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CHRISTOPH GRAUPNER: COMPOSER'S WORKS HIDDEN IN DARMSTADT'S COURT LIBRARY

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Elected for the Leipzig position ahead of Bach, Graupner declined as the Darmstadt Court made him stay. After his death in 1760, performances outside the Court were hindered as well as publication of his over 1400 cantatas and numerous other works. His rediscovery and publication provide exciting material for music teachers and students, a musical-liturgical resource for church musicians, and an enrichment for concert audiences. (Recorded examples are available.)

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When J. S. Bach was elected Kapellmeister at the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Christoph Graupner was one of those chosen ahead of him. But as Graupner was selected for Leipzig, the Court at Darmstadt, where he was Kapellmeister for over 50 years, would not allow such a prestigious musician to leave. Further, during the 60 years after the composer's death (until 1819), the Court denied the heirs their due payment for further use of his music manuscripts and hindered performances outside the Court, as well as any publication. This included manuscripts to his over 1400 cantatas, 111 sinfonien, 84 ouvertures, 43 concertos for various instruments, over a dozen chamber works and 150 pieces for keyboard.

The form and texture of Graupner's compositions tend toward the classic style of Haydn and Mozart, rather than continuing baroque forms and trends. He was well informed regarding newer techniques, including the influence of Johann Stamitz at the Court of Mannheim. Clearly he was actively a part of the bridge between baroque and the Viennese Classic, including the concern for the "Edle Einfalt" (Noble Simplicity).

Nearly all of Graupner's cantatas were conceived as chamber music, that is, for few performers in the excellent acoustics of the Court chapel and were composed for the Sunday afternoon services.

Beside the customary accompaniment of two violin parts, viola and a Continuo part played on a substantial pipe organ of 24 ranks, at various times the composer employed various other instruments, such as flute, flute d'amore, oboe, oboe d'amore, viola da gamba, trumpet, horn, and even clarinets in his final cantata of 1754. Darmstadt was one of the very few places at that time in Protestant Germany that also employed female soloists and choir singers.

Given that Graupner was forward looking in his musical style, he usually retained the Renaissance-Baroque chorale, or congregational hymn, in his cantatas. Although in the context of the Court, cantata soloists or choir sang those chorales vicariously for the congregation, he demonstrated his connection with traditional worship life outside the Court by publishing his monumental Darmstaeter Choralbuch of 1728, the printing plates for which he etched himself. This came at a time when in many places in Germany, hymnals were being radically revised, "modernized", and streamlined.

The original manuscripts of nearly all his cantatas are preserved and in good condition in the old Darmstadt Court library. Discovering this treasure about 35 years ago I decided to prepare a number of them for publication and this work formed the basis of my dissertation. In cooperation with my wife, a German, who did the translations, a considerable number of these cantatas were published through Carus Verlag / Stuttgart and are being performed. Within the past 15 years the Christoph Graupner Gesellschaft (Christoph Graupner Society) was founded and is promoting further scholarly work regarding the composer, as well as the performance of his music. Being mostly chamber music, performances of this music is made relatively convenient.

The rediscovery of this significant German baroque composer can be of interest for music teachers and students, a musical-liturgical resource for church musicians, and an enrichment for concert audiences.

[Recorded examples are available.]