

Johann Friedrich Fasch and His 12 Oboe Concertos

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While Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758) was living, all of his compositional output was distributed by handcopied manuscript; none of it was published. Since Fasch's death, the majority of his vocal music has been lost, while most of the instrumental works remain extant but scattered. Of the 61 extant concertos, 18 are solo concertos for various instruments.¹ Gottfried Kuntzel's 1965 dissertation, *Die Instrumentalkonzerte von Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758)*, catalogs Fasch's concertos and assigns each a number represented here as a K. number.²

Fasch worked during the 30-year period, 1710-1740, referred to as the "Golden Generation"³ of oboe literature in which the quantity and variety of solo oboe repertoire peaked. "By far the largest proportion of works for oboe by J.S. Bach (94%), Couperin (100%), Handel (74%), Telemann (76%), and Vivaldi (100%) fall in this period."⁴ These composers are generally associated with mature Baroque style. The solo oboe repertoire, however, currently includes few concertos representative of evolutionary compositions which hint toward the development of a new historical style period during the early eighteenth century. Fasch wrote 12 solo oboe concertos, five of which have been lost. Incipits, instrumentation, and keys of the lost concertos are known through entries in either the thematic catalog of General Major Freyherrn von Sonsfeldt of 1720 or the 1762 thematic catalog of the publisher Breitkopf.⁵

Fasch's Life

Johann Friedrich Fasch was most likely born April 15, 1688 in Büttelstadt, near Weimar, Germany. As a child, he sang in choirs at Suhl and Weissenfels. At age 13 he was accepted as Johann Kuhnau's first student at the Thomasschule in Leipzig where he befriended the young Georg Philip Telemann.⁶ It was in Leipzig that Fasch began practicing clavier and composition and also where accounts of a "purposeful prank" originate.⁷ Having composed an overture with which he was pleased, Fasch signed Telemann's name to the score and presented it to the latter's *Collegium Musicum*. To the composer's joy, the ensemble read through the overture and accepted it as Telemann's own.⁸

Fasch went on to form his own *Collegium Musicum* while a student at the University of Leipzig. In this stimulating environment, he supplied much of his own music for the group and became familiar with the work of his contemporaries. Even without extended traditional study in composition, Fasch became successful as a composer, receiving commissions in 1711 and 1712 for operas performed at the Peter-Paul Festivals at Naumberg.⁹ Seeking more thorough training as a composer, he traveled to Darmstadt where, for 14 weeks, he studied with Christoph Graupner and Gottfried Grünewald, being "instructed by both in composition most faithfully without being charged the slightest amount."¹⁰

In the beginning of his professional career, Fasch held several brief positions: violinist in Bayreuth, organist in Greiz, and six months in the employ of one Count Morzin.¹¹ This latter position has generated a long line of errors regarding Fasch's biography resulting from a failure to distinguish between two members of the Morzin family. For approximately the last two centuries, accounts of Fasch's life have indicated that he was Franz Joseph Haydn's predecessor as Kapellmeister to Count Vaclav Morzin in Prague.¹²

In the summer of 1722, Fasch assumed the duties of Kapellmeister at Zerbst, where he remained until his death on December 22, 1758.¹³ By 1722, Fasch had apparently established a solid reputation that extended beyond Saxony. After working at Zerbst for approximately eight weeks, he was one of several musicians invited to apply for the vacant *Thomas-Kantorat* in Leipzig, a position eventually awarded to the candidate from Cöthen-Johann Sebastian Bach.¹⁴ While Fasch was at Zerbst, his works were transcribed and/or performed by Telemann, J.G. Pisendel, C.P.E. Bach, and J.S. Bach.¹⁵ His son, Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch, also established a musical career serving (from 1756) as harpsichordist to Frederick the Great.¹⁶

Fasch's Work

Late in life and following his death, the elder Fasch's fame was obscured by the success of his famous son, who founded the Berlin *Singakademie*.¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, J.F. Fasch was ignored due to the attention given to J.S. Bach and finally "rediscovered" by Hugo Riemann around the turn of the century.¹⁸

Fasch's historical/stylistic placement is elusive, perhaps due to the period of style transition in which he worked and his lack of extended, formal training in composition. "Fasch's concertos, sonatas, and symphonies give a many-sided or composite view of his style. Perhaps the composer's stylistic variability should best be expressed by referring rather to his styles."¹⁹ Küntzel points out that Fasch was indeed innovative yet probably not influential to his contemporaries and successors.²⁰

In comparing Fasch's music to his contemporaries, David Sheldon finds that Fasch is quite unlike his teacher, Graupner, and draws parallels with the styles of C.P.E. Bach, J.G. Graun, J.D. Heinichen, J.J. Quantz, G.H. Stölzel, and Telemann.²¹

In the twentieth century, there have been varying opinions regarding Fasch's styles and contribution. Riemann and his disciples regarded Fasch as one of the most important pioneers between the Baroque and Classical eras who "put instrumental music entirely on its own feet."²² Sheldon, on the other hand, finds Fasch to be a moderately significant late Baroque, central German composer, who shared many forward-looking stylistic features with his contemporaries.²³

Fasch's Oboe Concertos

Fasch's instrumental style was influenced generally by the Italian baroque concerto²⁴ and specifically by Venetian composers Antonio Vivaldi²⁵ and Giuseppe Tartini.²⁶ Arthur Hutchings lists seven features of Venetian concertos, some of which can be observed in Fasch's oboe concertos:

- 1) the establishment of three movements,
- 2) brilliant or impassioned solo parts,
- 3) the romantic turn of Vivaldi's expression,
- 4) perspicuity of style, including easily memorable themes,
- 5) ritornello organization,
- 6) pathetic slow movements, and
- 7) use of wind instruments.²⁷

Two other traits characteristic of Vivaldi's early style are clearly revealed in the second and fourth movements of Küntzel No. 8, those being "additive construction, as opposed to the spinning out of a single subject, and interpenetration of solo and tutti material."²⁸

Among Fasch's 18 extant solo concertos are seven for oboe, five have been published and two (K. 3 and K. 8) have been photocopied and studied by the author. In addition, Küntzel lists five other solo oboe concertos which have been lost. Figure 1 shows the K. number, tonality, and number of movements for each of Fasch's 12 oboe concertos.

Figure 1. Fasch's 12 oboe concertos
(* indicates lost work)

| K. # | Key | No. of Movements |
|------|---------|------------------|
| 2 | G major | 4 |
| 3 | C major | 4 |
| 7 | D minor | 3 |
| 8 | G major | 4 |
| 10 | A minor | 4 |
| 12 | G minor | 3 |
| 17 | D minor | 3 |
| 61* | D minor | |
| 62* | G major | |
| 63* | A minor | |
| 65* | G minor | |
| 66* | G major | |

Four of the concertos were composed in the key of G major, three in D minor, two each in G minor and A minor, and one in C major. Regarding choice of tonality, both the concertos and symphonies of Fasch “display a preference for G major.”²⁹ Also, “there is abundant proof that the oboe was regarded in the eighteenth century as an instrument whose home key was C, from which it ventured usually no further than three flats or sharps, with a tendency towards the medium flat keys.”³⁰ This explains the preferences for D minor and G minor among these concertos.

In discussing Fasch’s concertos, Küntzel writes in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* that “they are all of the three-movement type created by Vivaldi ...”³¹ It is clear, however, that four of the oboe concertos (as well as a chalumeau concerto) have a four-movement structure similar to the sonata da chiesa—a point that Küntzel himself discusses in his earlier dissertation. The *Chalumeau Concerto in B-flat Major* (K. 16) may display an older movement structure, but all other features of this work are consistent with the transitional period in which it was composed.³² The same can be said for the *Concerto in G for Oboe* (K. 8). Two of the other four-movement oboe concertos (K. 2, K. 3) do not include viola parts, which creates more of a Baroque trio-sonata-like texture. These two works, like trio sonatas, have no ritornellos; the omission of the viola part diminishes the ripieno group which would regularly play ritornellos.³³

Concerto No. 8 seems to exist in a nebulous area, appearing alternately as ensemble sonata, solo concerto, concerto grosso, and sinfonia. Movement structure and affect are somewhat reminiscent of two oboe concertos from the standard Baroque repertoire by Handel: the *Concerto in G Minor* and the *Concerto Grosso in B-flat Major*. In performing the Fasch concerto, one realizes that the oboe rarely rests due to the *colla parte* texture of tutti passages. In the second and fourth movements, the oboe uncharacteristically introduces the primary ritornello theme, blurring the distinction between solo and tutti expected in a typical solo concerto.

David Boyden offers some insight in his article “When Is a Concerto Not a Concerto?”

The dual meaning of the term in Italian and Latin, and the corresponding notions of “join together,” on the one hand, and “contention, rivalry, or contrast,” on the other, do serve the important function of explaining how a number of works of quite different character from about 1600-1750 could all be described with perfect propriety by the single term *concerto*. In short, during the 17th century and the first part of the 18th, the word *concerto* is to be understood, not as a fixed form with solo parts, but rather as one of two manners of setting, involving either the concept of “joining together” or “ensemble” of musical forces, or the idea of “striving, contrast, and opposition.”³⁴

The old “ensemble” meaning of concerto explains why, in a number of cases, the *sinfonia* (i.e., “sounding together”) resembles the concerto, and is even equated with it at times. It also helps explain why a sonata played by the orchestra is sometimes called a *concerto*, thus becoming, as it were, a “sonata in concerto”; and why the terms *sinfonia*, *sonata*, and *concerto* are sometimes closely identified, as well as often distinguished!³⁵

According to Riemann, Fasch was most significant in melodic structure and treatment of themes.³⁶ Melodies of the Baroque emphasized a single affect and were governed by a persistent spinning out of one primary motive. Melodies of the Classic period, on the other hand, were periodic, that is, shorter, more segmented, often with juxtaposed contrasting motives, as illustrated in the opening of Movements II and IV of the *Concerto in G for Oboe* (K. 8). It was in this new style of treating melodies and themes that Fasch excelled.

Example 1 shows two contrasting melodic segments followed by a pause at the opening of Movement II. (See *Example 1, next page*) The first segment, measure 1 through the first note of measure 4, displays different rhythmic activity and instrumentation from the second segment, the remainder of measure 4 through 8. The pause in measure 8 is uncharacteristic of mature Baroque style. “The grouping of phrases and contrast elements into rather concise segments was achieved by Fasch and others with the aid of repeat patterns and sequences.”³⁷

II

Allegro

The image displays two systems of a musical score. The first system, labeled 'II' and 'Allegro', contains measures 1 through 6. It features six staves: Oboe (top), Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Basso, and Cembalo (bottom). The Oboe part begins with a 'solo' marking. The Cembalo part starts with a 'p' (piano) dynamic. The second system, starting at measure 7, continues the piece with 'p' dynamics for the Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Cembalo parts. The notation includes various rhythmic values and rests across all instruments.

Example 2 shows a similar passage from the fourth movement. Here the first segment extends from the beginning to the first note of measure 7 and is followed by a second segment, the remainder of measure 7 to the first note of measure 13.

The question of dating Fasch's work has been addressed by Küntzel and Sheldon; both claim

IV

Allegro

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes staves for Oboe, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Basso, and Cembalo. The Oboe part begins with a *solo* marking and contains several trills (*tr*). The Cembalo part starts with a *p* (piano) dynamic. The second system continues the Oboe part with a trill and a *tutti* marking. The Violino I and II parts, Viola, and Basso parts in this system show dynamics of *p* and *f*. The Cembalo part in the second system has a *f* dynamic.

insurmountable difficulties in this task. The few extant, dated works are vocal compositions from Fasch's first work at Zerbst, which were dedicated to his patron in 1722/23.³⁸ Many of Fasch's

instrumental works, including three of the lost oboe concertos (K. 61, 62, 63),³⁹ are listed in the thematic catalog of General Major Freyherrn von Sonsfeldt which was compiled beginning c. 1720 and includes entries added through 1760.⁴⁰ Performer/scholar Bruce Haynes observes that Fasch studied at Darmstadt in 1713, two years after the arrival of oboist J.M. Böhn, which may explain Fasch's many works for oboe.⁴¹ The concertos K. 7 and K. 8 were copied at Darmstadt by Johann Samuel Endler, who died in 1752.⁴² Stylistically, Küntzel believes that these two works are relatively early.⁴³

Summary and Conclusions

Johann Friedrich Fasch was a composer of apparent good repute during a vital generation of transition. His stylistic variability displayed selective standard conventions of late Baroque form yet applied a progressive approach to melodies and themes with elements of the new gallant style. Perhaps if less isolated in Zerbst or more widely known through publication, his innovations may have been more influential at the time.

The above discussions clarify previous misstatements regarding Fasch's life and work. He was not Haydn's predecessor with Count Morzin in Vienna, but was in the employ of Count Vaclav Morzin in Prague. All of Fasch's solo concertos are not of the three-movement Vivaldi type; four of the oboe concertos and a chalumeau concerto display a four-movement structure.

One-third of Fasch's solo oboe concertos were composed in G Major, which is somewhat at variance with Haynes' observation that the home key of the eighteenth-century oboe was C Major, tending toward one to three flats when it departed from C.

Fasch's output included a high percentage of challenging, well-crafted solo oboe concertos which reveal elements of old and new. Few transitional concertos are included in the solo oboe repertoire. With the forthcoming edition of *Concerto in G for Oboe*, edited by this author and available through Southern Music Company (TX), performing oboists and their audiences may take advantage of a new addition to the repertoire which represents this interesting age of the early eighteenth century. ❖

¹Gottfried Küntzel, "Fasch, Johann Friedrich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), VI, 413-14.

²Gottfried Küntzel, *Die Instrumentalkonzerte von Johann Friedrich Fasch (1688-1758)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, 1965), G. Küntzel, Bonn.

³Bruce Haynes, "The Oboe Solo Before 1800: A Survey," *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society* XVII (July 1989), 7-14.

⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵Küntzel, *Instrumentalkonzerte von Fasch*, 195-209.

⁶Gottfried Küntzel, "Fasch, Johann Friedrich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), VI, 413-14.

⁷David A. Sheldon, "Johann Friedrich Fasch: Problems in Style Classification," *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1 (January, 1972), 93.

⁸David A. Sheldon, *The Chamber Music of Johann Friedrich Fasch* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1968; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms), 18.

⁹Gottfried Küntzel, "Fasch, Johann Friedrich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), VI, 413.

¹⁰Sheldon, *Chamber Music of Fasch*, 21.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 22.

¹²Milan Postolka, "Haydn, Fasch and Count Morzin," trans. John Tyrrell, *The Musical Times* cxxix/1741 (February, 1988), 78.

¹³Sheldon, *Chamber Music of Fasch*, 23.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 23-25.

¹⁵Küntzel, *loc. cit.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Sheldon, *Chamber Music of Fasch*, 33.

¹⁸Küntzel, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹Sheldon, *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1, 115.

²⁰Küntzel, *op. cit.*, 414.

²¹Sheldon, *Chamber Music of Fasch*, 210-27.

²²*Ibid.*, 35.

²³*Ibid.*, 226-27.

²⁴David A. Sheldon, "Johann Friedrich Fasch: Problems in Style Classification," *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1 (January, 1972), 105.

²⁵Gottfried Küntzel, "Fasch, Johann Friedrich," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), VI, 413.

²⁶Sheldon, *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1, 115. Tartini was a teacher of J.G. Graun and worked at Prague 1723-26.

²⁷Arthur Hutchings, *The Baroque Concerto* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1961), 141-155.

²⁸Claude V. Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 2nd ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981), 166.

²⁹Sheldon, *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1, 113.

³⁰Bruce Haynes, "Tonality and the Baroque Oboe," *Early Music* VII/3 (July 1979), 356.

³¹Küntzel, *The New Grove*, VI, 413.

³²Küntzel, *Instrumentalkonzerte von Fasch*, 31-33.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴David D. Boyden, "When Is a Concerto Not a Concerto?" *The Musical Quarterly* 43/2 (April 1957), 229.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 230.

³⁶David A. Sheldon, *The Chamber Music of Johann Friedrich Fasch* (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1968; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms), 34.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 222.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 37.

³⁹Bruce Haynes, *Music for Oboe 1650-1800: A Bibliography*, 2nd ed. revised and expanded (Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1992), 119.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 407.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 117.

⁴²Sheldon, *The Musical Quarterly* LVIII/1, 97, footnote #25.

⁴³Küntzel, *Instrumentalkonzerte von Fasch*, 39-40.

About the author ...

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