there, wherever space on the existing plates permitted, the four canons whose appearance at the ends of unrelated sections of the work has led to such misunderstanding of Bach's ultimate design.

(Original Version)

Appearing hereinafter are two outlines, one of Bach's original version of the work, another of his final version; two tables present the Royal Theme (Example 1, in both) and Bach's variants on that theme as they appear in the original and final versions: In Table I, the eight examples correspond to the eight movements of the original version, and are so numbered; in Table II, the eight examples are presented with the eight additional examples from the final version, in the order corresponding to the movements of that version.

Eric Vaughn

Friday,
7th July 1972

NOTE

The manuscript agnostic on RICERCAR, which appears thus, immediately before the first Ricercar, in the dedicatory copy, may be translated, "At the King's command, the song (that is, Bach's promised fugal composition) and the remainder resolved with canonic (that is, imitative) art"; the heading for Part II, "Various canons upon the King's theme"; the inscription following the fourth canon, "As the notes grow, so may the Fortune of the King"; and that following the fifth, "And, as the modulation rises, so may the Glory of the King." The three parts are virtually identical in length, six to seven minutes each. Part II presents a double image, the first consisting of three pairs—two canons at the unison by similar motion, two canons at the fifth by contrary motion, and two canons at the fifth by similar motion, the second consisting of a pair of canonic elaborations of the King's theme (the first and sixth) partially embracing four central canons at upon the King's theme, each a degree higher in canonic order. The exact center of the canonic structure of the work, between the third and fourth canon, is emphasized by the contrast of the theme in diminution in the third and the canon by augmentation in the fourth, but the temporal center is in the fifth, at the very moment when the modulation has reached E sharp minor, totally the farthest remove from the principal C minor. These two different conceptions of symmetry inform the work, one static, or concentric, analogous to that of visual architecture, and the other dynamic, or eccentric, that of aural architecture, analogous to dramatic form and structure.

While the set of six canons anticipates and prepares for the Ricercar a6, the sixth canon, in finally becoming a canonic fugue a3, recalls the opening ricercar; in doing so, it counterbalances the first canon, which, in retrograde, also "looks" forward and backward at the same time. As for the term "ricercar," which Frescobaldi and Froberger had used during the previous century as title for a number of imitative works, progenitors of the fugue, Bach seems to have had two meanings in mind, first, one related to the French "recherché" and to the English "research," that is, complex or learned, from having looked into something again and again, for the Ricercar a6, and, second, one somewhat in jest, "to seek again," for the opening ricercar, which, if it truly is a record of the fugue Bach improvised at Potsdam, had caused Bach to reëxamine the King's theme at some length, the better to fulfill the King's command in the Ricercar a6.

INTERMISSION

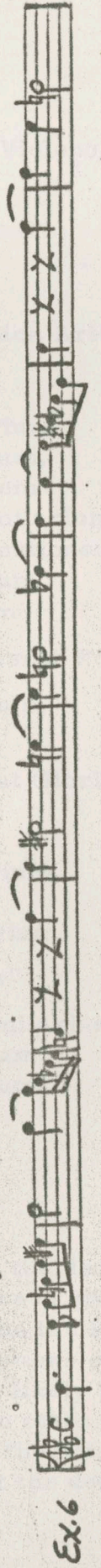
Ex. 1 


Ex. 2 

Ex. 3 

Ex. 4 

Ex. 5 

Ex. 6 

Ex. 7 

Ex. 8 

TABLE I. VARIANTS OF THE KING'S THEME IN BACH'S MUSICAL OFFERING (ORIGINAL)

(Final Version)

I) Ricercar (a3)

II) Sonata sopr' il Soggetto Reale à Traversa, Violono, e Continuo

Largo

Allegro

Andante

Allegro

"Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta"

III) Canones diversi super Thema Regium

1. a2, all' unisona, per motum similarium

2. a2, alla quinta, per motum contrarium,
thema in diminutionem

^o3. a2, alla dupl' ottava, per motum similarium,
thema in diminutionem

4. a2, alla quinta, per motum contrarium,
et in augmentationem

"Notulis crescentibus crescat Fortuna Regis"

5. a2, alla quinta, per motum similarium,
et in modulationem

"Ascendenteque Modulatione ascendat Gloria Regis"

Thematis Regii Elaborationes Canonicae

1. a2, all' unisona, per motum similarium,
et in retrogradum

^o2. a2, alla settima, per motum contrarium

"Quaerendo invenietis"

^o3. a4, alla dupl' ottave, per motum similarium

^o4. a2, alla quinta, per motum contrarium

5. a2, alla quinta, per motum similarium:
fuga canonica a3

IV) Ricercar a6

NOTE

The title of the sonata, which does not appear in the dedicatory copy of the work, but in two other extant copies, may have been given it by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, since it is in Italian, "Sonata upon the Royal subject for Flute, Violin, and Continuo," whereas all of the inscriptions of the dedicatory copy are in Latin: had Bach entitled it, it would more likely have read, "Trio per sonar super Thema Regium," in keeping with the other inscriptions; the acrostic on RICERCAR, which does not apply to the sonata, now appears, as it does in all copies of the first edition except the dedicatory copy,

immediately before the set of canons; the title for the second set of canons, which appears only in the dedicatory copy, on the front page of the canonic set, may be translated, "Canonic elaborations of the King's theme," and can apply only to the second set of the final version; the inscription following the second canon in that set, "Seeking, ye shall find," since Bach had left the canon almost entirely in puzzle form, the King to solve; the four canons marked thus (°) Bach added to the work when he revised it, in the very midst of its engraving, and, for press of time, accepted something less than elegance in their presentation: their appearance, out of order, in the First Edition, is the source of almost all misunderstanding concerning Bach's intentions and the nature of the original and final versions.

Ex. 1

Ex. 9

Ex. 10

Ex. 11

Ex. 12

Ex. 3

Ex. 4

Ex. 13

Ex. 5

Ex. 6

Ex. 2

Ex. 14

Ex. 15

Ex. 16

Ex. 7

Ex. 8

TABLE II. VARIANTS OF THE KING'S THEME IN BACH'S 'MUSICAL OFFERING' (FINAL)