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# GUSTAV MARIA LEONHARDT IN BASEL. PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG HARPSICHORDIST

by ANNE SMITH and JED WENTZ

## *Introduction*

It would be difficult for Early Musicians of the present generation credibly to maintain that they were not to some extent formed by the performance practice of Gustav Maria Leonhardt (1928–2012), either embracing or rejecting, entirely or piecemeal, the details of his style and the rigour of his approach. When preparing this article<sup>1</sup> for a symposium dedicated to honouring and exploring the legacy of such an influential musician we had to ask ourselves, more than once, what we thought was so interesting about the period Leonhardt spent in Basel: and even more urgently, what others might find interesting about it. We kept coming back again and again to the same fundamental point: namely that irresistible desire to know what had formed the man who later had such an influence on the Early Music movement.

Of course, the internal progress of Leonhardt's musical growth can never be fully exposed. We have no means of penetrating the artist's soul. The bear cub was licked at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis without a video camera in place to record the transformation. However, this attempt to reconstruct the process, though it must include a certain amount of hypothesis, will refrain from fanciful speculation. During its preparation, archives in Basel and The Hague were consulted, newspaper reviews and articles looked up, and most importantly, interviews were made with a number of figures associated with Basel and Leonhardt: Veronica Hampe, Christopher Schmidt, Jean-Claude Zehnder and Wulf Arlt. Special thanks are due to Thomas Drescher, Martina Wohlthat and Markus Emi, who all facilitated access to original documents housed in Swiss collections. The Paul Sacher Stiftung, too, enabled us to quote directly from some of the documents held in its Ina Lohr Collection.



Illustration 1: Christopher Schmidt and Gustav Leonhardt in 1947/48  
(Archive Christopher Schmidt)

<sup>1</sup> This article is largely based on a paper given at the Stimu Symposium „*Much of What We Do Is Pure Hypothesis. Gustav Leonhardt and His Early Music*“, Utrecht, 31 August to 2 September, 2012.



*Before Basel: Leonhardt in Holland*

So, let us begin charting the development of the influential Gustav Maria Leonhardt (his middle name always appears in the Basel documents). To do so properly, however, we have to begin by correcting ourselves. The image of Leonhardt as an unformed bear cub, licked into shape at the Schola, is, it seems, an erroneous one: Christopher Schmidt, a fellow student and close friend during this period,<sup>2</sup> recalled that Leonhardt arrived at Basel fully formed, both musically and technically; in fact, Leonhardt introduced himself to his teachers and fellow students by faultlessly performing the complete Goldberg variations in the first student concert of the year. He was 19 years old. Schmidt recalled that consternation broke out among the faculty as to what to do with such an advanced and brilliant student. The main emphasis of the Schola at this point was, in fact, on training young women to teach *Hausmusik*, and giving theologians and church musicians the necessary background in liturgical music. What to do with this Dutch youth who already performed such difficult works to such a high standard?

Clearly, in order to fully understand Leonhardt's experiences at, and interaction with, the Schola, we would have to examine it in relation to his early training in Holland. Though this period must be reviewed here in condensed form, Dutch influences on both Leonhardt's musical style and keyboard technique will be addressed.<sup>3</sup>

Performances of Bach's *Matthew Passion* by the Nederlandse Bachvereniging (Dutch Bach Society) left an indelible impression on Leonhardt as a young boy. This happened quite naturally, for his father George Leonhardt was a member of the Bachvereniging board. As late as 1995 Gustav Leonhardt would say in an interview: „From the beginning I was gripped by this masterpiece. Even now I cannot express that ecstasy in words.“<sup>4</sup>

The Nederlandse Bachvereniging was founded in 1921 by a group of musicians and theologians intent on presenting Bach's *Matthew Passion* to Dutch audiences as a liturgical, rather than as an aesthetic or artistic experience. This was a direct reaction to Mengelberg's Concertgebouw performances, and the first chairman of the board of the society, Johannes Hermanus Gunning stated quite clearly in 1926 that „in Bach's music piety is always no. one and musical expression no. two“.<sup>5</sup>

When Leonhardt started attending Bachvereniging concerts (his father George Leonhardt joined the board of directors of the Bachvereniging in the late 1930s),

<sup>2</sup> Leonhardt lived in the family home for a while.

<sup>3</sup> See also: Jed Wentz, „Gustav Leonhardt and the Reformation of Early Music“, *EM* 42/1 (2014), 3–12.

<sup>4</sup> „Van begin af was ik door dit meesterwerk gegrepen. Die vervoering zou ik zelfs nu nog niet onder woorden kunnen brengen“ (Conrad Maas, „Ik beweeg niet meer dan mijn vingers“, *De Volkskrant*, 07.04.1995, 2).

<sup>5</sup> „in Bach's muziek de vroomheid altijd numero één is en de muzikale expressie no. twee“. Quoted in: Rutger Schouten, *De Nederlandse Bachvereniging 50 jaar* (De Nederlandse Bach Vereniging, 1971), 10.



this zeal to recover the liturgical function of the *Matthew Passion* was still vital, the theological fire was entirely undimmed. A zealous proponent of this theologically-informed approach was Anthon van der Horst, who conducted the Bachvereniging at this time. He was an organist and composer as well as a conductor. He also gave theory lessons in Amsterdam, first at the Muzieklyceum and later at the conservatory. He was a personal friend of the Leonhardt family, and he must have exerted an enormous influence on the young Gustav, who had private theory lessons with van der Horst from the age of 12 or 13.

No record of Gustav's harmonious progress has survived, but if the lesson books of the Dutch violinist Willem Noske are anything to go by (Noske as a boy also studied with van der Horst, and at about the same age) the training would have been rigorous. Figure 2 shows an example of a page from Noske's workbook of 1930–1931, showing modulations from C major to c-sharp minor, and c minor to D-flat major.

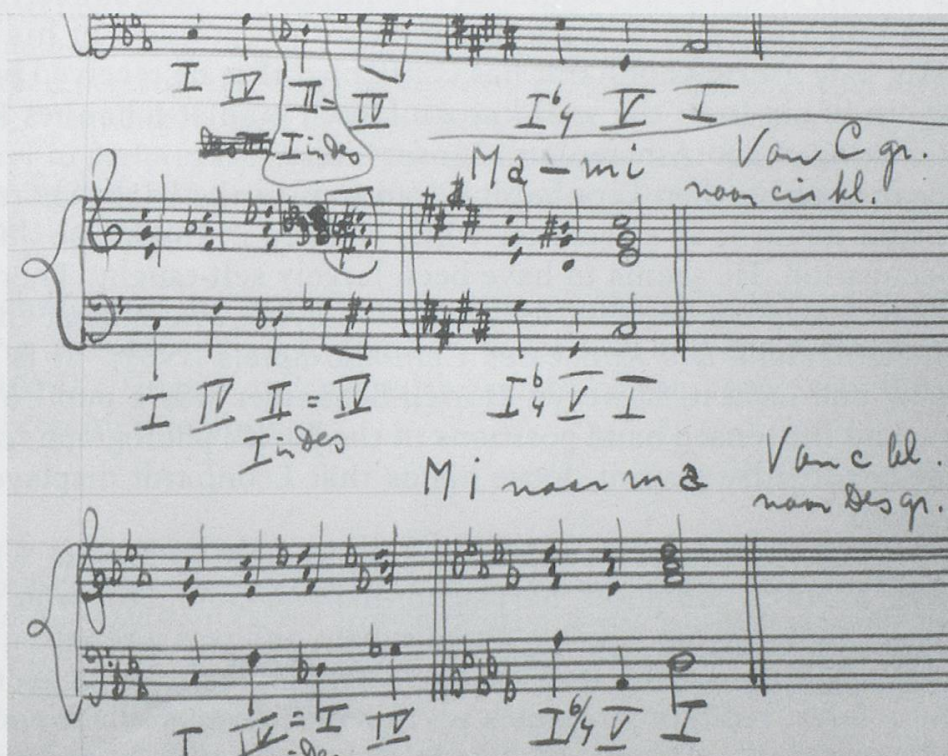


Illustration 2: A page from Willem Noske's harmony workbook (1930–1931). Courtesy of Het Nederlands Muziek Instituut.

Leonhardt would later down-play the importance of van der Horst's teaching, saying that he didn't remember much about his lessons; yet, van der Horst's influence on the young boy must have been great.<sup>6</sup> In fact, van der Horst, who

<sup>6</sup> „De lessen die ik van Anthon van der Horst had (theorie) vonden –privé- plaats toen ik 12 of 13 jaar oud was. Behalve dat ik erg onder de indruk was van van der Horst's geleerdheid kan ik me er niet veel van herinneren (ik meen dat ik oefeningen moest maken aan de hand van Louis & Thuille.“ (NMI, Anthon van der Horst archief, 309/138: Letter Gustav Leonhardt 30.10.1988).



was something of a music philosopher, gave a series of seven lectures on the topic of 'music theory in historical perspective' in Leonhardt's family home in Laren. These took place in January and February of 1945, during the last months of the war, the end of a period in which Gustav had studied music particularly intensively, and which saw him embrace the harpsichord as his main instrument.<sup>7</sup>

The specific style of van der Horst's musical performances has little to do with Early Music performance practice today, but his intellectual legacy was of the greatest importance: his manner of thinking about music, his advocacy of the use of facsimiles or autograph scores, and his fiercely intellectual set of criteria for judging a work and its performance, were of the utmost significance for what was to come, particularly as they were transmitted to an eager Early Music audience by Gustav Leonhardt in the 1960s and 70s.

It now remains, before returning to our main subject, the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, briefly to examine Leonhardt's technical training as a keyboardist. Alas, this is much more difficult to trace than the paternity of his musical ideology: His wife Marie Leonhardt has confirmed that he received piano lessons at the age of six from the well-known Dutch pianist Johannes Röntgen, who was teaching at the Amsterdam Conservatory.

It is unclear exactly when Leonhardt began to play the harpsichord, but he became serious about it as a teenager while trapped in his house during the German occupation. He seems to have been largely self-taught. There was of course, one very famous book on harpsichord playing available at that time, Eta Harich-Schneider's *Die Kunst des Cembalo-Spiels* (1939).<sup>8</sup> It is possible that he knew and used it; however, Harich-Schneider was a pupil of Wanda Landowska, and the tensed hand positions in the book's photographs are nothing like the beautifully elegant, loose hands that Leonhardt displayed when at the keyboard.

The more likely source of Leonhardt's harpsichord technique was Hans Brandts Buys, a Dutch composer, harpsichordist and conductor who was also a Bach fanatic. He loved Stravinsky, hated rubato and was a representative of the so-called 'sewing-machine style' or *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Leonhardt praised Hans Brandts Buys' radio programmes on the *Well-tempered Clavier*, which he said had had a great influence on him in the years before he went to Basel. Indeed, Leonhardt often admitted that he had had, early in his career, a period in which he too performed in the sewing-machine style. By 1968, however, he had already put that behind him:

<sup>7</sup> See: Gert Oost, *Anthon van der Horst 1899–1965. Leven en werken*, Alphen aan de Rijn: Canaletto, 1992, 92. For Leonhardt's war experience see, for instance: Roger Wimbush, 'Here and There. On Spiro Malas and Gustav Leonhardt', *The Gramophone*, May 1972.

<sup>8</sup> Eta Harich-Schneider, *Die Kunst des Cembalo-Spiels, nach den vorhandenen Quellen dargestellt und erläutert*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1939.



I am deeply ashamed of the recordings I made about fifteen years ago. I played like a machine, completely sterile. This was then in fashion: a reaction against Romanticism. And then you go too far! At a certain point I had reached the absolute zero of feeling. Naturally, you can't maintain that for long. During this crisis I discovered that the epoch of Bach was a very passionate one.<sup>9</sup>

It seems possible that this machine-like playing was encouraged, to some extent by Hans Brandts Buys. Brandts Buys never taught Leonhardt formally, but he was a mentor to the teenager and in 1951 they performed the *Art of the Fugue* together in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. It is possible that Brandts Buys exerted some influence on Leonhardt's technique, as well as his musical ideas in this early period. Indeed, Brandts Buys' instructions for learning to articulate on the harpsichord are revealing:

Play a musical motive, hold onto every note of it until the very last moment before the next one comes; afterwards make the space thus created between the notes bigger and bigger, but so that every note gets enough time to develop its sound fully, and then perceive the range of expressive possibilities that this style of playing offers. Many hours must be thus spent, before the player has sufficient technical control to perform this entirely with the fingers and with a loose arm, and then many an hour more will be spent before its worth is fully understood; but it will not be time wasted.<sup>10</sup>

This technique of intense listening, this emphasis on the development of the sound, or the 'bloom' as it came to be called, and the reference to playing only with the fingers and not with weight of the arms, sound all very like Leonhardt's own technique.

<sup>9</sup> „Die platen die ik een jaar of vijftien geleden gemaakt heb: daarvoor schaam ik me dood. Ik speelde als een machine, volkomen steriel. Dit lag ook in de tijd: als afweer tegen de romantiek. En dan sla je door! Op een gegeven ogenblik had ik het absolute nulpunt aan sentiment bereikt. Dat kun je natuurlijk niet lang volhouden. In deze crisis kwam ik tot de ontdekking, dat de epoche van Bach een zeer hartstochtelijke is geweest.“ Quoted in: Paul Luttikhuis, „Voorbij het nulpunt aan sentiment“, *NRC*, 7.4.1995, 5.

<sup>10</sup> „Speel een motief, houd elke noot hiervan vast tot het allerlaatste moment vóór de volgende komt; maak vervolgens de zoo ontstane tussenruimte steeds groter, doch zoo, dat elke noot volledig tijd krijgt tot ontwikkeling en klank te komen, en neem in u op de reeks van uitdrukkingmogelijkheden welke deze manier van spelen biedt. Er zal menig uur aan besteed moeten worden, voor men het technisch in zijn macht heeft dit met volkomen vingerspel en geheel losse arm te kunen uitvoeren, en dan zal het nog menig uurtje kosten de waarden hiervan te doorgronden, verloren is die tijd echter zeker niet.“ Hans Brandts Buys, *Het Wohltemperirte Klavier van Johan Sebastian Bach*, Nijmegen 1942, 148. Jolande van der Klis has noted that: „Leonhardt thought his manner of articulating was rather odd, but Brandts Buys' detailed manner of approaching the music commanded his admiration. Only later did he understand that the subtitles of Hans Brandts Buys were based on a thorough knowledge of the sources“. (Zijn wijze van articuleren vond Leonhardt nogal vreemd, maar de gedetailleerdheid waarmee Brandts Buys de muziek benaderde dwong bewondering af. Pas later begreep hij dat de subtiliteiten van Hans Brandts Buys gebaseerd waren op een gedegen kennis van de bronnen.) Jolande van der Klis, *Oude Muziek in Nederland. Het verhaal van de pioniers*, Utrecht 1991, 121.



Thus Gustav left Holland well-prepared both musically and technically. When he arrived in Basel in 1947 he was already a fan of Bach and Stravinsky, with a religious zeal to perform according to the composer's intentions, with an aversion to vain external display and a tendency to rely on articulation rather than rubato or any form of so-called 'Romantic' expression. What did the young firebrand find when he got to the Schola?

*Possible Basel Influences: August Wenzinger and Eduard Müller*

There were three main teachers with whom Leonhardt had contact in Basel: August Wenzinger, Eduard Müller and Ina Lohr.

August Wenzinger, pioneer on the viola da gamba, was one of the first teachers at the Schola. In 1933, he returned to Switzerland from Germany, where he had been first cellist in the Bremen orchestra, to come and teach gamba, ensemble music and ornamentation at the Schola. From 1938–1970 he was also the solo cellist in the Basel Orchestra (Allgemeine Musikgesellschaft) and taught cello at the Basel Conservatory.<sup>11</sup> Christopher Schmidt has recalled that Wenzinger and Leonhardt shared an immediate and long-lasting antipathy to each other, so that although Gustav Leonhardt was also an exceptionally good cellist for his age – his teacher in Amsterdam, Carel van Leeuwen Boomkamp, the first cellist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, had told him that he was capable of following in his footsteps – he decided not to take lessons on the instrument at the Schola. On the other hand, Leonhardt and Wenzinger did work together after the Basel period, so it would be a mistake to over-paint their antipathy as outright animosity: it does, however, seem unlikely that Wenzinger would have been a major or lasting influence on Leonhardt's musical aesthetic.

His keyboard-teacher was Eduard Müller [see illustration 3] who had begun teaching harpsichord at the Schola in 1939, and organ and basso continuo at the Basel Conservatory in 1945. Together with Wenzinger he was seen as one of the pioneering instrumentalists in the field of historical performance practice. Nonetheless, he too had seemingly little influence on Leonhardt's style: when asked point-blank, Christopher Schmidt and Jean-Claude Zehnder, both of whom knew the playing of Leonhardt and Müller from live performances, said that they were unable to distinguish any characteristics reminiscent of the teacher's style in that of the student. To do Müller justice, however, it must be said that in an interview in 2006 Leonhardt said that one of the most important things he had „learned from Müller was the clean analysis of organ works: not to make manual changes that will destroy one voice just for the sake of a change of colour. He was unusual at that time, because that was something most organists did.“<sup>12</sup> Thus here, too – although not on the stylistic level – Leonhardt showed his preference for stringent structural thinking.

<sup>11</sup> „Der Gesamtüberblick fehlt!“, Interview with August Wenzinger, *Concerto* 3 (1986), 16–27.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Brian Robin, *The Goldberg Magazine* 41 (2006), 35.



*Ina Lohr*

However, if neither Wenzinger nor Müller had any significant influence on Leonhardt's style, Ina Lohr certainly did, though the effect may not have been immediately audible. Lohr is the least well-known in the Early Music world of the Basel faculty of the time, and therefore some background information is appropriate here.

She was born in Holland in 1903, and was a generation older than her famous pupil Leonhardt, with whom she shared several key experiences: she, like Gustav, was the child of a wealthy industrialist, and in fact the families must have moved in similar circles. Furthermore, neither Gustav Leonhardt nor Ina Lohr was of unalloyed Dutch heritage, though they both loved Holland: Lohr was part Indonesian and Leonhardt was half Austrian. Another point of contact was that both of them had studied with Anthon van der Horst, Ina Lohr having done so in the 1920s at the Muzieklyceum in Amsterdam.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps most significantly, both of them were deeply religious Protestant Christians.

Music-making was a calling for Lohr, a task as well as a talent, a mission that she had received from God. In an unpublished autobiographical sketch, written late in life and housed in the library of the Schola Cantorum in Basel, she recounted her struggles with illness and depression as a teenager. One day, she felt she could not go on:

I thought that I knew that God would accept me, should I give him back my life. My failure would only disappoint my parents and siblings and the many friends, who expected so much of me. Thus one evening I went into the city, where the water in the canals is so filthy that even if one were saved [from drowning], one would die of poisoning. I was completely calm, continued standing quietly for a little [while], praying and preparing myself for the next world, with which, due to my illness, I was actually already acquainted. Even when a drunkard suddenly came towards me, he could not take this peacefulness away from me. I just looked at him, and suddenly he was in a state of shock and almost sober, [and] repeatedly stammered that he hadn't realized, no, he really hadn't realized it. I then took his hand and proposed that we go home. He came with me, told of a wife and two children, to whom he now wished to return, and we took leave of one another in front of my door, merely [exchanging words] of thanks. Only when I was seated in my room did it become clear to me that this poor man was sent to me from God as a messenger, as an angel, to show me that also helping [others] is a talent and a task. Two days later when I pulled back and saved a child who was almost run over by a car, I perceived this as a confirmation of my previous experience and

<sup>13</sup> In fact, Lohr had brought the Schola to Anton van der Horst's attention. Cf. Oost, *Anthon van der Horst* (see note 7), 76. Indeed, van der Horst praised the Schola in his *Bach's Hoogmis*, Amsterdam: Holland, 1941, 45.



recognized my task: to help where help was needed, but if at all possible within a musical life.<sup>14</sup>

This belief in her God-given task, disguised as musical talent, was the inner fire that lit Ina Lohr's singing.

Her mission also served as a point of orientation in her musical life, around which everything else revolved. It led her to study Gregorian chant with Hubert Cuypers at the Amsterdam Muzieklyceum and also to serve as his assistant choir director at the Moses and Aaron Church. It led to her fascination with the 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century polyphonic compositional style, which she learned from Anthon van der Horst. Even before she came to Basel, it led her to contact with the musicologist Charles van den Borren and his son-in-law Stafford Cape, the founder of *Pro musica antiqua*. Finally it led her to Basel, where her work with Paul Sacher, originally under the tutelage of Professor Karl Nef at the University, resulted in the founding of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

In 1980, when recalling the first program she realized together with Paul Sacher in 1930, she said:

When I look at this program today, I am overcome by the fact that with it I had already begun that which would later become central to me: liturgy. Liturgy in the sense of serving God throughout one's entire life, as far as we are able to; [and] with everything that we do, to stand before God and pray for his intercession, and praise and thank him. That was not clear to me then. I only wanted to construct something that would make sense, also for the listener, would make sense beyond

<sup>14</sup> „Da meinte ich zu wissen, Gott würde mich annehmen, wenn ich Ihm mein Leben zurückgäbe. Versagen können doch Eltern und Schwestern und den vielen Freunden, die so viel von mir erwarteten, nur Enttäuschungen bereiten. So ging ich eines Abends in die Innenstadt, wo das Wasser in den Grachten (Kanälen) so schmutzig ist, dass, wer daraus gerettet wird, doch an Vergiftung stirbt. Ich war vollkommen ruhig, stand noch ein wenig still, betete und bereitete mich auf die andere Welt vor, die mir eigentlich von der Krankheit her schon vertraut war. Auch als plötzlich ein Betrunkener auftauchte und auf mich zukam, konnte er mir die Ruhe nicht nehmen. Ich sah ihn nur an, und plötzlich war er nur noch erschrocken und fast nüchtern, stammelte nur immer wieder, das habe er nicht gewusst, nein, er habe das wirklich nicht gewusst. Da habe ich seine Hand genommen und vorgeschlagen, wir würden jetzt heimgehen. Er kam mit, erzählte von einer Frau und von zwei Kindern, zu denen er jetzt zurück wollte, und vor meiner Haustür haben wir uns einfach dankend verabschiedet. Erst als ich in meinem Zimmer saß, wurde mir klar, dass dieser arme Mensch mir als Bote Gottes, als Engel gesandt wurde, um mir zu zeigen, dass auch Helfen eine Gabe und Aufgabe ist. Als ich zwei Tage später auch noch ein Kind, das fast unter ein Auto gekommen wäre, zurückziehen und dadurch retten konnte, empfand ich das als Bestätigung meiner voreigen Erfahrung und kannte meine Aufgabe: helfen, wo es zu helfen gibt, wenn möglich aber doch innerhalb eines Musikerlebens.“ Ina Lohr, „Skizze zum Lebenslauf“, Vera-Oeri Bibliothek, Basel, Rara Sign. MAB Fb182.



the fact that the music was beautiful. This has remained a difficulty. I have remained with this kind of music-making.<sup>15</sup>

It was also the dedication to this mission that led her to become very involved in the movement in the reformed church in Switzerland to bring renewal to congregational singing, as well as to become active in the *Schweizerische Vereinigung für Volkslied und Hausmusik* (Swiss Association for Folksongs and House Music) which came into being in 1934, after the German *Singbewegung* (Singing Movement) was usurped by the Nazis. In turn this caused her to eschew an active concert life and devote herself to teaching *Kirchen- und Hausmusik* at the Schola.

Lohr had her own rather controversial and highly personal approach to solmization and the church modes – understanding it more as a structural theory of melody than a means of sight-reading – which she promoted with great passion. She also conducted a choir made up of Schola students and devout amateurs from local churches, both Catholic and Protestant. They performed monophonic and polyphonic religious works from the middle ages to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. She was a small woman, but made an indelible impression: those who knew her can, at the mention of her name, immediately picture her, conducting and singing, full of fire and conviction, energizing all around her with her belief and enthusiasm.

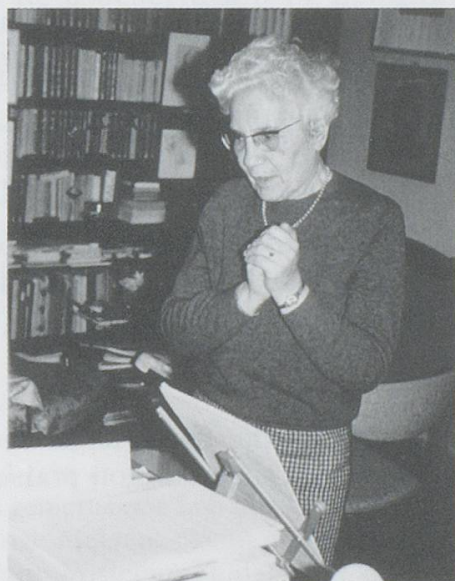


Illustration 3: Ina Lohr circa 1980 (private collection).

<sup>15</sup> „Wenn ich dieses Programm heute sehe, ergreift es mich, dass ich da drin schon begonnen habe, was nachher für mich die Hauptsache wurde: Liturgie. Liturgie im Sinn von Gottes Dienst durchs ganze Leben hindurch, soweit wir dazu imstande sind; mit allem, was wir tun vor Gott stehen, ihn bitten, und ihn loben und danken. Damals war mir das nicht klar. Ich wollte nur etwas aufbauen, was einen Sinn haben würde, auch für die Hörer, einen Sinn abgesehen von dem, dass die Musik schön war. Das ist eine Schwierigkeit geblieben. Ich bin bei dieser Art Musizieren geblieben.“ From an audio cassette, ILCD 4, Sammlung Ina Lohr, Paul Sacher Stiftung.



By all accounts she was not an easy woman, and could be a formidable opponent when crossed, but it seems that Leonhardt was fascinated by her musicianship: Christopher Schmidt relates how Leonhardt always participated in Lohr's choir projects, and also that the three best students at the Schola at that time – indeed, the only ones who performed at a professional level – Christopher Schmidt, Gustav Leonhard and David Kraehenbuehl, met every weekend to play 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century music on two recorders and gamba, occasionally joined by Lohr, whose singing cast a spell over them all.<sup>16</sup> Leonhardt took delight in this early repertoire and in Ina Lohr's ever-changing performances of it. Indeed, when asked if he thought that the experience Lohr's music-making could have influenced the sound produced by the Leonhardt Consort in the 1960s, Schmidt, after some reflection, agreed it very well could be so: that seeds planted with Lohr in Basel sprouted much later in Amsterdam.

Leonhardt himself gave touching confirmation of the debt he owed to Lohr in 1983, in a letter, written by him to Lohr on the occasion of her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, that is preserved in the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel:

Here come my very best wishes (from Bruges, where the competition has just started) to you, who celebrate your 80<sup>th</sup> birthday [...] how many will not be with you on the day in their thoughts, and in thankful remembrance review everything they have to thank you for. I am one of them and cannot begin to mention everything, perhaps because it is so interwoven with the entire musical development; however, I do want to mention here the enormous experience of melodic monophony [*melodische eenstemmigheid*] for which I have to thank you. Even a harmonist (which a harpsichordist principally is) can make use of that! I am very grateful to you for the place you took and take in my musical development and wish you joy and health from all my heart.<sup>17</sup>

When he speaks of „*melodische eenstemmigheid*“ here, he is however, perhaps not speaking merely about the shaping of melodic lines. Ina Lohr was convinced that the most effective way of coalescing a church congregation or a family was by means of unison singing:

Also with the congregational song the focus is on the words, on the common answer, on the common thanks, on the common praise and prayer. Therefore its

<sup>16</sup> Related in an interview with Anne Smith, see also: Christopher Schmidt, „Erinnerungen Ina Lohr“, *BjBHM* 32 (2008), 159–163, 161.

<sup>17</sup> „Hier komen uit Brugge, waar het concours zojuist begonnen is, mijn allerbeste wensen voor U die Uw tachtigste verjaardag viert, en-naar ik vermeen- het niet publiekelyk wilt doen. Doch velen niet zullen op de dag in gedachten by U zyn, en in dankbare herinnering alles aan zich laten voorbijtrekken wat zy aan U te danken hebben. Ik behoer bij hen en kan er niet aan beginnen alles op te noemen, misschien ook omdat het zo verwerven is met de hele muzikale ontwikkeling; toch wil ik hier de enorme ervaring van de melodische eenstemmigheid die ik U te danken heb, noemen. Zelf een harmonist (die een clavecinist toch grotendeels is) kan daar gebruik van maken! ik ben U zeer dankbaar voor de plaats die U in mijn muzikale ontwikkeling innam en inneemt en wens U van ganzer harte vreugde en gezondheid toe. Brugge, 28. Juli 1983.“ Paul Sacher Stiftung (Sammlung Ina Lohr).



most appropriate form is the texted, unisono melody. When the entire congregation sings in unison, without *accompaniment*, then the words are the center of attention, the words carried by melody. We concentrate ourselves while singing entirely on these jointly sung words and thereby really constitute a congregation.<sup>18</sup>

Thus for Ina Lohr the words ‚melodic monophony‘ would also imply the effective and deeply felt singing of words of religious praise and prayer.

Nonetheless, it must also be said that Leonhardt may have had his reservations about the primacy of this communal approach to music. It seems most likely that the story Leonhardt told to Jolande van der Klis about certain teachers in Basel „who found it suspicious if one played too well“, and how Leonhardt „did not make himself well-loved“ by ridiculing this point of view, must refer to Ina Lohr. Ina Lohr, namely, wrote that

it is clear that in today's concert that the first prerequisite is an outstanding performance and that a very spoiled audience, measuring and judging, compares the performances of various musicians with one another. The musician must therefore have something of the medieval juggler who delighted, touched and amazed [his audience], he must gain its favor through a great exertion. Thence his rejecting, often scornful attitude towards a form of musical performance that consciously excludes this struggle, one which seems to make it very much easier.<sup>19</sup>

That this could almost be a description of Leonhardt at that time seems to be confirmed by an anecdote related by Marie Leonardt in 2012: she recalled that at one point during the school year 1947/48 Wenzinger was preparing the Schola ensemble to perform one of the harpsichord concerti of J. S. Bach. Gustav Leonhardt was the soloist. After a rather disappointing rehearsal, Wenzinger told the students that they all needed to go home and practice their parts, to which Leonhardt loudly replied „I don't need to practice mine“, a response that, though undoubtedly true, certainly did not curry favor.

<sup>18</sup> „Auch beim Gemeindelied geht es um das Wort, um die gemeinsame Antwort, um den gemeinsamen Dank, um das gemeinsame Lob und Gebet. Darum ist seine geeignetste Form die wortgebundene, einstimmige Melodie. Wenn die ganze Gemeinde einstimmig, *unbegleitet* singt, dann steht das Wort im Mittelpunkt, das Wort getragen vom Gesang. Wir konzentrieren uns im Singen ganz auf dieses gemeinsam gesungene Wort und bilden dadurch wirklich eine Gemeinde.“, in: Ina Lohr, „Kirchenmusik im Konzert und Lied in der Kirche“, *Singt und Spielt* 10 (1943/44), 90.

<sup>19</sup> „sicher ist, dass im heutigen Konzert die hervorragende Leistung eine erste Voraussetzung ist, und dass ein sehr verwöhntes Publikum die Leistungen verschiedener Konzertgeber messend und urteilend einander gegenüberstellt. Der Musiker muss also etwas vom mittelalterlichen Jongleur, der ergötzte, rührte und verblüffte, an sich haben; er muss sich die Gunst des Publikums durch eine grosse Anstrengung erobern. Daher seine ablehnende, oft verächtliche Haltung einer Musikausübung gegenüber, die diesen Kampf bewusst ausschliesst, die es sich also scheinbar sehr viel leichter macht.“, in: Ina Lohr, „Einige Gedanken zum Thema ‚Hausmusik – Konzertmusik‘“, *Singt und Spielt* 19 (1951), 18. See also: Gerd Berg, „Dirigieren ist der leichteste Beruf“, in: *Concerto* 2 (1984), 61–64, 62.



Before leaving the topic of Ina Lohr, let us indulge briefly in speculation: Schmidt has stressed that Ina Lohr's performances were ever-new, with that quality of being in the moment, of using the text and of shaping phrases to project meaning. Such vibrant, quixotic qualities were also the hallmarks of Alfred Deller's style, with the difference that Deller was a real performer. Schmidt put it this way: Lohr's singing contained no performance, only heartfelt devotion.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Leonhardt recognized in Deller the qualities he loved in Lohr, but now in a real performer, one who had the ambition to become a star?<sup>21</sup>

### *Basel Activity: The Master Thesis*

But Leonhardt did more than sing early monophony and polyphony in Basel: he was also working on his thesis. This document, which is preserved in the library of the Musik Akademie Basel, tells us much about its writer at this interesting stage of his development. Its title is *J. S. Bach's ternäre Notation. Theilstudie von Bach's rhythmischer Notation* (*J. S. Bach's Ternary Notation. A Partial Study of Bach's Rhythmic Notation*).<sup>22</sup> The work is mainly concerned with questions of vertical alignment in Bach's scores: how should a dotted 8th-note followed by a 16th-note be performed, for instance, when played against a triplet? Such questions could only be properly answered, according to Leonhardt, after making a comprehensive comparison of all of Bach's compositions. The opening lines of the thesis give an indication of the seriousness and rigour of the work:

The starting point was Bach's complete works. In many cases a solution can only be found after a comparison has been made of all of the relevant works. To study a specific genre, for instance only the instrumental works, is insufficient: it will become apparent that, for instance, clues can be found in vocal works that offer a solution to questions about instrumental pieces; or visa versa.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> „Sie sang nicht als eine Berufssängerin, es gab in ihrem Gesang keine Darstellung, sondern einfach nur Hingabe.“ (Schmidt, „Erinnerungen Ina Lohr“ [see note 16], 161).

<sup>21</sup> In a paper given at the Medieval and Renaissance Music Conference, Certaldo, 2013, „Ina Lohr (1903–1983). An Unsung Pioneer of Historically Informed Performance Practice“, Anne Smith included a short audio clip of Ina Lohr singing Psalm 42, *Wie der Hirsch nach frischer Quelle*. Afterward the tenor Paul Elliot, a student of Alfred Deller and one of the pioneers of the Early Music movement in England, came up and said that her singing was very reminiscent of that of his teacher with its insistence on the text's meaning and declamation.

<sup>22</sup> Archives of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis.

<sup>23</sup> „Ausgangspunkt war Bach's Gesamtwerk. Nur der Vergleich aller in Betracht kommenden Werke kann in vielen Fällen die Lösung bringen. Das Untersuchen einzelner Gruppen, wie z. B. nur Instrumentalwerke, genügt nicht: es wird sich zeigen, dass sich gerade z. B. bei den Vokalwerken Hinweise finden für die Lösung von Fragen bei den Instrumentalwerken; oder umgekehrt.“ (Gustav Maria Leonhardt, *J. S. Bach's ternäre Notation. Theilstudie von Bach's rhythmischer Notation* [Archives of Schola Cantorum Basiliensis], 4).



This sets the tone for the whole of the thesis, and also makes clear what Leonhardt was doing during his years in Basel when he wasn't singing with Ina Lohr: he was studying the entire oeuvre of J. S. Bach!

Christopher Schmidt recalled that Leonhardt prepared all of the keyboard works of Bach over the three-year period that he had lessons with Eduard Müller, who at the end of each lesson would invariably ask: „and what shall we hear next time?“ This is particularly interesting because it shows that Leonhardt's own teaching technique of never hearing the same piece twice was one he had himself experienced as a student in Basel. But, though he was learning Bach's complete keyboard works for his lessons,<sup>24</sup> he clearly felt that studying the notation of the keyboard music alone would not be enough to solve the riddle of, as he put it, „Angleichung oder Nicht-Angleichung“ – whether these values should correspond or not – in Bach's music.

Therefore, using the *Ausgabe der Bachgesellschaft* as his source, he proceeded to study eight specific rhythmical figures as they appeared throughout the works of Bach, comparing them to similar figures within a given work, or in other pieces of Bach, as well as to descriptions of how the figure should be performed according to treatises by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Johann Joachim Quantz and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (see Illustration 4).

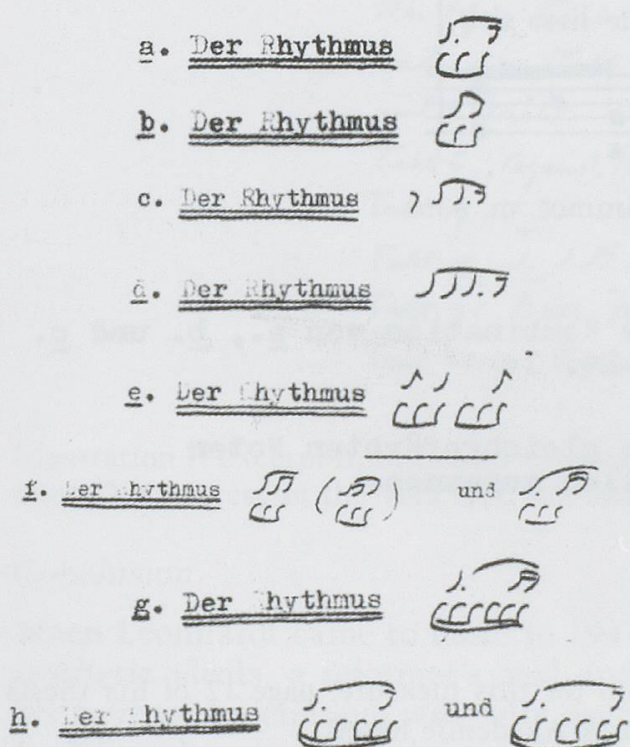


Illustration 4: The subtitles for the various rhythmical figures investigated by Gustav Leonhardt in his thesis  
(Courtesy of the Vera Oeri Bibliothek, Musik Akademie Basel).

<sup>24</sup> This would mainly have been an intellectual exercise: Christopher Schmidt remembers that Leonhardt never actually practiced very much on the harpsichord, but only studied scores.



Using coloured circles to mark coincidental notes, Leonhardt proposed a solution for a complex passage in the aria „Des Vaters Stimme ließ sich hören“ from BWV 7 (*Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam*), taking Quantz's *Versuch* as his contemporary source (see Illustration 5 & 6). Leonhardt chose this passage „for the diversion of the interested reader“, because he found it one of the „craziest examples of notational confusion in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century“.<sup>25</sup> When he came to record this aria, as part of the collaborative project to record the complete cantatas with Nicolaus Harnoncourt, he indeed adopted the solution that he had proposed years before in Basel.<sup>26</sup>

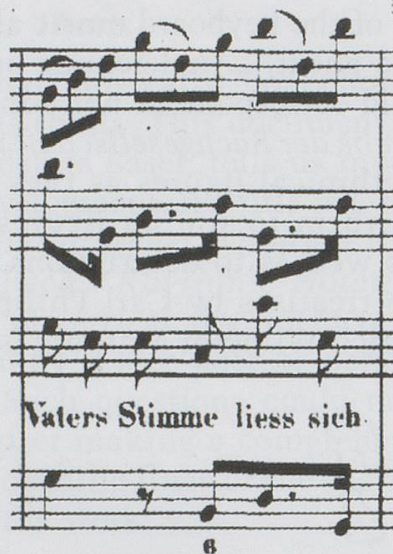
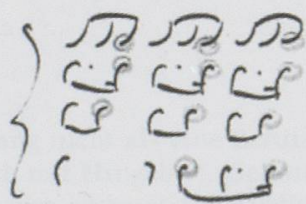


Illustration 5: BWV 7, aria „Des Vaters Stimme“, m. 33.

Und schliesslich die vertikale Kombination von a., b. und c.  
in Takt 31 der Tenor-Arie von Kt. 7:



Die gleichgefärbten Noten  
fallen zusammen.

Illustration 6: Gustav Leonhardt's solution for this measure, page 12 of his thesis (Courtesy of the Vera Oeri Bibliothek, Musik Akademie Basel).

<sup>25</sup> „Zur Ergötzung des geneigten Lesers lassen wir hier noch zwei der tollsten Beispiele der Notations-Konfusion im 18en Jhr folgen: [...]“ (Leonhardt, *J. S. Bach's ternäre Notation* [see note 23], 12).

<sup>26</sup> Leonhardt recorded BWV 7 in January of 1971. See: <http://www.bach-cantatas.com/Performers/H&L-Rec6.htm> (25.07.2013).



The final section of the thesis, fifteen pages written entirely in neat manuscript, is a list of every remarkable passage of ternary notation in Bach's entire oeuvre: for instance, all of the relevant examples from the *Art of the Fugue* (see illustration 7).

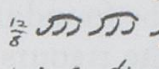
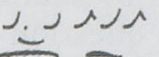
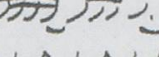
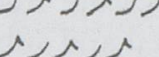
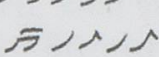
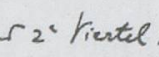
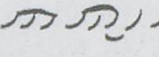
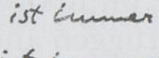
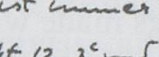
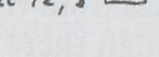
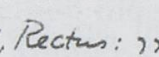
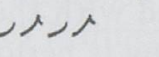
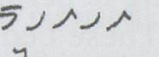
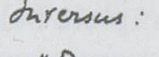
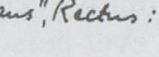
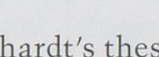
*Kunst der Fuge*, Cp. 11, Takt 101, die merkwürdige Triole: wie notiert.  
 Cp. 13, Takt 17, Bass:  $\frac{12}{8}$   [?] ebenso Takt 25, 26 Sopra  
 Takt 18, Bass: wie notiert.  
 Cp. 14, Takt 4:  $\frac{12}{8}$    
 Takt 24:  $\frac{12}{8}$    
 Cp. 16, Takt 4:  $\frac{12}{8}$    
 Takt 17:   
 Takt 19:   
 Takt 46: 1<sup>c</sup> und 2<sup>c</sup> Viertel: wie notiert.  
 Takt 48: Trillernachschlag hat Tempo von Trillerschlügen  
 Takt 49:   
 Cp. 17 Die Figur  ist immer zu spielen wie:  $\frac{12}{8}$    
 Die Figur  ist immer zu spielen wie , mit Ausnahme von Takt 12, 3<sup>c</sup> und 4<sup>c</sup> Viertel, und Takt 46, 1<sup>c</sup> und 2<sup>c</sup> Viertel.  
 Takt 6, „Vagans“, Rectus:   
 Takt 17:   
 Takt 19:   
 Takt 21, Bass, Inversus:  (vgl. Rectus und Takt 49)  
 Takt 24, 26, „Vagans“, Rectus: 

Illustration 7: Excerpt from Gustav Leonhardt's thesis concerning the *Kunst der Fuge*, page 22 (Courtesy of the Vera Oeri Bibliothek, Musik Akademie Basel).

### Conclusion

When Leonhardt came to Basel in 1947 he was already armed with advanced aesthetic ideals, a reformer's zeal and an intellectual rigour. Furthermore, his keyboard technique was fully developed. Once in Basel, he continued to study – exhaustively! – the works of J. S. Bach, whose *Matthew Passion* had inspired him to become a musician in the first place.<sup>27</sup> This Dutch intellectual and technical framework, infused by an undimmed reverence for Bach's

<sup>27</sup> Leonhardt once said, humorously, that he might never have become a musician if Naarden had had a Handel rather than a Bach festival. See: Paul Luttikhuis, „Voorbij het nulpunt aan sentiment“, *NRC Handelsblad*, 07.04.1995, 5.



works, would serve him for the rest of his career. On the contrary, the influence on his playing of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, rooted to some extent in the ideas of Anthon van der Horst, but more especially in those of Hans Brandts Buys, would diminish in the course of the coming years.

The attempt to answer the question of how and why his playing changed in the wake of his experience in Basel has been the deepest motivation of this article. Part of the answer can be found in Leonhardt's master thesis. It shows him to be reflecting both on the rigours of the Dutch approach and on notation's latent musical potential: by examining discrepancies in Bach's scores, as well as struggling with the question of possible rhythmic interpretations within a given beat, he was preparing himself, unconsciously no doubt, to make his own choices and to create his own style of performance, one that was characterized by the refined and subtle use of rhythmic freedoms within a strict overarching tactus.

The final piece of the puzzle, however, lies in his new musical experiences at the Schola, those of pre-Baroque music, and of monophonic singing in particular. After leaving Basel, as he gradually turned away from *Neue Sachlichkeit*, a greater suppleness, rhythmic freedom, and inner fire began to inform his music-making. This is audible on his recordings with Alfred Deller, as well as those he made with Frans Bruggen and Jaap Schroeder; but most especially it shines forth on the recordings made with his wife Marie and the Leonhardt Consort. It is in these recordings from the 1960s that the seeds planted by Ina Lohr came to full fruition, though there is no question of mere slavish imitation. Here the music sings and 'speaks' in Leonhardt's own language; here the horizontal lines are treated with the same loving respect as the vertical harmonies; here too, everything is performed passionately, rhetorically, as if dictated by an unspoken text. These Leonhardt Consort recordings reveal the greatest inner conviction, a complete belief in the music and its performance. Perhaps that is why, of all the many recordings Leonhardt would make in his career, these remain ever-fresh, ever-personal, performances of his Early Music.