

# JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH AND THE “NEW GUSTO” IN MUSIC AROUND 1740<sup>1</sup>

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Already during Johann Sebastian Bach’s own lifetime more and more critical voices accused him of having a style that was artificial and lacking in lightness, emphasizing that while musically educated persons might appreciate his music, mere laymen would hardly do so:

But one also has to admit that for pure [listening] pleasure his music will not do; and a connoisseur who does not understand music will never develop a taste for such a heavy harmony.<sup>2</sup>

A perusal of the “Leipzig (post) newspapers” from the years 1723 through 1750 makes evident the transition from the old to the new *gusto*; specifically, one sees it in the advertisements of compositions just published or in the process of being published. It was a transition that happened literally in front of Bach’s eyes, and one that he no doubt followed with personal interest (after all, some of the “progressive” composers were his pupils); yet it was one in which he himself was not directly involved.

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<sup>1</sup>This article, which first appeared as “Joh. Seb. Bach und der ‘neue Gusto’ in der Musik um 1740,” in *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 72 (1986): 69–79, is reprinted in translation with thanks to the editors for their permission to do so.

<sup>2</sup>From an anonymous letter, dated April 23, 1750, presumably written by the vocalist Filippo Finazzi, published in the Hamburg journal *Freye Urtheile und Nachrichten zum Aufnehmen der Wissenschaften und der Historie überhaupt* (quoted in Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze, eds. *Bach-Dokumente*, 4 vols. [Leipzig: Bach-Archiv, 1963, 1969, 1972, 1979]: 2, no. 604).