

Preface

“Johann Pachelbel, a widely famous musician and meritorious organist,” thus Johann Mattheson’s (1681-1764) characterization of Pachelbel in the very first sentence of the biographical entry in the *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* of 1740. That Mattheson wrote such a deferential description thirty-four years after Pachelbel’s death can only be due to the musician’s recognized stature and reputation during his lifetime, which had not diminished even following his death.

Johann Pachelbel was born in 1653 in Nuremberg, where he received his fundamental musical training, above all in keyboard playing, from local musicians. As far as we know, he was enrolled at the University of Altdorf in 1669-70 and at Regensburg’s Gymnasium Poeticum in 1670-73. The years 1673-75 he spent in Vienna, where – according to Mattheson in 1740 – he deputized for the cathedral organist “as his official adjunct, to great acclaim.”

On 4 May 1677 he was appointed court organist in Eisenach in the service of Johann Georg, Duke of Saxony-Eisenach. Yet already in the following year he assumed the position of organist at the Predigerkirche in Erfurt. Daniel Eberin, his superior as court music director in Eisenach, described Pachelbel in a letter of recommendation “as a consummate and rare virtuoso.”

In 1690 Pachelbel left Thuringia in order to take a position as musician and organist at the Württemberg court in Stuttgart. However, a war with France led to Pachelbel’s involuntary departure from Stuttgart in 1692, when he went to his hometown. Shortly thereafter he accepted a position as court organist in Gotha, but already in 1695 he requested his release in order to return to Nuremberg, having already promised in writing to serve as organist there. He remained in Nuremberg in the position of organist of St. Sebald’s Church until his death in 1706.¹

As far as his vocal music is concerned, the ca. fifteen years that Pachelbel spent in central Germany – in Eisenach and Erfurt – can certainly be considered his formative period. He lived and worked there in the vicinity of the great Thuringian Bach family of musicians, with whom he was closely associated as godfather and music teacher. If one examines the compositions of the Bach family that have been preserved, particularly thanks to Johann Sebastian Bach, in the form of the so-called “Altbachisches Archiv,” many of which were written precisely during this period, the stylistic proximity to the present concerto by Pachelbel is conspicuous.

The solo concerto for tenor, strings, and basso continuo presented in this edition opens as a typical strophic aria with ritornello and embellished solo verses. There are five string parts, whereby the first violin clearly comes to the fore as the melody-carrying voice: the “classical” string texture of the seventeenth century. However, Pachelbel does not merely reduce the strings to the function of ritornello instruments, but rather lets them accompany in various ways, sometimes in dialogue with the singer. Of particularly subtle construction is the dialogue between the chorale “Wo soll ich fliehen hin?” (“Where should flee to?”), which the instruments begin in measure 113, and the solo tenor’s answer “Flieh nur in meine Seiten Höhle!” (“Flee only into the hollow in my side!”). The text of the chorale is not sung in the piece, but the question-answer device functions because the text of the chorale would have immediately popped into the mind of the Protestant-raised listener of Pachelbel’s time at the appearance of the melody. On the title page, the sacred concerto is titled *Vergeh doch nicht, du armer Sünder* (Do not die, you poor sinner), which corresponds to the opening text of the tenor part. Yet, “vergeh” (“die” or “pass”) is only used this one time, subsequently the text always reads “verzag doch nicht” (do not give up hope). This inconsistency and other uncorrected mistakes (missing accidentals or notes that have been shifted a line lower) make it seem likely that the manuscript is a second-hand copy that was never used for a performance.

We would like to thank the music department of the Bavarian State Library, Munich, which holds the manuscript of the sacred concerto under the call number Mus.ms. 5381, and which provided the publishers with a copy of the work.

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Translation by Howard Weiner

¹ Cf. *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 2nd edn., s.v. “Pachelbel, Johann” by Michael Belotti, and *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn., s.v. “Pachelbel, Johann” by Ewald V. Nolte/John Butt.