

Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753) and **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750) were contemporaries and worked together both as colleagues and as friends. Silbermann would later become godfather to Bach's son, Carl Philipp Emanuel.

Perhaps the single most important feature of Gottfried Silbermann's instruments is their distinctive sounds. From the silvery flutes to the strong and reedy 16' Posaune in the pedal, Silbermann's sounds were unique, and indeed were constantly praised by organists in their testimonies of his instruments. Frequent reference was made to a play on his name, as organists praised his "*Silberklang*" or "*Silvery Sounds*". Such was his reputation, that on June 30th 1723 Gottfried Silbermann was granted the privileged title: "*Honorary Court and State Organ Builder to the King of Poland and Duke of Saxony*".

Bach was also famous throughout the area as an organist, and was frequently asked to test new organs on which he would invariably improvise. But it is noteworthy that through personal friendship and mutual respect he never officially tested one of Gottfried Silbermann's instruments, though he played them frequently. In 1736 Silbermann completed a fine 3-manual, 43-stop instrument for the Frauenkirche, Dresden. The Organ was dedicated on Sunday November 25th. A week later, on December 1st, as the *Dresdner Nachrichten* reported:

"The famous Capellmeister to the Prince of Saxe-Weissenfels and Director Musices at Leipzig, Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach, made himself heard from 2 to 4 o'clock on the new organ in the church of Our Lady, in the presence of the Russian Ambassador, Von Keyserlingk, and many Persons of Rank, also a large attendance of other persons and artists, with particular admiration, wherefore also His Royal Majesty most graciously named the same, because of his great ability in composing, to be His Majesty's Composer".

Bach and Silbermann also worked together on the escapement mechanism for some of the world's first pianos, or forte-pianos. Bach tried one of Silbermann's early efforts and commented critically by pointing out serious defects - heavy touch and weakness of the higher notes. These defects were later remedied, with Bach's approval. Frederick the Great purchased a number (possibly fifteen) of these new fortepianos for his summer palace Sans Souci at Potsdam. When Bach visited Potsdam in 1747 he was required to improvise upon all of them, the whole Royal party moving from room to room. It was this occasion which gave rise to the *Musical Offering*.

The music of Bach, played on Gottfried Silbermann's organs: a perfect combination.



The Organ in Grosshartmannsdorf Village Church by Gottfried Silbermann (1683-1753).

On October 27th, 1738 a new church for the Village of **Grosshartmannsdorf** was dedicated, and Gottfried Silbermann was contracted to supply a new organ. In May 1740 the organ case was completed, and in the month of July, 1741, the case was painted. On August 15th 1741 twelve 4-axle wagons made the journey from Silbermann's workshop in Freiberg bringing all the necessary materials, together with Master Silbermann and four apprentices. They were lodged in Grosshartmannsdorf. Fifteen weeks later the Organ was completed. It was inaugurated on December 3rd, 1741 by Freiberg Cathedral Organist Erselius.

While many of Silbermann's village organs were broadly similar in specification, the **PONITZ Organ** was in contrast a much grander affair, and indeed its price at 1500 Taler was more than double the modest 600 Taler for Grosshartmannsdorf. The extra cost went into a much more substantial specification – a comparison of the two organs is given below.

The Ponitz Organ was completed and handed over on November 18th, 1737. Contemporary reports show that this instrument was very highly regarded at the time, spreading the fame both of the instrument and its builder. This fine organ retains its original sound and specification.

The two manuals can be compared in specification. The Pedal sections are the same for the two instruments, both having a Subbass 16', Posaunenbass 16', and Octavbass 8'.

<u>HAUPTWERK</u>		<u>OBERWERK</u>	
<u>Grosshartmannsdorf</u>	<u>PONITZ</u>	<u>Grosshartmannsdorf</u>	<u>PONITZ</u>
Prinzipal 8'	Bordun 16'	Gedackt 8'	Principal 8'
Rohrflöte 8'	Principal 8'		Gedackt 8'
Quintadena 8'	Viol di Gamba 8		Quintaden 8'
Octava 4'	Rohrflöte 8'	Rohrflöte 4'	Octava 4'
Spitzflöte 4'	Octava 4'	Nasat 3'	Rohrflöte 4'
Quinta 3'	Spitzflöte 4'	Octava 2'	Nassat 3'
Octava 2'	Quinta 3'	Gemshorn 2'	Octava 2'
	Octava 2'	Tertia (1+3/5')	Gemshorn 2'
		Quinta 1 + 1/2'	Sesq. (1 + 3/5')
		Sufflet 1'	Quinta 1 + 1/2'
			Sufflot 1'

Our program opens with three of Bach's more grand and powerful works which demonstrate the resources of the larger Ponitz Organ. While the Fugue of **BWV 546** dates back to Weimar, the mighty Prelude is a much later Leipzig composition, probably dating around 1730.

Similarly the **Prelude and Fugue BWV 548** is a Leipzig work, also composed around the late 1720s or early 1730s.

The Prelude (Toccat) and Fugue in F Major, BWV 540, though no less grand a work, dates entirely from Weimar. It was during his Weimar years that Bach and his cousin Walther transcribed orchestral works of other composers, notably Italian, for solo keyboard, either organ or harpsichord; indeed the canonic beginning of this Toccat is modeled after Vivaldi's Double Violin Concerto in d-minor which Bach transcribed as BWV 596.

The somewhat lighter **Prelude and Fugue in G, BWV 550**, is also a Weimar composition.

Having thus sampled the Ponitz Organ, we move now to the smaller **Grosshartmannsdorf** instrument for six of the Eight Short Preludes & Fugues, **BWV 553-560** (The remaining two, BWV 555 & 556, can be heard on Vol. 2: **BACH 709** of the *Bach on Silbermann Organs* Series). Authorship of these is sometimes questioned: if they are not by Bach then possibly by his pupil Krebs.