

## SZYMON PACZKOWSKI, POLISH STYLE IN THE MUSIC OF JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Lanham 2017 (= Contextual Bach Studies) Rowman &amp; Littlefield, pp. 402+XVI.

ISBN 978-0-8108-8893-7

Those who know Johann Sebastian Bach as a master of the Italian, French, and German musical styles might be forgiven for wondering whether a book on the composer's Polish-style music is necessary or even possible. After all, Bach left us only three movements that he identified as being in the idiom: a 'Polonaise' in the French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817; a 'Poloinesse' episode in the fourth movement of Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 in F major, BWV 1046; and a 'Polonaise' with *double* in the Overture-suite in B minor, BWV 1067. Beyond these dances are a handful of vocal movements – including several arias in the Peasant Cantata, *Mer habn en neue Oberkeet*, BWV 212 – that unambiguously reference the Polish style. But thanks to Szymon Paczkowski's provocative study, we may now contemplate the possibility that Bach's engagement with the polonaise (and, to a lesser extent, the mazur) was more extensive and multifaceted than this modest corpus of works suggests. The latest instalment in Rowman & Littlefield's 'Contextual Bach Studies' series, under the general editorship of Robin A. Leaver, this book is an English translation of Paczkowski's Polish original from 2011.<sup>1</sup>

Following preliminary investigations of the Polish style in eighteenth-century Germany, Paczkowski offers a sequence of compact case studies connected by a 'guiding principle' (p. 16), namely, that Bach consistently used the polonaise 'as a musical symbol of royal power and God's royal majesty' (p. 160). All but one of these case studies involve vocal works, many of

which have never before been suspected as referencing Polish music. Thus Paczkowski's project is mainly to 'unlock' the symbolism of the Polish style as it relates to the works' political and theological meanings. Among the important and interrelated questions raised by such an enterprise are just what the Polish style entails, how it can be recognized when in the company of 'foreign' musical languages, where and why Bach put it to use, and what it might have meant to him and his listeners. Paczkowski dutifully addresses each of these questions, even if the answers he provides vary greatly in their utility.

His first order of business is to establish the parameters of the Polish style both musically and culturally, and this occupies the book's introduction and first two chapters. A consideration of the concept of style as understood by Bach's German predecessors and contemporaries leads to cursory summaries of his experience with the French, Italian, and German styles. More helpful is an overview of the 'mixed taste', which blends all these styles, as described by mid-century writers such as Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, Johann Mattheson, Johann Joachim Quantz, and Johann Adolph Scheibe. But here Paczkowski might have noted that the concept of a peculiarly German stylistic mixture goes back at least to the late seventeenth century (as articulated, for example, by Georg Muffat in 1695) and receives further expression in writings from the 1720s by Ernst Gottlieb Baron, Johann Christoph Gottsched, Johann David Heinichen, and Georg Philipp Telemann. The connection between music of Poland (often referred to as 'Sarmatia') and

<sup>1</sup> *Styl polski w muzyce Johanna Sebastiana Bacha*, Lublin 2011.

Germany is already explicit in a recitative in Telemann's libretto to his secular cantata *Wie? ruhet ihr, versteckte Saiten?*, TVWV 20:13 (1721).<sup>2</sup> Telemann, as Paczkowski notes, was credited by Marpur, Scheibe, and Jacob Wilhelm Lustig (a student of the composer) with introducing the Polish style into German music. This is a striking claim, but rather than interrogate it, Paczkowski is content to point out that the Polish style was already recognized as a distinct idiom by the early seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup> He might have asked whether these writers implicitly understood the Polish style as Telemann's reimagining or 'domestication' of genuine Polish music.

2 'The flattery of Italy's pieces, / The unrestrained liveliness / That flows from French songs; / Britain's leaping, obliging nature; / Yes, Sarmatia's exquisite pleasure, / To which the notes' jesting is devoted: / German diligence combines all this / To the honor of its country, / All the more to please the listener here / Through pen, mouth, and hand'. ('Was Welschland schmeichlendes in seine Sätze schliesset, / Die ungezwung'ne Munterkeit, / So aus der Franzen Lieder fliesset; / Der Britten springendes gebund'nes Wesen; / Ja, was Sarmatien zu seiner Lust erlesen, / Bey welchem sich der Scherz den Tönen weyht: / Dieß alles wird der Teutsche Fleiß, / Zu seines Landes Preis, / Mehr aber noch, die Hörer zu vergnügen, / Durch Feder, Mund und Hand allhier verfügen'.) Telemann's libretto was published in *Poesie der Nieder-Sachsen*, ed. Christian Friedrich Weichmann, vol. 3, Hamburg: Johann Christoph Kießner 1726, pp. 284–286. It has been reprinted in *Singen ist das Fundament zur Music in allen Dingen: Eine Dokumentensammlung*, ed. Werner Rackwitz, Leipzig 1981, pp. 119–121.

3 Elsewhere Paczkowski is more skeptical regarding German writers' stance toward Polish music: 'It seems that the comments by Marpur and Kirnberger on polonaise cadences were not so much a reflection of musical reality at the time but more a reflection of their personal notions about Polish dances' (p. 57). But what this 'musical reality' might have been now appears irrecoverable, since, as Paczkowski observes, 'we lack original comparative materials from Poland that would be needed to check the reliability of Kirnberger and Marpur's observations about the meters and melodic-rhythmic figures in the polonaise "proper" and its German version' (p. 59).

Bach most likely had little direct contact with or knowledge of Poland, and was instead informed by popular conceptions of the country and by librettos filled with 'Saxon propaganda that projected the official image' (p. 13) of Friedrich August II, elector of Saxony and king of Poland (as August III). It was this monarch who granted Bach the honorary title of *Hof-compositeur* in November 1736, three years after he had first applied for the position with a portfolio consisting of his *Missa* in B minor, BWV 232<sup>1</sup>. Several years earlier, Bach mentioned the Polish style in his famous 1730 memorandum to the Leipzig town council, speaking of the unique challenge German musicians face in having to perform music in any idiom, including that of Poland. But he does not say that musicians 'ought to master every national style, with regard to *composition* as well as performance' (p. 19; my emphasis), as Paczkowski would have it.

Foundational for the book's later case studies is a substantial discussion of the Polish language-music connection and how the polonaise may be defined through meter, rhythm, tempo, affect, and cadence structure. Looming large here are the writings of Mattheson, Marpur and the Bach student Johann Philipp Kirnberger, who spent significant time living in Poland. Marpur and Kirnberger are held up by Paczkowski as 'the leading theorists of the Polish style' (p. 35), despite their descriptions being 'often incoherent and muddled by conceptual confusion', which of course doesn't inspire much confidence in the former writer as 'a significant point of reference' (p. 47) for the book's musical analyses. Also foundational for Paczkowski's investigations of Bach's music is his claim, in the midst of a valuable survey of Polish dances as described in eighteenth-century dance treatises and performed at various European courts, about the 'extraordinary, politically motivated ascendance of

the polonaise in artistic music' (p. 67), especially at the Dresden court. Thus it is disappointing that Paczkowski provides little in the way of concrete examples to demonstrate just how Dresden composers 'came to use the polonaise as a musical symbol of the King of Heaven' (p. 67) in both secular and sacred contexts.

Inspired by Mattheson's example of how the chorale melody *Ich ruf zu dir* can be transformed into a Polish dance through iambic (short-short-long-long) and other characteristic 'polonaise' rhythms, Paczkowski identifies the chorale setting *Jesus, richte mein Beginnen* in the fourth part of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, BWV 248, as an analogous transformation because it includes some of the same rhythms used by Mattheson (Example 1.4). But one might easily counter that Bach's setting is more of a minuet than a polonaise, and that in any case the iambic and 'polonaise' rhythms in question – the latter including the figures of an eighth note followed by two sixteenth notes, and of two sixteenths followed by four eighths – are common enough in non-dance-based movements that, by themselves, they carry no specific meaning. For that matter, the two-sixteenths–four-eighths figure, which as we shall see is one of Paczkowski's key criteria for identifying polonaises in Bach's music, does not actually figure in eighteenth-century theoretical writings on the Polish style, at least not as quoted in the book's examples. Nor is it common in named polonaises of the time, despite becoming virtually a hallmark of the dance during the nineteenth century. Looking through the music quoted by Paczkowski, I found instances of this rhythm in only three pieces identified by their composers as Polish dances: C.P.E. Bach's *Polonaise* in G minor, BWV Anh. 125 (three times; Example 1.6), a 'Pohl'nisch' dance in C.J. von Feldstein's 1772 *Erweiterung der Kunst nach der Chorographie zu tanzen* (four times; Figure

2.2), and the Polonaise from J.S. Bach's French Suite No. 6 in E major, BWV 817 (once; Example 3.7). That this supposedly characteristic rhythm occurs only a single time in the three named polonaises by Bach – four, if we include an aria in the secular cantata *O angenehme Melodei*, BWV 210a, that is identified in the libretto as an 'Aria tempo di Polonaise' – suggests that for him it was not a significant marker of the dance. And this, in turn, casts doubt on some of Paczkowski's proposed polonaise identifications in Bach's music.

One can easily get a sense from the book that, when it came to music in the Polish style, eighteenth-century theory and practice was essentially monolithic. In a section on the 'tempo and character' of the polonaise (pp. 41–46), Paczkowski quotes writers from the 1730s to the 1790s and references an equally wide range of compositions, from Handel to Beethoven – all of which gives an impression of continuity spanning much of the century. Yet as the musical examples make clear (1.7 to 1.11), the style of this music is not only highly diverse, but in some cases departs markedly from the characteristic polonaise rhythms and cadences as described by theorists. Thus it would appear that compositional concepts of the Polish style, if not theoretical concepts as well, were anything but static over the course of the eighteenth century. (One need only glance at the keyboard polonaises of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, one of which Paczkowski quotes, to see how broadly a single composer could conceive of the genre.)

So just what is a polonaise? Or, to rephrase the question as a riddle, when is a polonaise *not* a polonaise? It turns out that describing and recognizing the dance is not as straightforward a matter as essentializing other, more familiar types such as the gavotte or sarabande. If it were, then Paczkowski's book might well have been written long ago. But he is disinclined

(perhaps wisely) to establish a set of criteria to facilitate the identification of polonaises and other Polish dance types among Bach's works. Instead, having mined theoretical accounts for rhythmic patterns and cadence types associated with the polonaise (and, to a lesser extent, the mazur), he finds the dance wherever one or more of these musical elements appear, even if other markers of the style are absent. Thus mapping the theoretical onto the practical is treated as a wholly unproblematic exercise – we are repeatedly assured that movements are in 'full accordance' (p. 128) or 'full compliance' (p. 135) with theory – even if the 'Polishness' of some music is less than self-evident. In this respect it is telling that Marburg himself was not entirely sure how to account for pieces that are not meant for dancing and are 'only roughly in the Polish style' ('nur ohngefähr in der pohlischen Schreibart').<sup>4</sup> He gives as examples songs by Franz Benda and Carl Heinrich Graun. For Paczkowski, though, these songs are 'essentially vocal polonaises' and the composers and their publishers 'neglected to mention this fact, presumably because they assumed that their contemporaries would easily recognize the Polish style' (p. 53). Or perhaps Benda, Graun, and others realized, along with Marburg, that the music occupies an ambiguous stylistic space. In any event, Paczkowski does not explain what exactly makes these songs so recognizably Polish.

Bach's three instrumental polonaises are the subject of Chapter 3. Referring to Telemann's recollection of hearing violins tuned a third higher than usual at Polish inns, Paczkowski claims that the similarly-tuned *violino piccolo* in Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 (which, significantly, does not play in the fourth-movement 'Poloinesse') would have had a 'peculiarly Polish' (p. 95)

4 Paczkowski renders this phrase as 'only in a kind of Polish style', but it seems clear that Marburg means a style that is less than fully Polish.

association for Bach's listeners. Moreover, the instrument's unexpected presence in a concerto is understandable as 'an intentional nod to the stylized folklore then fashionable' (p. 96) at the Dresden court – though there is no evidence connecting the work with Dresden.<sup>5</sup> Although the inclusion of a polonaise episode in a large minuet *en rondeau* structure may seem incongruous, Paczkowski finds it appropriate in a work dedicated to the Margrave of Brandenburg, 'given the polonaise's ceremonial dimension' (p. 97).

The famous polonaise in the Overture-suite in B minor, BWV 1067, is, in Paczkowski's view, a late addition to a piece that served as Bach's 'musical reminder that Saxony had a royal sovereign and that he himself was the latter's titular *Hof-Compositeur*' (p. 106). In arguing this point, Paczkowski imagines a Cöthen origin for an early version of the suite while accepting Irving Godt's hypothesis that the polonaise must have been written at a different time from the other movements because of its contrasting melodic and harmonic content. This reading of the polonaise's origin and significance cannot be dismissed out of hand, but neither can it stand on its own

5 Paczkowski does not make reference to Malcolm Boyd's alternative explanation for the inclusion of the *violino piccolo* in Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, one that accounts especially for the unconventional nature of the solo part in the third movement. Boyd argues persuasively that this movement originated as a lost chorus with parts for SATB voices, which were then fitted to the *violino piccolo* through the use of multiple stops. The later choral version of the movement in the 1726 cantata *Vereinigte Zwietracht der wechselnden Saiten*, BWV 207, presumably followed this earlier model as well (or else was reverse-engineered from the concerto version). See M. Boyd, *Bach: The Brandenburg Concertos*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 60–70. Paczkowski also does not mention Bach's other two uses of the *violino piccolo*, in the cantatas *Herr Christ, der ein'ge Gottes-Sohn*, BWV 96, and *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, BWV 140. Might these have carried Polish associations of their own?

feet without taking into account more recent research by Joshua Rifkin,<sup>6</sup> whose extensive study of the suite's genesis is cited but, curiously enough, not engaged with in any meaningful way.

In his nine case studies of Bach's vocal music, Paczkowski offers rich accounts of the works' genesis and the political or theological significance of their texts. These serve to support his identifications of the works' Polish style based on eighteenth-century theoretical writings. First up is the motet *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied*, BWV 225 (Chapter 4). Of the various hypotheses regarding the work's origin, Paczkowski finds that of Konrad Ameln most attractive, no doubt because it places the work's premiere on 12 May 1727, when August II, king of Poland and elector of Saxony, visited Leipzig following his recovery from a life-threatening injury. Paczkowski accordingly reads the motet's chorale and aria texts as a 'suitable theological commentary on the king's recovery' and the work in its entirety as 'an expression of gratitude' (p. 118) for the king's survival. Musically, he finds the first movement to contain 'rhythmic patterns and structures typical of the polonaise' (p. 125) along with characteristic 'feminine' caesuras and cadences. Fair enough, though it must be said that Bach uses these very same elements as tropes of joyful expression in numerous other vocal works. Try as I might, I cannot hear the motet's first movement as a polonaise in the absence of other musical features associated particularly with that dance.

A similar methodology informs discussions of five sacred works in Chapters 5 and 6. To my ears the double-choir piece *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft* (BWV 50), the opening choruses of *Lobe den Herrn*,

*meine Seele* (BWV 69a), *Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren* (BWV 137), and *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* (BWV 190), and the third movement of *Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren*, are all unconvincing as Polish dances. The first chorus of *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele*, in fact, is identified by Paczkowski as a polonaise based almost solely on the presence of the questionable two-sixteenths–four-eighths rhythmic pattern discussed above. Throughout his analyses, he maintains an unshakable conviction that these references to the Polish style were both deliberate on the composer's part and instantly recognizable by his listeners. Speaking of *Nun ist das Heil und die Kraft*, he claims that 'to suitably portray this extraordinary image of the heavenly court and God's royal splendor in BWV 50, Bach deploys the stylistic tropes used in court music at the time. Accordingly, he chose polonaise rhythms, which in Bach's time in Saxony functioned as a musical shorthand for royal majesty [...] [T]he polonaise rhythms found throughout the score of BWV 50 can on no account be treated as accidental. Besides the secret number symbolism, Bach was using a more open and obvious kind of symbolism that would have been picked up by any audience at the time' (p. 160).

Yet the case advanced here for the polonaise as 'a musical shorthand for royal majesty' rests mainly on identifying musical settings of laudatory texts as examples of the dance. And to the extent that one finds these identifications less than obvious, one must wonder whether Bach's audiences would have caught on any more easily. On the other hand, the alto aria *Lobe, Zion, deinen Gott* from *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* is plausible as a 'model example of a German vocal polonaise' (p. 135), as is the tenor aria *Glück und Segen sind bereit* from *Erwünschtes Freudenlicht*, BWV 184. Revealingly, however, the two-sixteenths-

6 'The *B-minor Flute Suite* deconstructed: New light on Bach's Overture BWV 1067', in: *Bach Perspectives*, vol. 6, ed. Gregory Butler, Urbana 2007, pp. 1–98.

-four-eighths rhythmic figure is practically absent from both arias.

Chapters 7 and 8 address the Polish style in two movements of the Mass in B minor, BWV 232. The 'Quoniam' of the 1733 *Missa* (BWV 232<sup>1</sup>) is a polonaise, Paczkowski argues, thanks to the by-now-familiar 'polonaise' rhythms found in the bassoons and continuo. That Bach might have been referring to the dance in accordance with Dresden court practice is suggested by numerous settings of this text in masses by Johann Adolf Hasse, Johann David Heinichen, Johann Gottlieb Naumann, Joseph Schuster, and Jan Dismas Zelenka, all claimed by Paczkowski to be polonaises. He provides three excerpts of movements from this repertory (Examples 7.3–5) but dispenses with any commentary on the music, as if the Polishness of each excerpt is self-evident (it is not to me). Also containing 'polonaise' rhythms is the 'Et resurrexit' chorus, which, as Klaus Häfner has observed, musically resembles the concluding 'Réjouissance' of the Overture-suite in D major, BWV 1069. Paczkowski notes that the suite movement also has polonaise rhythms, but stops short of calling it an actual polonaise. Could this be another instance of a rhythmic vocabulary signifying joyful sentiments rather than (or perhaps in addition to) the polonaise? Although notated in 3/4, the suite movement is filled with the hemiola effects that are common in Telemann's passepieds (usually notated in 3/8); thus it might be heard as referring to the passepied as much as to the polonaise.

The book's final four chapters address the Polish style in Bach's secular cantatas, and it is here that the polonaise accrues additional meanings for Paczkowski, beyond its supposed function as a symbol of royal power and God's majesty. The 'Aria tempo di Polonaise' (*Grosser Flemming*) in *O angenehme Melodei*, BWV 210a, written for Count Joachim Friedrich von Flemming, governor of Leipzig and the

city's official representative of the Dresden court, may have had a royal association in this particular instance, but as Paczkowski shows in admirable detail, the cantata was parodied on numerous earlier and later occasions, some for unknown purposes. Perhaps the aria really was inspired by 'the wild popularity of polonaises in Saxony, the symbolic connotations of the dance with royal power, and its associations with the courtly ceremonies in Dresden' (p. 237). Or might the diverse uses to which it was put demonstrate instead that, for Bach, sometimes a polonaise was just a polonaise?

A similar case is the polonaise duet *Zweig und Äste in Zerreiſet, zersprenget, zertrümmert die Gruft*, BWV 205, written for the name day of the Leipzig professor August Friedrich Müller in 1725. As a justification for Bach's use of the Polish style here, Paczkowski considers the cantata to allegorize the professor's promotion of 'the science of wisdom as applied to the concept of the ideal ruler, which provided ideological support for the absolutist leanings of the king of Poland elector of Saxony' (p. 244). But such a reading seems to place an undue symbolic burden on this unassuming duet, in which Pomona brings Müller fruits of the harvest and Zephyr offers 'whispering' breezes. Again, the duet reappears in parodied form in several other cantatas – for the coronation of King August III (*Blast Lärmen, ihr Feinde! Verstärket die Macht*, BWV 205a), for the wedding of a Leipzig merchant (*Vergnügte Pleiſſen-Stadt*, BWV 216), and for an unknown occasion (*Erwählte Pleiſſen-Stadt*, BWV 216a). Paczkowski finds these diverse deployments of the polonaise consistently symbolic, 'as Bach uses the same polonaise music to honour an academic theorist of absolutism, a king, and the royal city of Leipzig'. Thus for him the dance comes to stand for the king's right to rule and his dominion (as elector rather than king) outside of Poland.

Bach exploits the humorous potential of the polonaise and mazur in his 'Peasant Cantata', *Mer hahn en neue Oberkeet*, BWV 212. Paczkowski appropriately quotes Scheibe on the Polish style's suitability for expressing satirical sentiments, and observes that this notion appears to derive from Telemann – though without citing relevant material, such as the song *Sanfter Schlaf*, TVWV 25:63, characterized by the composer himself as an embodiment of the 'comic Polish seriousness' ('die lustige polnische Ernsthaftigkeit'). As has long been recognized, several arias in Bach's cantata are indeed in the Polish style. Paczkowski identifies *Ach, es schmeckt doch gar zu gut* and *Gib, Schöne, viel Söhne* as mazurs, while *Das ist galant, es sprich niemand von den caducken Schocken* and *Fünffzig Taler bares Geld* are both polonaises. But the earthy *Ach, Herr Schösser* does not impress me as having 'a characteristic mazur rhythm' (p. 279).

Given the rustic-canonic/low-high style of this last aria, one wonders: Are the two sides of the Polish style – symbolizing power and majesty on the one hand, and facilitating humorous or satirical sentiments on the other – mutually exclusive? That is, might Bach have intentionally played with the style's serious and comic associations, as Telemann did? Should we be on the

lookout for an element of satire among the polonaise-powered invocations of royal might in panegyric secular cantatas? And does the Peasant Cantata conspire to send up the sense of magnificence associated with the polonaise? Or if Telemann saw Polish music as 'comic-serious', did Bach instead regard it as 'comic *and* serious'? Finally, to what extent might Bach have regarded the Polish style as an expression of the Other – as an exotic embodiment of 'barbaric beauty' (to once again quote Telemann) from an untamed land that is capable of disrupting the order of things? These are some of the questions I believe worth asking of a musical style that can strike very different expressions, and of a composer who was apparently comfortable wearing these masks. If such questions go unasked by Paczkowski, he nevertheless offers a fresh perspective on Bach's music, especially the occasional vocal works. Investigations of the Polish style as a theoretical construct, source of entertainment, and potential bearer of political and satirical associations all invite us to reconsider Bach's motivations as a composer and, not incidentally, the ways in which we choose to view him.

Steven Zohn  
Temple University

#### SZYMON PACZKOWSKI'S COMMENTS ON STEVEN ZOHN'S REVIEW

I am grateful to the *Muzyka* quarterly for turning to one of the world's leading experts on Telemann for a review of my book, and to Steven Zohn for what is certainly a close and thorough reading from his own perspective. I appreciate this detailed review, and I accept its polemical nature, the occasional causticity notwithstanding. I believe the review offers a good starting point for a broader debate on the Polish style in Baroque music.

Without going into the details of Zohn's critique, by which I find myself honestly unable to be persuaded (in particular when it comes to the interpretation of theoretical sources, statistical patterns relating to polonaise rhythms, or some of Zohn's summaries of my ideas, like my supposed contention that music in the Polish style was 'essentially monolithic' in eighteenth-century theory and practice, a claim I never actually make), I also think it is necessary