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The organ and „Kunstreligion“ – A Fatal liasion

Orgle in »religija umetnosti« – Usodna zveza

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IZVLEČEK

ABSTRACT

Na začetku 19. stoletja so mladi nemški intelektualci svojo pozornost usmerili na navidezno zastarel in nemoderen instrument ter ga začeli zavzeto sprejemati. Rezultat je zanimiva in nenavadna zveza med častitljivim starim liturgičnim instrumentom, orglami, in novim ter izvirnim konceptom, namreč konceptom religije umetnosti, ki zajema tako religijo kot umetnost.

At the beginning of the 19th century young German intellectuals turn their attention to a seemingly outdated and oldfashioned instrument and start embracing it wholeheartedly. The outcome is an exciting and unusual liasion between a reverend old liturgical instrument, the organ, and a novel and original concept, namely that of Kunstreligion, encompassing both religion and art.

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At the end of the 18th century churches in Germany suffered from a steady loss of church goers. Religion lost its hold on society yet did not completely disappear. Out of the old traditional institutions new and less visible forms grew. For the middle classes it was art that took over the role of religion as a guidance to God.¹ The protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher was one of the first who extensively described the relationship of art and religion: neither art nor religion, he says, have to do with knowledge or doing, but with emotion and both originate in the absolute. Also, both have suffered from the dominance of rationality advocated in the Age of Enlightenment. Therefore he concludes that right now there needs to be a unity between inner awareness and the perception

¹ See Jan Brachmann, *Kunst – Religion – Krise: Der Fall Brahms* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003) (Musiksoziologie Band 12), 72-118.

of the world. This can be accomplished with the help of art as a path to one's inner self and by converging art and religion. No one has been able to put it more precisely with his dictum: Die wahre Ausübung der Kunst ist religiös.²

Schleiermacher's idea was taken up by many of his contemporaries and led to a religion that became increasingly aestheticized and secularized disassociating itself from liturgy, institutions and formal structures. The philosophical concept of Kunstreligion emerged. There are two aspects to this concept: on the one hand it is critical of religion but on the other hand a sincere wish for a new and deep understanding of religion arises. Not only theologians and philosophers but also writers such as Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck started reconsidering the relationship of art, especially of music, and religion.

*Sie kommen durch ganz andere Wege zu unserm Inneren, als durch die Hülfe der Worte, sie bewegen auf einmal, auf eine wunderbare Weise, unser ganzes Wesen, und drängen sich in jede Nerve und jeden Blutstropfen, der uns angehört. Die eine dieser wundervollen Sprachen redet nur Gott; die andere reden nur wenige Auserwählte unter den Menschen, die er zu seinen Lieblingen gesalbt hat. Ich meine: die Natur und die Kunst.*³

*Wenn alle die inneren Schwingungen unsrer Herzensfibern, - die zitternden der Freude, die stürmenden des Entzückens, die hochklopfenden Pulse verzehrender Anbetung, - wenn alle die Sprache der Worte, als das Grab der innern Herzenswuth, mit einem Ausruf zersprengen, - dann gehen sie unter fremdem Himmel, in den Schwingungen holdseliger Harfensaiten, wie in einem jenseitigen Leben in verklärter Schönheit hervor, und feyern als Engelgestalten ihre Auferstehung.*⁴

They stressed the fact that Kunstreligion is something genuinely new and does not fit into the existing concept of art solely as a contributing factor in referential systems that serve other purposes. It is no wonder, then, that these thoughts favoured the idea of absolute music, in which music becomes autonomous from functional contexts and therefore becomes »art par excellence« as Mario Vieira de Carvalho pointed out in his paper on *Musical autonomy as a referential system*⁵. His point was that art as philosophy is the new paradigm of autonomous music and the change of paradigm in the structure and the function of musical communication leads to the emergence of a new self-referential system. Furthermore musical meaning is no longer subsumed in the codes of other communication systems such as, for example, those of liturgy.⁶

I'd like to add that this development posed a great challenge to composers and interpreters of church music, especially organists. The question was: How is the organ to be interpreted in this new light? Has it become a liturgical dinosaur, doomed to extinction? Or will the enthusiasm of the German romantics concerning Kunstreligion offer the possibility of a new approach to this ancient instrument?

² See Friedrich Schleiermacher, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007), 113–116.

³ Wilhelm H. Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), 61.

⁴ Wilhelm H. Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 82.

⁵ Mario Vieira de Carvalho, "Musical autonomy as a referential system", in, ed. by Matjaž Barbo, Thomas Hochradner (Wien: Holitzer, 2012), 1–20.

⁶ See *ibid.*, 19.

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It can be safely assumed that the old referential frame which church musicians were wont to rely on started breaking up. Religion turned into a more and more private affair which among other things triggered the disestablishment of the profession of church musician.⁷ The symptoms of this decline were already mentioned by Johann J. Quantz in his publication *Versuch, einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*⁸. Johann N. Forkel, too, complained that “Organisten nicht mehr im Stand seien eine Musik zu extemporieren, die wenigstens den Affekt mit dem Gemeindelied gemein habe”⁹. In churches organists even fell back on popular music taken from operettas and operas, which naturally aroused the anger of the clergy. The musical education of organists deteriorated. In addition employment as a church musician became less and less attractive particularly as the pay was poor at best. This in turn lowered expectations concerning performance and brought about a decline in daily usage.¹⁰ At the same time, let’s not forget the general development of music: the rise of the middle class brought about a shift of music performance in churches to the concert hall - the referential frame for music has now definitely changed. Within a very short time the focus on public concerts led to the strengthening and predominance of absolute music and made the formerly well-established structures obsolete. The demand for sophisticated music was met in public concerts, where even sacred church music was staged. It is not surprising then, that citizens of Berlin demanded that churches be opened for musical entertainment, just to have more room for concerts.¹¹

3

The young philosophers and artists of the times were very enthusiastic about these changes and expressed their ideas in different ways. No artist was able to capture the spirit of the Romantic Age as well as Caspar David Friedrich. In his works of art Caspar David Friedrich does not merely aim at beauty but at infinity, which in last consequence leads to God. As mentioned before, this path to your inner self is also described by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who explains that music leads to the core of your being. A similar idea is expressed by the writer E.T.A. Hoffmann, who declares infinity to be the nature of music. It is music in particular that takes you to these unfathomable and inexpressible depths.¹²

⁷ See Friedrich Blume, *Geschichte der evangelischen Kirchenmusik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965), 219–221.

⁸ See J. J. Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (...) (reprint Leipzig: Bärenreiter, 1983), 329–330.

⁹ J.N. Forkel, *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben: Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: 1802), 24.

¹⁰ See Michael Maul, “„aber sey auch seiner werth!“ – Überlegungen zum Bild des Organistenstandes im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert, in „Diess herrliche, imponierende Instrument“. *Die Orgel im Zeitalter Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys*, ed. by Anselm Hartinger, Christoph Wolff, Peter Wollny (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf und Härtel, 2011), (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Bach-Rezeption Band 3), 245–257.

¹¹ See Carl Friedrich Zelter, *Erste Denkschrift* (Brief vom 28. 9. 1803 an Staatsminister von Hardenberg), quoted in Bernhard Schmidt, *Lied – Kirchenmusik – Predigt im Festgottesdienst Friedrich Schleiermachers. Zur Rekonstruktion seiner liturgischen Praxis*, Berlin, Schleiermacher Archiv 20, 2002, 109.

¹² See Wilhelm Seidel, “Absolute Musik und Kunstreligion”, in *Musik und Religion*, ed. by Helga de la Motte-Haber (Laaber, 1995), 106–111.

Furthermore Friedrich W. Riedel, “Evangelische Kirchenmusik im Spiegel musikästhetischer Schriften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts”, in *Neues musikwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 12 (2004): 79–94.

It is remarkable that the organ became connected with the ideas of infinity and transcendency in all areas of art. In Robert Schumann's *Haus- und Lebensregeln* we can find the following:

*Gehst du an einer Kirche vorbei und hörst du Orgel darin spielen, so gehe hinein und höre zu. Wird es dir gar so wohl, dich selbst auf die Orgelbank setzen zu dürfen, so versuche deine kleinen Finger und staune vor der Allgewalt der Musik.*¹³

Others felt the same way. The philosopher Friedrich T. Vischer marked:

*Die Orgel sei das rechte Organ für eine Musik, aus welcher dem Menschen ein Höheres als er selbst, ein Ansichseiendes, Substantielles, Universales entgegentönen soll.*¹⁴

This reawakened interest in the organ went hand in hand with efforts to renew church music, focusing especially on the use of chorals. Schleiermacher for his part felt committed to support this renaissance, in particular as it coincided with his concept of Kunstreligion, bringing together music and religion. First of all he acquired a small organ to accompany the singers in his church. Also, it was his aim to enrich church services with music by bringing in all sorts of unconventional instruments. Furthermore he urged that the repertoire be enlarged. Doubtlessly this can be seen as an attempt to strengthen churches in times of secularisation by being host to music and art and thereby binding the philosophical notion of Kunstreligion to the institutional church.¹⁵

In fact the actual liaison of traditional church music and the main trend of romantic thinking seemed to take place outside of church walls. The Berliner Singakademie founded by Johann Fasch is the most obvious example. Its repertoire was limited to sacred music, mainly polyphonic. This academy, however, was not identical with a church community, being not indebted to the service, but can be taken as the voice and expression of the middle class citizen. Correspondingly it became very popular to further and promote one's spiritual growth through interpreting sacred music – outside of churches and away from church authorities. Therefore performances of the Singakademie soon came to be celebrated as an expression of both true religion and true art:

*Kirchenmusiken kennen wir im Grunde nur dem Nahmen nach. Das vortreffliche Oratorium von Ramler und Graun, der Tod Jesu, ist die einzige Musik dieser Art, welche wir einmal des Jahrs zu hören bekommen. Will man sich in Berlin in diesem Fache einen ächten Künstlergenuss verschaffen, so ist der einzige Weg dazu, sich zu der von dem verdienstvollen Fasch gestifteten, Singakademie Zutritt zu verschaffen. Es ist wahrlich im höchsten Grade interessant ein beynahe aus hundert Personen bestehendes Chor zu hören, welches die schwersten vielstimmigen Gesänge mit einer Reinheit und Präcision executirt, welche allen Glauben übertrifft.*¹⁶

13 Robert Schumann, *Musikalische Haus- und Lebensregeln: Faksimile mit Übertragung und Textabdruck* (Sinzig: studio, 2002), 30–31.

14 F.T. Vischer, *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen* (reprint Hildesheim: Fischer, 1975), 324.

15 See Ilsabe Seibt, *Friedrich Schleiermacher und das Berliner Gesangbuch von 1829* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht Gm, 1998). (Veröffentlichungen zur Liturgik, Hymnologie und theologischen Kirchenmusikforschung 34).

Furthermore Bernhard Schmidt, *Lied – Kirchenmusik - Predigt im Festgottesdienst Friedrich Schleiermachers: Zur Rekonstruktion seiner musikalischen Praxis*, Berlin, Schleiermacher-Archiv 20, 2002.

16 AMZ 1800, Sp. 585–588, quoted in Christoph-Hellmut Mahling, "Zum Musikbetrieb Berlins und seinen Institutionen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts", in *Studien zur Musikgeschichte Berlins im frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Carl Dahlhaus (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1980), (Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts 56), 30.

Fanny Mendelssohn described this in a very impressive way:

*Der überfüllte Saal gab einen Anblick wie eine Kirche, die tiefste Stille, die feierlichste Andacht herrschte in der Versammlung, man höre nur einzelne unwillkürlich Äußerungen des tief erregten Gefühls.*¹⁷

And what about the organ? Is this instrument bound to remain in the subservient role of accompaniment although it was acclaimed as the most transcendental instrument of all by many prominent thinkers of the time?

4

Talking about organ music in the first half of the 19th century is unthinkable without mentioning Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. He is the first to achieve a combination of traditional choral music with contemporary musical developments, such as the sonata or the *Charakterstück*. This resulted in an exciting new form – the organ sonata, which offered a completely new way of handling and interpreting this instrument.¹⁸ This new approach was enthusiastically embraced in the very first review in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Organists were seen as being torn between profanity and spirituality, which led to confusion about the general direction of the organ and its music. Two kinds of organ music could now be made out: traditional organ music that used to be exclusively an expression of institutionalised religion, mainly represented by Johann Sebastian Bach and, on the other hand, the music of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy:

Die Sonatenform auf die Orgel übertragen – was heißt das? Fragt die besonnene Kritik. Soll die Weltlichkeit damit ausgesprochen sein – oder die Ausführlichkeit – oder die Virtuosität – oder die Gliederung? [...] Ihr ist eigenthümlich, dass sie ein größeres ganzes Tonbild in abgeschlossener Freiheit, ohne andere Tendenz als das Tönen und Tonbildern selbst darstelle; und hierin ist sie von Bach's Präludien und Fugen für die Orgel unterschieden, da diese immer die bestimmte Tendenz des Kirchlichen vor und hinter sich haben, d.h. immer als Eingang, Zwischenspiel, Ausgang die Empfindung frommer Herzen begleiten sollen, niemals aber die eigentliche schweifende, doch selbständige Freiheit eines musikalischen Concertes annehmen. Es scheint nicht, dass zu Bach's Zeit eigene Orgel-Concerte stattgefunden haben: auch bedurfte es deren nicht, um das Volk in die Kirche zu locken. Von dieser Seite angesehen wäre das außerkirchliche Element bei M. entschieden ausgesprochen, da diese größeren Gebilde durchaus concertartig sind. Aber es giebt noch vieles Heilige, was darum noch nicht kirchlich ist; und auf diesem Standpunkte stellt M. auch hier wie im Paulus, minder in den älteren Orgelfugen, deren schöne zweite näher an die Kirche anklingt. Heilige (vielleicht besser: geistliche), nicht kirchliche Töne – man kann sie das eigene Gebiet unserer Zeit nennen, und darin einigen Trost finden zum Ersatz des Reinkirchlichen, das uns verschwunden,

¹⁷ Quoted in Arnd Richter, *Mendelssohn: Leben – Werke – Dokumente* (Mainz: Atlantis Musikbuch Verlag, 1994), 122.

¹⁸ See Arnfried Edler, "Die neue Orgelmusik und die Wandlungen des Gattungsgefüges", in *Gattungen der Musik für Tasteninstrumente, Teil 3: Von 1830 bis zur Gegenwart* (Laaber: Laaber, 2004), (Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen 7, 3), 131–137. Furthermore Hermann J. Busch, "Es kommt ... auf richtige Wahl der Register sehr viel an". Zur Orgelpraxis Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys", in *Zur deutschen Orgelmusik des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Hermann J. Busch, Michael Heinemann (Sinzig: studio, 2000), (Studien zur Orgelmusik 1), 138–146.

womit wir keineswegs bloß das Typische, Confessionelle, Priesterliche bezeichnen wollen – nur das unvermischt-abgeschlossene Genügen im Durchwallen seliger Räume, die der Lärm des äußeren Lebens nicht rührt. Dieses letztere nun finden wir begreiflicher Weise so wenig in Mendelssohn wie in unserem Zeitalter; und außer dem Zeitalter zu stehen ist ein Märchen der lügenhaften Weisheit [...]. Also machen wir diese weltlichen An- und Zwischenklänge unserm Tondichter nicht zum Vorwurf, und untersuchen nur, wie weit er gewusst hat, dieselben dem Heiligen dienstbar zu machen.¹⁹

It is Mendelssohn's accomplishment to create the organ sonata which elates organ music to a level of spirituality without necessarily being in accordance with the referential frame of the church. The liberation of the genre and its orientation towards the newly established system of autonomous music is thereby fulfilled: the choral as the symbol for sacred music is now combined with the virtuosity of the sonata, and thereby its liturgical function is no longer central. Yet its deeply religious origin has a profound impact on the exclusively profane sonata. It is this new type of the organ sonata, incorporating both the wordly sonata and the religious choral, that henceforth can be found in concert halls.

This liaison was definitely fertile: Mendelssohn's success in England as an interpreter of his own organ music and that of Bach are evidence of a growing popularity of this instrument.²⁰ Huge instruments were built in town halls and concert halls all around England and the continent. Moreover later composers of the 19th century were inspired by Mendelssohn's revolutionary new ideas and developed new forms of the organ sonata, like the phantasy sonata and the organ symphony. So, despite having its roots in the church the organ conquered the concert halls.

5

The newly established concept of Kunstreligion which developed parallel to the idea of absolute music changed musicians' perception of the organ and its traditional usage. As a result the organ was employed more and more in concert halls besides remaining a liturgical instrument. The integration of the organ in the public sphere, the combination of the choral and the sonata, the experience of spirituality in concert halls were hailed as milestones. Looking back, however, this development did not turn out quite as successful as originally thought. The hold of the church on the organ never seems to have been completely severed. In Prussia it was the King himself, William IV., who bound the organ to liturgy by enforcing the Prussian Agenda, which was an attempt at a comprehensive reform of church music.²¹ This is one reason why new ways of treating

¹⁹ Eduard Krüger, "Mendelssohns neueste Werke", in *NZfM* 24 (1846): 2, quoted in Cordelia Miller, *Virtuosität und Kirchlichkeit: Deutsches Orgelkonzertwesen im 19. Jahrhundert* (Köln: Dohr, 2010), (Musicologia 7), 65.

²⁰ See Wm. A. Little, "Mendelssohn in Birmingham 1837 und 1840 – der Komponist als Organist", in „*Diess herrliche, imponierende Instrument*“. *Die Orgel im Zeitalter Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdys*, ed. by Anselm Hartinger, Christoph Wolff, Peter Wollny (Wiesbaden, 2011), (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Bach-Rezeption Band 3), 187–202.

²¹ See Christoph-Hellmut Mahling, "Zum Musikbetrieb Berlins und seinen Institutionen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts", in *Studien zur Musikgeschichte Berlins im frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Carl Dahlhaus (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 1980), 27–284.

the instrument were crippled at this promising moment. Other reasons can be found in the strengthening of conservative circles in the clergy and in the further development of Kunstreligion, whose proponents now claimed all music to be of a religious nature. In the last consequence this of course means that people can taste infinity even by listening to military marches, implying that they can reach the same level of transcendency as with traditional church and organ music. Needless to say this hampered a new approach to the organ. Moreover this instrument could not contribute anything to the many musical developments of the 19th century: neither could it satisfy the need for performing music in private, nor did it fit in with the rising sentiment of patriotism, which it is unsuitable to express.

Yet this new approach to the organ inspired by the romantic enthusiasts was not completely in vain: for the first time in its history the organ was disentangled from the embrace of the church and consequently was capable of entering a different referential system, and it broke free of a century-old inflexibility. Henceforth new opportunities opened up: Think of Max Reger's choral fantasies or an organ symphony by César Franck – it was for this kind of music that these Romantists forged the way.

POVZETEK

V začetku 19. stoletja so ljudje v Nemčiji obrnili hrbet cerkvi. Odtujitev od institucionalizirane religije in s tem privatizacija religije sta imela velik vpliv na najpomembnejši liturgični instrument, orgle: poklic cerkvenih glasbenikov in organistov sta izgubila svoj prestižen značaj, umetnost igranja na orgle pa je propadala. V valu sekularizacije so bile orgle v nevarnosti, da postanejo odvečne in le ostanek preteklosti.

To je čas, v katerem so vsi močno uveljavljeni in zanesljivi sistemi odnosov skoraj razpadli. Vendar so premeteni umi iz tako različnih polj, kot so glasba, umetnost, filozofija in teologija, vzeli orgle in spremenili paradigmo: orgle in njihova tradicija se povežejo z »religijo umetnosti« kot filozofsko stvaritvijo in s tem dobijo vsaj delno novo legitimacijo. Ta kreativna misel v končni usodni zvezi med religijo umetnosti in orglami pripelje do novega ocenjevanja orgelske glasbe, ki ga vodi Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.