

G. H. STÖLZEL'S *PRACTISCHER BEWEISS*:  
A HITHERTO UNCONSIDERED SOURCE  
FOR J. S. BACH'S FOURTEEN CANONS

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In 1974, Johann Sebastian Bach's personal copy of the print of the *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988) was discovered. It also contained an unknown set of fourteen perpetual puzzle canons on the inner side of the back cover in the composer's own hand entitled "Verschiedene Canones über die ersteren acht Fundamental-Noten vorheriger Arie von J. S. Bach" ("Diverse canons on the first eight notes of the ground of the preceding aria by J. S. Bach"), hereafter referred to as the Fourteen Canons (BWV 1087). The exact date of their composition is not known but it is probable that they were written between ca. 1742 and ca. 1746.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the Fourteen Canons fit neatly into Bach's compositional output in the final decade of his life when he evidently became preoccupied with the writing of canons.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Fourteen Canons also display a number of striking

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<sup>1</sup>Christoph Wolff, "Bach's Handexemplar of the *Goldberg Variations*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 29/2 (1976), 234. Although Yoshitake Kobayashi dates the autograph copy to 1747–1748, he suggests that it is probably a final version of earlier drafts. Yoshitake Kobayashi, "Zur Chronologie der Spätwerke Johann Sebastian Bachs. Kompositions- und Aufführungstätigkeit von 1736 bis 1750," *Bach-Jahrbuch* 74 (1988), 60.

<sup>2</sup>The *Goldberg Variations*, the *Musical Offering* (BWV 1079) and the *Art of Fugue* (BWV 1080) contain numerous canons, that is respectively nine interval canons amongst a total of thirty variations, nine canons, and a canonic fugue interspersed between two ricercars and a trio sonata, and four canons along with fourteen Contrapuncti. The Canonic Variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* (BWV 769) are based entirely on the strictest form of counterpoint. Christoph Wolff provides an enlightening discussion of the inter-relatedness of these late works from various perspectives and identifies the Fourteen Canons as being of crucial significance in determining the focus of Bach's creative energies ("Bach's Handexemplar of the *Goldberg Variations*," 224–41).