

CHAPTER 2

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF GEORG FRIEDRICH KAUFFMANN

Georg Friedrich Kauffmann was born on 14 February 1679 in Ostermondra, Thuringia. Very little is known about Kauffmann's early years. He received his early keyboard training from Johann Heinrich Buttstett (1666-1727) in Erfurt. Buttstett was a student of Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706) and the teacher of Johann Gottfried Walther (1684-1748) and Jakob Adlung.

Merseburg, a city that was the seat of the dukes of Saxe-Merseburg from 1656 to 1738, was where Kauffmann later continued his studies under J.F. Alberti (1642-1710). Alberti, at that stage, was the court and cathedral organist, who schooled the young Kauffmann in the rudimental elements of composition. When Alberti suffered an incapacitating injury to his right hand in 1698, Kauffmann persistently deputised for him and eventually succeeded his mentor, as court and cathedral organist after the latter's death in 1710.

Co-existing citations to Kauffmann, including his own writings, suggest that he subsequently became the Director of Church Music for the Duke of Saxe-Merseburg and was possibly also employed as court Kapellmeister. The specific nature of his contract and obligations, however, remains ambiguous to this day.

Kauffmann's works comprehensively abound with precise and compact phrase structure with brief polyphonic complexity. His style of writing is, in essence, still evidently Baroque, although overflowing with added prominence on basic harmonic structure from which emerges a type of pre-Classical aesthetic. He proved to be equally proficient and comfortable in both *galant* and *stilo antico* composition. Albeit that his existing

compositional output is very meagre, Kauffmann can be regarded as one of the greatest of J.S. Bach's German contemporaries. (Arnold 1984: 90; Henderson 1999: 316.)

Kauffmann's reputation as a composer and organist reached far beyond the environs of Merseburg as Joshua Rifkin explains in the following examples. (Sadie 1980: 830-831.) It is commonly known that Johann Gottfried Walther, who was presumably acquainted with Kauffmann in Erfurt, copied the latter's well-known chorale prelude on *Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir*, early in the 18th century. Even Walther's pupil, Johann Tobias Krebs (1690-1762), later a pupil of Bach, copied one of Kauffmann's organ works, the Fantasia in G major, at more or less the same period.

In 1717 the Leipzig University council deliberated to request the expertise of Kauffmann to inspect and examine the recently built organ in St. Paul's church. Although Kauffmann was regarded as an esteemed nominee for the task, the invitation eventually went to Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), the most sought-after organist and examiner of the day.

In 1722 Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722) copied certain sections of Kauffmann's cantata *Unverzagt, beklemmtes Herz* to be utilised for a public performance on 16 August 1722, the event occurring shortly after Kuhnau's death.

In Halle, a local organist named Gottfried Kirchhoff (1685-1746) (a pupil of Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow [1663-1712]) owned a number of Kauffmann's cantatas which are no longer extant, and according to contemporary documentation, were probably put to use in the Marienkirche where he was organist.

In the autumn of 1722, Kauffmann made his way to Leipzig as a contestant for the position of Kantor at the Thomaskirche where Johann Kuhnau was active since 1701. In the records of the town council it appears that Kauffmann was one of seven candidates and he is described as "Court Organist and Music Director in Merseburg". On 29 November Kauffmann performed his examination work and was named as one of the finalists. J.S. Bach was ultimately offered the post in April 1723. It is almost certain that Kauffmann and

Bach would have met and become acquainted during this period and they presumably had indirect contact in the succeeding years.

Around 1727 Johann Andreas Kuhnau (1703-?), a nephew of Johann Kuhnau and pupil of Bach from c.1723-1728, who resided in Merseburg where Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784) incidentally also studied, copied three of Kauffmann's cantatas. One of these works, *Die Liebe Gottes ist ausgegossen*, was performed by one of Bach's choirs, that sang cantatas of his personal choice on feast days.

It is fair to say that the serious criticism of current musical activities began in Germany with the issue of a treatise entitled *Critica musica* by the prolific German musicologist, Johann Mattheson in 1725. This work contained, *inter alia*, evidences of an essay by Kauffmann that was never published and had since been lost. It bore the title *Introduzione alla musica antica et moderna, das ist: Eine ausführliche Einleitung zur alten und neuen Wissenschaft der edlen Music*. Mattheson provides a synopsis of this essay that encompasses the general and specific rules of composition in the old and new style.

Approximately eight years later Kauffmann initiated the serial publication of his greatest work, the *Harmonische Seelenlust* (Leipzig: 1733). Unfortunately he died of tuberculosis on 24 February 1735 in Merseburg before the publication could be completed. Bach had knowledge of this extraordinary work of his contemporary, considering that the engraving thereof was executed by the workshop of Johann Gottfried Krüger (1684-1769), who also worked on Bach's keyboard Partitas and the *Clavierübung* I and III (Wolff 2002: 484).