



Extremely well conserved: Haussmann's second original portrait of Bach was privately owned until now.

“PAINTED IN OILS BY HAUSMANN”

A new attraction is coming to Leipzig Bach Archive in 2015: an original portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach, painted by Elias Gottlob Haussmann in 1748, is returning to Leipzig after 265 years. Most recently, the painting was part of the private collection of American researcher and collector, William H. Scheide. During the Second World War, it also hung for a while in the house of the parents of John Eliot Gardiner.

By Peter Wollny

The Bach portrait by Elias Gottlob Haussmann shows the cantor of St. Thomas's Church at around 60 years of age. It is a typical “official portrait”, showing the subject in a formal and perhaps also somewhat idealized pose. Yet if we look closely, it does give away some information about the great composer. This is how he must have looked when he performed before Frederick the Great, while he was working on the *Musical Offering* and the *Art of Fugue*, and when he put the St. John Passion, written more than 25 years earlier, back on the programme for the last time. His dark eyes are alert and interested; they are filled with human warmth and intellectual acuity. The thick brows lend him a forceful demeanour and the deep frown line is a warning to any over-impudent questioner to exercise caution and restraint. On the other hand, the slightly ironic traits around the mouth indicate good-naturedness and humour. The chin, nose and high brow bear witness to an almost unshakeable self-confidence. Life has left its marks on this face, but it has not succeeded in breaking the person. This is a man who does not need a lot of fuss to be made about him; yet his fellows are not indifferent to him.

Almost incidentally, Bach is holding in his right hand a small, unassuming sheet of music; however, he is holding it by the top, inciting the observer to read: “*Canon triplex à 6 Voc: per J. S. Bach*”. If you take the time to look more closely, you will see a small miracle of musical artistry. The three parts written there can be reversed and together constitute a harmonically richly coloured, six-part piece in which no note is superfluous or missing. The sheet is evidently intended as proof of Bach's artistic beliefs: that perfect harmony arises when all the parts of an elaborate, polyphonic movement constantly “work together” according to the rules of counterpoint.

To this day, Elias Gottlob Haussmann's portrait remains the sole authentic, from-life portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach. Any other portraits in circulation are either later copies of Haussmann's original or intuitive attributions of paintings that have come down to us anonymously.

Haussmann executed his portrait – presumably on a commission by Bach – twice: the first (dated 1746) was, according to unconfirmed reports, part of the inheritance of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach and was purchased in around 1800 by the later cantor of St. Thomas's Church August Eberhard Müller, who donated it to St. Thomas's School when he left Leipzig. Since 1913, this version has hung in the Bach Room of Leipzig's *Stadtgeschichtliches Museum*. The painting is rather badly conserved; it has been painted over and restored several times with the result that the subject gives the impression of being behind a veil – with blurred outlines and odd shadows on the face.

The second original, painted two years later, is in a much better state of conservation. This painting

evidently comes from the estate of Bach's second son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, for the catalogue of the estate of the “Hamburg Bach”, printed in 1790, describes a portrait of Bach as follows: “Bach (Johann Sebastian) Kapellmeister and Music-director in Leipzig. Painted in oils by Haussmann. 2 feet, 8 inches high, 2 feet, 2 inches wide. In a golden frame.” We have only partial knowledge of what happened to the painting after that. Oral tradition has it that it came into the possession of the Silesian family Jenke in the early nineteenth century. A descendent of the family, Walter E. Jenke, then brought it to England shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. It hung in the house of the parents of Sir John Eliot Gardiner in Dorset during the war years and after. In 1952, Jenke sold the painting at an auction; it was bought by the Bach scholar and collector William H. Scheide from Princeton/New Jersey.

Back in the Bach anniversary year of 1985, Scheide expressed the wish that “his Bach” would one day return home. During his visit to the Leipzig Bach Festival in the summer of 2003, he initially granted the Bach Archive the right of first refusal to purchase it. Together with his wife Judith, on his 100th birthday (January 6, 2014) he finally bequeathed the painting to the Bach Archive. Bill Scheide died on November 14, 2014. When the Haussmann Bach portrait of 1748 takes its place in the Bach Museum's Treasure Room, it will – in accordance with the last will of his former owner – have returned home after 265 years. Then visitors to the Bach Archive will be able to divine for themselves the mysteries of his personality and music. ♣

WILLIAM H. SCHEIDE (1914–2014)

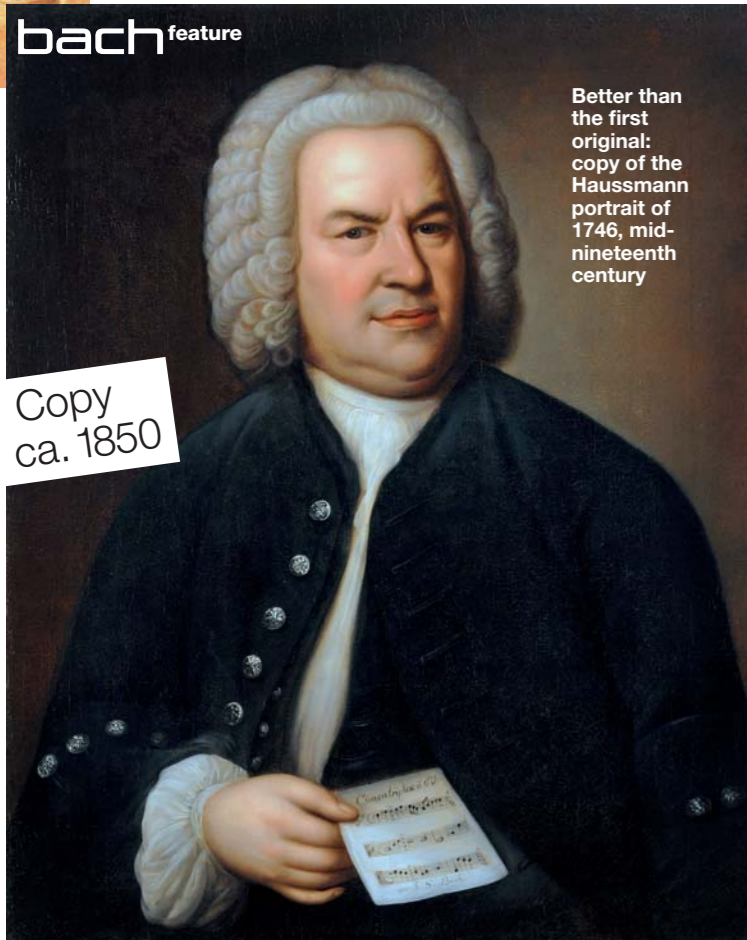
In William H. Scheide, who died on November 14, 2014, we have lost a reputed scholar and a profound connoisseur of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. William Scheide had been a member of the Board of Trustees of Leipzig Bach Archive Foundation since 2001 and was one of the Archive's most generous and loyal sponsors. William Scheide made a name for himself as a Bach scholar early on; he was the first American musicologist to be published in the *Bach-Jahrbuch* and every one of his essays published there between 1959 and 2003 shaped our way of thinking about Bach's life and artistry.

Scheide was a graduate of Princeton University, which awarded him a Bachelor's degree in 1936. After the Second World War, he developed the collection of antique books and valuable manuscripts begun by his grandfather and continued by his father, and built up the largest private collection of autograph scores, early copies and first prints of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. As the longstanding director of the Bach Aria Group, which he founded in 1946, he championed the propagation of Bach's work in the United States.

In accordance with his will, his collection of books and manuscripts will go to Princeton University. The portrait of Bach by Elias Gottlob Haussmann, which he owned since 1952, is now – in Scheide's own words – “coming home”.

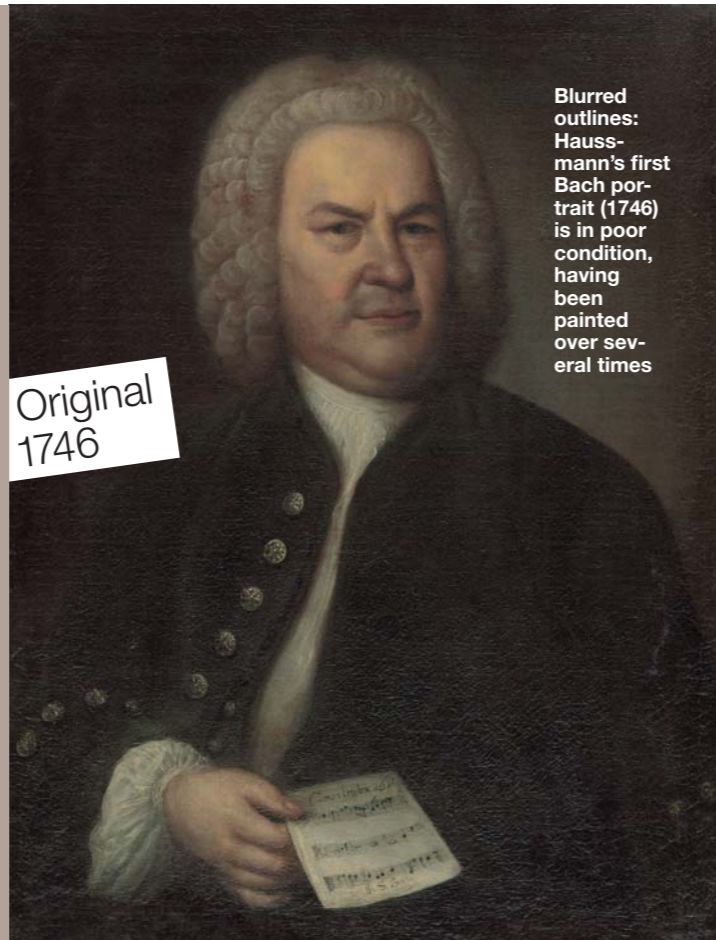
Better than the first original: copy of the Haussmann portrait of 1746, mid-nineteenth century

Copy
ca. 1850



Blurred outlines: Haussmann's first Bach portrait (1746) is in poor condition, having been painted over several times

Original
1746



SEEING WHAT WE LOVE

Bach researcher Martin Geck on Bach portraits and iconographic research

≡ **For many years, there were no new developments relating to Bach portraits, then in 2014 three new acquisitions were announced successively: two by Bach House in Eisenach and one by a private owner in Dortmund. What did we know about the three paintings at that time?**

Several years ago, the Handel researcher Hans Joachim Marx hinted at the existence of the Dortmund portrait (at that time in private ownership in Hamburg) and reproduced it in one of his publications. That had made it a hot tip for connoisseurs for quite some time. People had been talking of the portrait in the Gorke collection for nearly a century, and for not quite so long about a portrait owned by the Danish composer N. O. Raasted. But events accumulate sometimes, and most importantly, this kind of thing gets greater publicity today.

≡ **Apart from these three, what possible or actual Bach portraits can we theoretically or quite positively identify given the information we have on sources?**

Only the different versions of the Haussmann portrait should be viewed – to differing degrees – as completely authenticated historically. But we should not imagine that this painter's image of Bach is absolutely objective: Haussmann was used to rendering likenesses of Leipzig dignitaries and his portrait has an official character that may have struck Bach's family and friends as rather unnatural. As to the authenticity of all other

portraits, we can only speculate. The privately owned portrait in Dortmund is, in my view, a fairly "hot favourite". But it is so badly damaged that it does not contribute much to the debate about the "authentic" appearance of Bach.

≡ **Is it possible that other portraits of which we were previously unaware might come to light?**

The more time passes, the more improbable it is that an unknown portrait will come to light. Even the three portraits mentioned above did not appear from nowhere.

≡ **When did Bach iconography begin? When did researchers begin to take in interest in the question of how Bach looked?**

Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel had a large collection of portraits of composers, suggesting that interest in the appearances of famous musicians dates back at least to the mid-eighteenth century. He also felt it important that Johann Nicolaus Forkel should precede his Bach biography with the most appropriate portrait of his father as possible. At the same time, the criterion of "painted

from life" was not crucial initially. As a general rule, people did not want a photographic reproduction of Bach's features, but a "convincing" portrayal of the great master.

≡ **In 2014 in *Concerto* magazine, you reported on the meeting of a commission of experts in Leipzig in 1955. The objective of this meeting of Bach researchers, art historians and different medical specialists was to resolve the question of the authenticity of a total of five Bach portraits. On what body of knowledge was the commission able to base its investigation – and what was the result?**

There is no straightforward answer to that. From the surviving records, I have the impression that the members of the commission did not cooperate much, but rather that each one of them presented his opinion and that they then went their different ways without much discussion.

≡ **One of the participants was Heinrich Bessler. One year later, he published his paper entitled "Five genuine portraits of Johann Sebastian Bach", triggering a debate which lasted several months and in which Bach researcher Alfred Dürr, especially, contradicted Bessler on numerous details. How important at that time were political events and the division of Germany in this debate about portraits?**

Although Bessler had been awarded the GDR National Prize, he viewed the country as provincial in many ways. For that reason, he wanted to be published and make his voice heard in the West. But East Germany insisted on self-determination where its cultural assets were concerned. Commercial interests, which were admittedly minimal measured against today's standards, may also have played a role: the GDR hoped to obtain hard currency through reproductions, the Bärenreiter publishing house hoped to make money by selling books, and Bessler presumably hoped to pocket a fee for his purported authentications.

≡ **As proof of his thesis, Bessler referred first and foremost to anatomical features. What were the methodical weaknesses of this kind of approach? Can anatomical features in paintings tell us anything at all?**

It's all built on very weak premises – if only because no one knows how faithfully the different painters reproduced the specific anatomical features of the model: he might have exaggerated or even omitted them.

≡ **How much further are we today compared with that meeting of experts in Leipzig on January 24, 1955?**

Today we are much further ahead when it comes to determining the period at which a given portrait or frame was made. That's a matter of physical fact. As for criticism of the style, that's still a very broad subject.

≡ **You argue in favour of taking the term "genuine" out of the discussion and instead looking at the question of credibility. What is the difference and what are the advantages of this change of mindset as far as method is concerned?**

People talk of a "genuine" Rembrandt or a "genuine" Picasso.

But what is a "genuine" Bach? We will never know how Bach looked in real life. We do have the official Haussmann portrait to go on, but that is all. All other "Bach" portraits have come down to us in more or less anonymous fashion – in those cases, how can we speculate how close each respective painter came to painting the "real" Bach? In contrast, putting the question of how credible a portrait is means trying to find out as much as possible about the circumstances in which it was painted. And in that case we can state, albeit with reservations, that the closer the painter was to the person or to the time of Bach, the better.

≡ **From that point of view, which Bach portraits can we now regard as credible?**

Ultimately, only the Haussmann portrait is credible.

≡ **In 1970 you published a book about the portraits of Richard Wagner. What are the main differences between Bach and Wagner iconography?**

There are hundreds of photos of Wagner. You can really build up a good picture of how he looked in the different situations and phases of his life. If you hold up the numerous painted portraits of Wagner against them, you realize how differently he is portrayed – even if you only take the ones for which we have proof that he sat for the painter. Once you've seen that, you're very cautious about asserting that a painter has provided an "authentic" portrait of the model. In what way is Renoir's impressionistic Wagner portrait "authentic"? The example of Wagner is a warning against investigating the different Bach portraits first and foremost in relation to their "authenticity".

≡ **In your own, personal view: why do people want to know how Bach (or any other famous composer) looked? What do these paintings tell us, and can even dubious portraits contribute meaningfully to our image of Bach?**

Everybody builds a picture of someone they love and admire. Often, painted portraits have to do the job – they are something physical to focus on. If someone has a doubtful portrait that they perhaps bought themselves and that they have grown fond of, why shouldn't they hang it up? There is no absolute definition of "appropriate" or "embarrassing". And with Bach's music, it's exactly the same: who has an exact image of Bach in their head? There are many musical images of Bach and every one of them is right – although I would of course hope that there aren't too many kitschy or warped images among them. The same applies to painted images of Bach. ♣

Interview: Christiane Schwerdtfeger