

bach PRESS RELEASE

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Sächsische Akademie
der Wissenschaften
zu Leipzig

KBR

LEIPZIG BACH ARCHIVE PRESENTS NEWLY DISCOVERED ORGAN WORKS BY JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Leipzig-based Bach researcher Peter Wollny identifies two organ compositions as the work of the 18-year-old Johann Sebastian Bach · First performance in 320 years to be livestreamed from St Thomas' Church, Leipzig

2025/014 – 17 November 2025

Hold back until: 17 November, 16:00 (MEZ/CET)

As of 17 November, the index of Bach's works (BWV) is richer by two numbers: Leipzig Bach Archive director Peter Wollny has succeeded in identifying two previously anonymous organ works as composed by Johann Sebastian Bach. In a livestreamed official ceremony in the presence of the Minister of State for Culture, Wolfram Weimer, and the Mayor of Leipzig, Burkhard Jung, the city of Leipzig together with the worldwide Bach community celebrates the first performance of these works in 320 years in St Thomas' Church in Leipzig.

Leipzig-based Bach researcher and Bach Archive director Peter Wollny has been familiar with the two works that have just been identified as Bach's, the *Ciacona in D minor*, BWV 1178, and the *Ciacona in G minor*, BWV 1179, for more than 30 years. He found them in the Royal Library of Belgium. During the course of his research career, the musicologist collected numerous clues which now, with the final piece of the puzzle – the naming of the scribe – form a complete picture. This identification took place in the context of work on the BACH Research Portal, a research project by the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig, in which for the first time all the available archive resources about the entire Bach family of musicians are being opened up and made publicly available in digital form.

Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Peter Wollny: *»I spent a long time searching for the missing piece of the puzzle in the attribution of the works – now the whole picture is revealed. We can state for once and for all that the copies were made around 1705 by Bach pupil Salomon Günther John. Moreover, stylistically the works contain features that one finds in Bach's works from of this period, but in those of no other composer. I want to thank my colleagues at the Royal Library of Belgium and the Leipzig Bach Archive for their decades of support for my research. And special thanks go to our Foundation's sponsors: the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, the Free State of Saxony*

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President Prof. Dr. Ton Koopman · Director Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Peter Wollny · Acting Managing director Peter Matzke

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and the City of Leipzig, for their unfailing trust and financial support for our work.«

Both organ works were published on 17 November by the longstanding Leipzig publishers Breitkopf & Härtel and thus made immediately available to the general public. The livestream of the official ceremony, including a performance of the works by Dutch organist Ton Koopman in St Thomas' Church, Leipzig, can be accessed on-demand on the Leipzig Bach Archive channel.

The Leipzig Bach Archive is the musical centre of excellence on Johann Sebastian Bach located in the composer's principal place of work. In 2025, the institution celebrates the 75th anniversary of its foundation. Its purpose is to research into the life, work and influence of the composer and the extensive Bach family of musicians, and to preserve and propagate Bach's legacy. The Bach Archive is a member of the Conference of National Cultural Institutions and one of Germany's »cultural lighthouses«. The BACH Research Portal is a project of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig, which is headquartered at the Leipzig Bach Archive.

www.bacharchivleipzig.de | www.saw-leipzig.de

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Queries will be answered from 18 November, 10am (CET).

You can download photos for your coverage **free of charge** here:

<https://www.picdrop.com/jensschlueterphotography/Bachwerke>

Password: Bach2025

Available from: 17 November 2025, 5pm approx.

Photo credits: Leipzig Bach Archive/Jens Schlüter

further information and statements on the following pages

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STATEMENTS

Dr. Wolfram Weimer, Minister of State for Culture and the Media:

»Today, Johann Sebastian Bach is an absolute world star. His music bridges epochs, binds generations together and remains a yardstick and compass. It is our responsibility to preserve this heritage, to research it and hand it on – by scholarly, artistic and educational means. The Leipzig Bach Archive does an outstanding job in this respect: as the leading research institution, it presents the world with two newly discovered works by Bach. This is more than just a scholarly sensation – it shows how vital and future-focused the task of preserving our cultural heritage can be when excellence and passion come together.«

Barbara Klepsch, Saxon State Minister for Culture and Tourism:

»With these newly discovered pieces for organ by Johann Sebastian Bach, the Free State of Saxony presents a discovery that will resonate worldwide. This musical sensation is an invitation to people all over the world to travel to our beautiful state to acquaint themselves more thoroughly not only with the music, but also the figure of Johann Sebastian Bach. I want to congratulate those at the Bach Archive who succeeded in matching work to composer.«

Burkhard Jung, Mayor of the City of Leipzig:

»Leipzig is the city of Bach, because here music is not only performed, but also researched and discovered. And the Leipzig Bach Archive is at the vanguard of this. With its outstanding scholarly achievements, most recently this find by Peter Wollny of hitherto anonymous works, the institution provides impressive proof of how dynamic and effective its exploration of our musical heritage is. This research strengthens Leipzig's international aura and deepens our understanding of a composer who has influenced the history of music more than almost any other. I wish to thank the team of researchers at the Leipzig Bach Archive, which never ceases to open new doors to Bach with passion and precision, and in particular its director, Peter Wollny. Thanks to the work of the Bach Archive, Leipzig is and always will be the centre of the Bach world.«

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Prof. Dr. Marie Cornaz, Royal Library of Belgium (KBR), Director of the Music Department (BE):

»With the music collection of François-Joseph Fétis (1784–1871), the Royal Library in Brussels preserves a gigantic treasure trove of valuable manuscripts and prints from the 15th to the 19th century which is of particular importance for international musicological research. As one of Europe's leading libraries, we are delighted that our collection of first-class Bach sources has now been enriched by two additional pieces.«

Prof. Ton Koopman, President of the Leipzig Bach Archive, organist, conductor and researcher (NL):

»When one thinks of the young Bach or even Mozart, it is often assumed that the genius came later – but not so! These two works are of a very high quality scarcely to be expected in one so young. I am convinced that organists the world over will be extremely grateful for this lively, virtuosic new repertoire and will perform them regularly in future.«

Prof. Dr. Hans-Joachim Knölker, President der Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig:

»We are absolutely thrilled by our long and fruitful years of collaboration with the Leipzig Bach Archive, of which our BACH Research Portal is one cogent example. When the pure research in the humanities that is conducted here leads to such spectacular results, it becomes clear once again how fundamentally important federal government and Land-funded research is for the Academy's programme.«

Nick Pfefferkorn, Managing Director of Leipzig publishers Breitkopf & Härtel:

»The discovery of these works by Johann Sebastian Bachs is a musicological sensation. With these pieces, the Breitkopf & Härtel publishing company, which printed Bach's libretti even during his lifetime, is proud to continue its longstanding tradition as Bach publisher.«

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FURTHER INFORMATION

»The first fruits of his diligence ...«: the story behind the discovery of the works

J. S. Bach: *Ciacona in D minor* BWV 1178 & *Ciacona in G minor* BWV 1179

When the 18-year-old Johann Sebastian Bach took up his first post as organist in the Thuringian town of Arnstadt in 1703, it marked the beginning of a productive period. Here, he attained a professional level in his compositions; his son Carl Philipp Emanuel spoke later of the »first fruits of his diligence«. In his Arnstadt works, Bach leaned on what had inspired him during his lessons with his oldest brother in Ohrdruf (1695–1700) and his training with Georg Böhm in Lüneburg (1700–1702), and began to experiment with combining Central and North German traditions.

Leipzig-based Bach researcher and Bach Archive director Peter Wollny has been familiar with the two early works that have just been identified as Bach's, the *Ciacona in D minor*, BWV 1178, and the *Ciacona in G minor*, BWV 1179, for more than 30 years. He found them in the Royal Library of Belgium. From the start, he was fascinated by the manuscripts and tried to discover the secrets behind them. During the course of his research career, the musicologist collected numerous clues which now, with the final piece of the puzzle, the naming of the scribe, form a complete picture. With the aid of copies and multiple visits to Brussels, he repeatedly studied the two manuscripts – minutiously examining every individual note.

Attributing a work to Bach is a tough task: neither manuscript is in Johann Sebastian Bach's hand, added to which they are undated and unsigned. But Peter Wollny was able to identify the initially anonymous scribe from other sources in Bach's entourage – for example, in another early work of Bach's, a fugue on a theme by Albinoni. Added to this were also other pieces from the region of Central Germany.

The search for the identity of the scribe turned into a decades-long detective story. Among other responsibilities, Wollny, now director of the Leipzig Bach Archive, has been in charge of the BACH Research Portal since 2023. This long-term project of the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Leipzig aims to open up all the available archive sources concerning the entire Bach family of musicians and make them publicly accessible in digital form using the latest digital humanities methods over a period of 25 years.

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While researching for the project in a Thuringian church archive, Wollny's colleague Dr. Bernd Koska found a job application letter dated 1729. In it, an organist until then completely unknown to Bach researchers, by the name of Salomon Günther John, claimed to have been Bach's pupil in Arnstadt. From then on, John's life story was easy to reconstruct: from 1705 to 1707 he took lessons from Bach in Arnstadt and in later years turns up one more time in Bach's entourage, in Weimar. Wollny searched for documents and finally found early writings by John with which he was able to determine for once and for all that he was the copyist he was looking for.

The copies were made around 1705. Stylistically, the works contain features that one finds in Bach's works at this period but in those of no other composer, such as the combination of variation and ostinato with an extended fugue. There are also techniques that are strongly reminiscent of the Lüneburg organist, Georg Böhm, Bach's teacher. Johann Sebastian Bach's early compositions are full of such echoes of Böhm right up to his time in Weimar. In addition, there are musical echoes of the Chaconne from Bach's cantata BWV 150.

With the attribution of these two organ compositions, the index of Bach works is now richer by two numbers. This find is one of an impressive number of discoveries, major and minor, that the staff of the Bach Archive have succeeded in making in the course of the pure research carried out at this institution for 75 years now.

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