

TATLOW'S BACH AND BACH'S SIGNATURES IN THE *GOLDBERG VARIATIONS*

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In the following paper I propose to show that Bach consistently employs figures of fourteen notes throughout the *Goldberg Variations*. In several instances, I will highlight figures of forty-one notes. I will argue that these figures were inserted deliberately—not accidentally—with conscious intent on the part of the composer to stamp his name indelibly in his work (the name Bach equaling 14 in its letter-number equivalencies, and J. S. Bach equaling 41).

My hypothesis, of course, is closely bound up with ideas and theories first proposed and developed by Friedrich Smend in the middle of the last century. As summarized by Malcolm Boyd, those ideas included Smend's view regarding the intentionality of the fourteen notes of the canonic parts in the canon in the Hausmann portrait, the fourteen buttons visible in that portrait, and the fourteen notes in the first lines of the organ chorale, *Vor deinem Thron* (BWV 668), with a total of forty-one notes in the whole of the chorale melody. Boyd also observes that Smend's ideas "have been pursued with more vigor than discretion by many of his followers, sometimes to the point of absurdity."¹

Perhaps it is only natural that when the development of any theory reaches a point of absurdity, a reaction inevitably follows. Such was the case with Ruth Tatlow's *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet*, an energetic rebuttal of Smend published in 1991.² In her introduction to that work, Tatlow nicely illustrates the absurd state of affairs that had been reached, citing, for example, discussions

¹Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983), 222–23.

²Ruth Tatlow, *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.