



Dispersed musical treasures – the music autographs of Beethoven and Bach at the Berlin State Library

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Abstract:

The Second World War has changed a lot: Collections have also been displaced since then belonging to the cultural heritage such as music autographs from Bach, Mozart and Beethoven which are stored at the Berlin State Library. The autograph of the Symphony No. 9 by Ludwig van Beethoven is also part of them. The score finds itself completely with voices and sketches in Berlin – apart from a few sheets which are saved at the Beethoven-Haus (Beethoven's House) in Bonn and at the National Library in Paris today.

After Beethoven's death, Anton Schindler acquired the corpus of the Symphony No. 9 with 137 sheets who sold it to the Königliche Bibliothek zu Berlin in 1846; then further 67 sheets followed in 1901 which were the missing parts of the finale. After outbreak of the Second World War, the autograph of the Symphony No. 9 was divided in three parts and passed to different places for safer storage due to imminent air raids.

Parts of it came to Silesia, after the end of war henceforth belonging to Polish territory, later to Cracow at the Jagiellonian Library. Other fascicles returned to the library building at Unter den Linden in 1946. A third part returned to the Berlin State Library – Prussian Cultural Heritage in West Berlin.

During a state visit in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1977, Beethoven's autograph of the Symphony No. 9 was passed back to the GDR and thus to the State Library in East Berlin by the Polish government amongst others, in addition some autographs from Bach and Mozart. These pieces originated from the collections of the former Prussian State Library (Preußische Staatsbibliothek) which were kept in Cracow. This transaction raised hope that this could be a good start for a further restitution of Prussian holdings but the hope was not fulfilled. At least, almost all parts of the autograph of the Symphony No. 9 found themselves in one place again. However, they were split in two halves in a divided city. Only after the German reunification the two Berlin State Libraries were consolidated under the roof of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in 1992. When the collections of the Music Department could again be sorted in our library at Unter den Linden in 1997, the split collections became a unit at last. When it was included in the UNESCO List of World

Heritage, the score has already been digitized in 2002 and posted on the Internet. It is accessible under <http://beethoven.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/index.html>

The autographs from Johann Sebastian Bach also belong to the most valuable treasures of the Berlin State Library whose manuscripts are in Berlin up to 80 %. During the Second World War, these manuscripts were also displaced from the library to assumed safer places. A changeful history has mostly reunified them in the State Library except of eleven shelf-marks which are still at the Jagiellonian Library in Cracow. A project that is supervised and financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) plans to consolidate all existing Bach autographs virtually.

For this reason, the State Library now develops a model for the team work with the co-op partners in Leipzig and Dresden by which the collections stored at different sites should be reunified virtually on the Internet independent of time and site. The national as well as the international Bach autographs which will be integrated in this process (for example those which are still stored in Cracow)

http://staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/deutsch/abteilungen/musikabteilung/dfg_bach_digital/

Ladies and gentlemen,

cold light, maximum security steel strong rooms and a permanent temperature of 18 degrees – these are not necessarily the first associations that come to mind when one thinks of Johann Sebastian Bach or Ludwig van Beethoven. For me as Director General of the Berlin State Library, however, this is everyday life.

While the works of Bach and Beethoven are cherished and admired as brilliant documents of European musical history throughout the world, the State Library's job is to ideally archive and provide this treasure of humankind.

These autographs, however, have seen a lot of change since they were first produced: Europe's political developments have left their mark especially on the history of the collection of the Berlin State Library; a mark with which we are still confronted today and whose implications to remedy is our everyday work.

Particularly many changes occurred through World War II: A great number of the most precious treasures, which form part of the world heritage today, were moved, such as the Berlin State Library's music autographs of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. They also included the autograph of Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Today, its full score and rough drafts are located in Berlin – excluding a few pages which are kept at the Beethoven house in Bonn and in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

After Beethoven's death in 1827, the main body of the Ninth Symphony, comprising 137 sheets, came to be owned by Anton Schindler, a musician and music writer associated with Beethoven, who sold it to the Royal Library in Berlin in 1846. Another 67 sheets, the still missing parts of the finale, followed in 1901. After the beginning of World War II – due to imminent air raids – the autograph of the Ninth Symphony was divided into three parts and moved to different locations in 1941 – to Furstenstein in Silesia, to Altmarrin/Mierzyn in Pomerania and to Beuron Abbey in the Upper Danube Valley. While the main body were brought from Silesia – which was Polish territory now – to the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow soon after the war had ended, parts of the finale returned – via several sites – from Altmarrin/Mierzyn in Pomerania to the State Library's location Unter den Linden in East Berlin in 1946. The third part, which had remained unscathed during the war at Beuron Abbey, was brought to Tübingen, from which it was returned to the State Library / Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in West Berlin only more than twenty years after the war in 1967.

During a state visit to the GDR in 1977, the Polish government returned pieces of the former Prussian State Library's collection now kept in Krakow to the GDR and hence to the State Library in East Berlin; among others, the main body of the autograph of the Ninth Symphony as well as autographs of Bach and Mozart. Hopes which arose then that this might be the beginning of further returns of the Prussian collections have not been fulfilled. But all the same, almost all parts of the Ninth Symphony had been gathered in one place now – in Berlin. However, they were in both parts of a separated city. It was not until after German reunification that both Berlin State Libraries were united under the umbrella of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in 1992. When the collections of the music department were brought together in the State Library's location Unter den Linden in 1997, also those collections which had once been torn apart were united again. No other work of symphonic literature has developed such a broad and complex reception as Ludwig van Beethoven's work of this genre. By incorporating the human voice into a symphonic work, it presents a milestone, a mark which all later musicians up to this date are measured against. Its political significance which it gained after the fall of the wall and the unification of the two German states is also unprecedented for a musical work. It became no less than a symbol of reunification; a contemporary association Beethoven himself might not have understood.

Its inclusion into the list of the UNESCO World Heritage in 2001 is certainly largely due to this political and symbolic role of the Ninth Symphony. All the same, it is a musical work of extraordinary importance. In 2002 already, we digitized the score and made it available on the internet. It can be viewed there at anytime and from any place under the web address via

the homepage of the Berlin State Library (website <http://beethoven.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/index.html>). This is due to a request of the UNESCO program Memory of the World which we were happy to fulfil.

Of equal importance as this autograph of Beethoven are the autographs of Bach – not only for the State Library, where they are kept in great number, but for the cultural heritage of humankind itself. This collection is of unique variety, as it unites some 80 per cent of existing autographs of Bach in one place.

I would like to briefly sketch the history and background of this collection over the past 200 years, too, which originally even initiated the creation of a music collection in the Royal Library at the time.

While in other European libraries, music collections already emerged at the turn of the 19th century, it took a few years longer before the modest basic stock of purchased music became a noteworthy collection in Berlin. And the reason for creating this music collection was none other than Johann Sebastian Bach. The largest part of his estate was left to his second-born son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, who was friends with a wealthy and music-loving collector, Georg Poelchau. After Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach had died, Poelchau acquired the Bach estate which perfectly complemented his own music collection. When Poelchau first offered this collection to the Royal Library in Berlin in 1823, however, it was rejected due to its sheer size, it seemed too large, too expensive. In those days, the value that music presents to a library had not been understood yet, while at the same time, libraries were highly interested in medieval manuscripts, for example. Fortunately, this view changed, and in 1841, when Poelchau's collection was for sale again, its purchase was permitted by the ministry in Berlin. Poelchau's collection was like a thunderbolt: Overnight, almost 3000 music manuscripts had been added to the library's stocks, including Bach and Beethoven, Mozart, Weber, Haydn and Händel. The library thus disposed of autographs of renowned works such as St Matthew Passion, St John Passion and the Christmas Oratorio, which became the centrepiece of an ever-growing collection, housed in the library's building at Bebel Square, finished in 1780.

It is an old saying that riches attract riches; this also applied in a special way to the Bach collection of the Royal Library at the end of the 19th century. Donations of generous patrons and the favour of the responsible ministries, gradually rising national consciousness which held in esteem the cultural heritage – all of this led to a concentration of Bach's original works in Berlin, up until the market for Bach autographs had nearly dried up around the time

of World War I. By then, 80 per cent of preserved Bach autographs were owned by the Royal Library. This had been accomplished first and foremost through the acquisition of complete collections. Yet, it became (and still is) all the more difficult to close the small remaining gaps. Bach autographs are hardly ever offered – and if so, at such dizzying prices which make it difficult, if not impossible, for publicly funded libraries to get a chance. There are, however, modern ways of completing a collection to which I will turn later.

First of all, World War II and above all its implications for the Bach autographs have to be considered. The good news first – nothing was lost from Bach's collection for the heritage of humankind. Whereas in other places, unique cultural documents were burnt or looted, Bach's work escaped destruction. And still, there were decisive changes.

As in the case of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the Prussian State Library also sought to protect its Bach collection. The autographs of the Prussian State Library – the library's name since 1918 – were transferred only a few decades after the collection had been moved to the library's building at Unter den Linden.

From there, three million printed books and all special materials, mostly manuscripts, were moved to regions of the German Reich that seemed relatively safe during the war. A special mechanism was used to evacuate the collection which probably saved much of the material, but which presents us with difficulties still today. This mechanism can best be compared to private investment: nobody would invest his entire capital either in gold or in commodity futures or in annuities. Everybody would instead opt for a healthy mix of industries and risks, just as in the early forties when one tried to find a way to minimize the risk of loss or destruction of the collection. One direct strike on a truck or barge would have been enough to destroy the whole Bach collection within seconds. Thus, in order to diversify the risks, the collection was fragmented, there is no other word for it: a bit of Bach was moved to Beuron Abbey in Southern Germany, a bit of Bach to the castle of Rühstädt in Brandenburg, some more was moved to Altmarrin/Mierzyn in Pomerania, to Furstenstein castle close to Waldenburg/Walbrzych in Lower Silesia and to Banz Abbey North of Bamberg in Upper Franconia. The trucks loaded with 12 to 15 tonnes of books and manuscripts could hardly handle the slope to the Benedictine abbey. After the war, there were two places in the areas of the western Allies to which the collections were brought, including the Bach autographs: the so-called Hessian Library, later the West German Library in Marburg, and the University Library of Tübingen, where one of the most prominent users of the Bach autographs during the 20 years for which the collection was deposited here was the physician, theologian and musician Albert Schweitzer. It was not until decades later that the collections from Marburg

and Tübingen were returned to West Berlin, where they found a new home in the new building of West Berlin's State Library, an architectural work of Hans Scharoun.

The remaining parts of the Bach collection, which were located in the zone occupied by Soviet forces or on territory now belonging to Poland, became subject to the Cold War conflicts. Parts returned to the library premises Unter den Linden and formed part of the collection of the German State Library of the GDR. Whatever was located in the Western zones after the end of the war, found its way into the State Library / Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in West Berlin. And the parts that had been moved to Silesia, those parts of the abundant collection which in the summer of 1945 were located on Silesian territory, were now subject to the Polish administration. And this is the case up until today. Even today, 13 autographs of our Berlin collection remain in the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow, a total of 790 pages of manuscripts. Only once, in May 1977, Poland – by way of exception – left its stance concerning so-called looted art. As a “gift of the Polish people to the people of the GDR”, as it was called at the time, Polish Secretary General Edward Gierek handed over six music autographs of the holdings of the Prussian State Library to Erich Honecker: two autographs of Mozart, two of Beethoven – and two of Bach: a cembalo concerto and a flute sonata. More than 30 years have passed since. Still, important parts of our collection remain under Polish keeping, the collection is regarded – in German eyes – to continue to form part of the possessions of the Berlin State Library; negotiations on its return are being maintained with Poland at government level since 1991.

On the other hand: 13 autographs comprising 790 pages seem little compared to 300 autographs comprising 13,500 pages, which are stored together in perfect harmony in the State Library's vaults since reunification. The manuscripts kept in Krakow are available to researchers, and not a single autograph of Johann Sebastian Bach was destroyed during World War II, which has bereaved us of so many cultural treasures.

Today, knowing the course history took, it is difficult to judge if the decision to diversify the collection, which divided the Bach collection into various segments in the early forties, was wise and correct. Had the Bach autographs been moved to one single place – what would have been the destiny of this location and thus of the Bach collection? Would the whole collection have remained unscathed and been returned to East or West Berlin, would the whole collection have been moved to territory which became Polish after 1945, so that the entire Bach collection would be kept in Krakow today, or would it – as it unfortunately also happened – have fallen victim to flames? It is futile to spend too much time speculating,

because – at least as far as the Bach collection is concerned – the State Library got off with a slap on the wrist during the war.

The responsibility which the State Library assumed with the Bach collection presents a great honor and a commitment we are pleased to make, but it is also a heavy burden which, for quite a long time, we were not sure how to shoulder, as it is our duty to preserve the cultural heritage we have been entrusted with – no easy task if, as is the case with the Bach autographs, the music is losing its note heads. I am sure you are well aware of the problem of ink corrosion in Bach's autographs, so I would like to merely touch upon the truly dramatic damage we are presented with.

It is a well-known fact that Johann Sebastian Bach had very poor eyesight. In order to be able to continue to read his own scores, he made the note heads particularly strong – of all things using just the notorious iron gall ink which is corroding the paper today and makes the note heads simply fall out of it as if it had been hole-punched. Or is the correlation between the bold note heads and Bach's poor eyesight nothing more than a nice legend? Experts are divided on the true cause of this case of ink corrosion – was Bach simply too poor to afford better quality ink, or was it the tradition of iron ore mining in Saxonia and Thuringia which caused the high content of iron in Bach's ink?

Whatever the reason may be – the shattering diagnosis was ink corrosion. The ink oxidized, rusted and corroded the paper. Sometimes, this only concerned a few notes, in other cases, entire parts of a composition. Earlier attempts to restore the paper using chiffon silk and rice starch turned out to be unsuccessful. The sheet as such could be stabilized; this, however, did not stop the chemical decomposition. In 2000, a new paper splitting technique was applied by which a paper sheet is inserted between the recto and the verso to hold the original paper.

Anyone who approaches these music autographs with an unemotional, matter-of-fact stance, may not see the use of saving these original autographs. One might argue that the score is available in thousands of printed copies, and music stores are overflowing with CDs of recordings of the most renowned artists. And of the original autograph, there are photographs, facsimiles and digitized versions of superb quality, ensuring that the original autograph is sufficiently documented for posterity. Why then invest so much effort – and expenses – in saving it? The answer to this question can be put in a nut shell: Because there is a special aura to the original which no reproduction, no matter how sophisticated, could ever offer.

In the meantime - since the first music autographs were purchased in the 19th century as a basis for a music collection, the role of libraries has radically changed. Democratic processes have been introduced which imply for libraries that knowledge is no longer simply stored but made available to everyone, as far as possible. Given the poor state of the autographs, as I described, we have to make every effort to protect them by storing them in a constant climate. Here, too, digitization offers the possibility of making Bach available to everybody: "Bach Digital" is a project funded by the German Research Foundation and managed by the State Library in cooperation with our partners in Dresden and Leipzig. The project was launched one year ago and first results will be available soon on the internet.

The idea of the project is to make available on the internet, free of charge, a digital version of all preserved autographs of Bach's works, the performance notes used and Bach's own hand-written copies of works of other composers. In the future, this central musicological source on which, for generations, philological methods have been developed and tested, will be available on the internet at anytime and from any place. The Bach database at Göttingen, a project also funded by the German Research Foundation, serves as the basis for "Bach Digital", offering metadata and a variety of search options.

Sources that belong together, i.e. also the Bach autographs kept in Krakow today, can thus be reunited at a virtual level. At the same time, the workload for the libraries owning the autographs will be reduced and, above all, the autographs themselves can be better protected, as they will be less frequently used.

The material which was collected laboriously over the years, which survived catastrophic times like both World Wars and the partition of Germany, and which, after German reunification, found its place in the center of the German capital, will thanks to the medial revolution presented by the internet be available to researchers and other interested persons in its entirety anytime all over the world.

Thank you for your attention.