

Laurie H. Ongley

The reconstruction of an 18th-century *basso* group

WHEN we attempt to reconstruct orchestras from the second half of the 18th century, the *basso* group presents us with a perplexing series of puzzles. Scores usually designate the bass line merely 'Basso' or 'Organo', making it difficult to ascertain exactly which instruments, and how many of each, might have played. However, sources from the Saxon court at Dresden are remarkably comprehensive in scope and explicit in their *basso* designations. Surviving manuscripts show that Dresden's available *basso* group was a relatively large one, including keyboard and as many as four each of bassoons, cellos and contrabasses. The sources also demonstrate that a sizeable ensemble played even when the instruments were not explicitly scored. But this *basso* group varied greatly in size, depending on the performance venue; the bass-line ensemble, mirroring the orchestra as a whole, was considerably larger in the church than in the opera or chamber.

The repertory I shall examine includes music

by Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741–1801), Joseph Schuster (1748–1812) and Franz Seydelmann (1748–1806), the three simultaneous *Kapellmeister* at Dresden. (See table 1 for the dates when they were employed by the court.) Music by these three composers dominated the Dresden repertory from the mid-1760s to the early years of the 19th century. In the Sächsische Landesbibliothek—Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden (D-Dlb), there survives a collection of over 1,000 of their manuscripts, including many matching sets of scores and performance parts for operas, liturgical music and oratorios. Unfortunately there are virtually no performance parts for symphonic or chamber music in this repertory, so conclusions for those genres must remain tentative. In my consideration of performance manuscripts I have included only the original 18th-century parts, disregarding additional parts in 19th-century hands.

In order to assess the relative weight of the *basso*

Table 1 The Dresden *Kapellmeister* Naumann, Schuster and Seydelmann

Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741–1801)					
<i>Kirchencompositeur</i>	1746	1765			
<i>Kirchen- und Kammer-Compositeur</i>		1765	1776		
<i>Kapellmeister</i>			1776	1801	
Joseph Schuster (1748–1812)					
<i>Kirchencompositeur</i>			1772	1787	
<i>Kapellmeister</i>				1787	1812
Franz Seydelmann (1748–1806)					
<i>Kirchencompositeur</i>			1772	1787	
<i>Kapellmeister</i>				1787	1806

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group, the size of the *Kapelle* must be taken into consideration. Table 2, compiled from the annual court calendar, lists the number of paid performers on each instrument in five-year increments from 1765 to 1805. Tables 3 and 4, drawn from court payroll records, give the names of orchestra members in two representative years, 1764 and 1794.

From tables 2-4 we may conclude that the Dresden *basso* group had available, on paper at least, four bassoonists, three or four cellists, approximately four contrabassists and two organists. Having these musicians on the payroll does not, of course, necessarily mean that they all played at the same time. Performing duties could have been rotated, or some players could have been absent for a variety of reasons. Several members of the Dresden orchestra toured Europe as soloists and were frequently absent from court. Other instrumentalists, suffering from ill health or the effects of ageing, were virtually incapable of playing, but were nevertheless included in the roster of the *Kapelle*. However, when court documents refer to absent or incapacitated players, they also indicate unequivocally the substitutes hired as replacements. The orchestra's administrator, or *Directeur des Plaisirs*, had a particular number of musicians in mind; he produced an orchestra with that number, whether or not the players were the individuals listed in the court calendar.

In fact, the *Directeur des Plaisirs* had several differ-

ent numbers in mind, one for each performance venue. As the following extract from a petition of 1788 illustrates, the *Directeur* expected a larger number of contrabassists in the church orchestra than in the opera:

The contrabassist Horn is unqualified to play in the opera, and I also cannot count on Dietrich, because he is weak, old and sickly. So I have only Wirmb and Petermann left in the opera. When one of these two is sick, as has already happened, I have had to use the young contrabassist Schubert in the opera, and also in the church, where four contrabasses are necessary.¹

Thus we learn that two basses were required for the opera and four for the church, and that substitutes were hired if the full complement was not available.

A similar petition shows that the 'weak, old and sickly' Dietrich from 1788 was still a member of the church's contrabass section in 1790, and that Schubert was still his *ad hoc* substitute. It affirms that four contrabassists were expected in the church:

Church duty absolutely requires four contrabassists, and old Dietrich often cannot serve for months at a time; of the other three, one or more has often been sick. In such cases I have had to hire the son of the late chamber heater, Anton Schubert, to play the contrabass in the church for 6 *Groschen* a day. It is thus imperative that we engage a supernumerary contrabassist, as we have done with other instruments, in part so that we never have fewer than four in the church, and in part so that when one of the regular bassists dies [we will be in a position to replace him].²

Table 2 The Dresden court orchestra, 1765-1805

	1765	1770	1775	1780	1785	1790	1795	1800	1805
Violin	17	16	19*	17	17	19	20	20	19
Flute	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3
Lute	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Horn	2	3	2	3	3	4	4	4	4
Oboe	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	3	3
Clarinet	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2
Viola	4	4	4*	4	4	6	6	4	4
Cello	3	4	3	2	4	4	3	4	5
Bassoon	4	4	5*	3	4	4	4	4	4
Organ	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Contrabass	3	3	3	4	5	4	4	4	4

* This figure includes one or more *Supernumerar* players. Such extra players are referred to often in court documents, but they are only listed in the annual calendar in 1775.

Source: *Churfürstlicher Sächsischer Hof- und Staats-Calendar* (Leipzig: M. G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich, annually from 1765)

Table 3 The Dresden court orchestra in 1764

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Name</i>
Concertmaster	Carl Mattheus Lehneis
Violin	Lorenzo Carazzi
	August Uhlig (also instrument inspector)
	Johann George Fickler
	Franz Zich
	Francois de Francini
	Franz Nicolaus Hunt
	Johann George Neruda
	Felice Picinetti
	Friedrich Gottlob Haller
	Franz Fiedler
	Johann Baptista Hunt
	Johann Eiselt
	Joseph Dieze
	Simon Uhlig
Anton Lehneis	
Flute	Ludovicus Neruda
	Franz Joseph Goezel
	Antoine Francois Derablé
Lute	Johann Adam Schmidt
	Johann Adolph Faustinus Weis
Horn	Carl Haudeck
	Anton Joseph Hampel
Oboe	Antonio Besozzi
	Carlo Besozzi
	Johann Christian Fischer
Viola	Johann Franz Zincke
	Johann Adam (also ballet composer)
	Johann Huber
	Johann Gottfried Roehr
Cello	Johann David Lange
	Joseph Zicka
	Joseph Franz Hofmann
	Antonio Felice Picinetti
	Johann George Knechtel
Bassoon	Friedrich Joseph Zicka
	Christian Friedrich Mattstaedt
	Carl Christian Ritter
	Franz Christlieb
Organ	Johann Gabriel Zeisig
	Peter August
	Christian Gottlob Binder
Contrabass	Johann Caspar Horn
	George Christoph Balch
	Anton Beitrich

Source: 'Extract aus dem Reglement derer vom 1. Jan. 1764 an aus der Gen. Accis-Cassa zu bezahlenden nachbenannten Besoldungen ...', *Acta Das Churfürstl. Orchestre*, i (1764 and following), Dresden, Staatsarchiv, Loc. 910, ff.23–28v

Table 4 The Dresden court orchestra in 1794

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Name</i>
Concertmaster	Christoforo Babbi
Violin	Franz Nicolaus Hunt
	Franz Fiedler
	Joseph Dietz
	Simon Uhlig (also instrument inspector)
	Anton Lehneis
	Johann Christian Dunckel
	Carl Gottlob Taschenberger
	Friedrich Anton Neruda
	Christian Kunze
	Joseph Kneischel
	Heinrich Traugott Salomon
	Carl Gottfried Dietzsch
	Johann Gottlob Scholze
	Franz Carl Hunt
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	Anton Klingner
Cello	Joseph Schubert
	Franz Poland
	Johann Tricklir
	Carl Wilhelm Hoeckner
	Heinrich Megelin
	Franz Eisert
Bassoon	Carl Christian Ritter
	Johann Ephraim Nessel
	Franz Schmidt
Organ	Carl Gottfried Kummer
	August Siegmund Binder
Contrabass	Anton Arnest
	Anton Dietrich
	Johann Wilhelm Petermann
	Franz Anton Schubert
	Anton Schubert

Source: 'Besoldungs-Etat, von sämtlichen bey der Churfürstl. Capelle ...', *Acta Schauspiele und Redouten auf dem kleinen Theater*, x (1793 and following), Dresden, Staatsarchiv, Loc. 909, ff.41–42v. This table includes only surnames of musicians; I have added forenames from the *Hof- und Staats-Calender*.

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Again four bassists performed, matching the number listed in the personnel roster for that year, although some of the players were substitutes.

A further petition urges the engagement of supernumerary violists to augment a weak section in 1786:

... the first violist, Simon, because of his advanced age, sickness and diminishing capacity of the senses, is sometimes able to perform only his church duty; similarly, the second player, Horn, due to attacks of melancholy, is not in condition to be hired for any service other than church duty; and furthermore, the fourth player, Klinger, because of his weak health, must often be excused from duty. Thus the third violist Franzel remains alone in service. As the orchestra, then, is too weak in the bass, particularly in the violas: if Your Electoral Highness does not wish to augment the strength of this section permanently, I submissively recommend the temporary engagement of two supernumerary violists, with an interim salary of 125 *Thaler* each. Upon the deaths of the permanent violists the supernumerary players can move into the permanent positions with full salaries.³

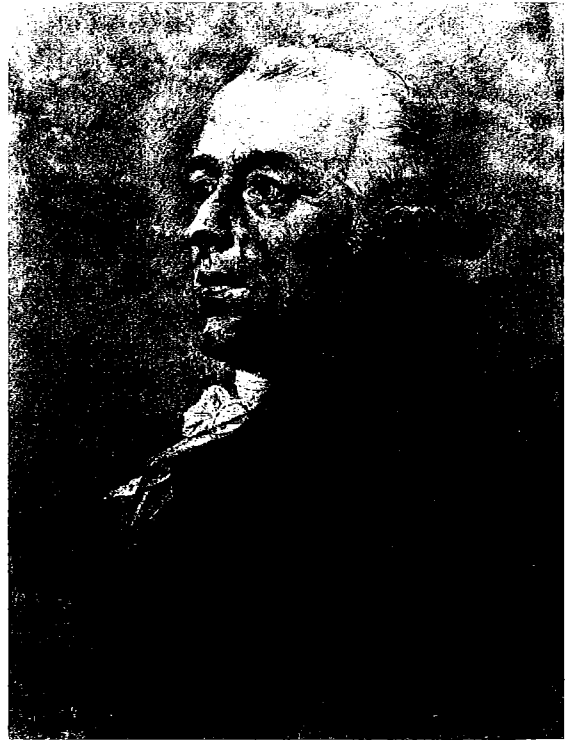
This extract seems to confirm that the church orchestra required a larger complement of instruments than other venues. We also learn that a higher standard of performance was expected in the opera than in the church, where little seems to have been expected of the musicians. Similar documents suggest that, among other orchestral instruments as well, the musicians in the opera were fewer in number but more capable than those in the church. The *Directeur des Plaisirs* claimed that the requisite number of musicians was difficult to maintain; we must remember, however, that he was trying to wrest money from the court treasury, and that it was in his interest to make the situation sound dire.

Turning now to the music manuscripts, we find corroboration of the numbers mentioned in the court documents. To begin with the strings, payroll records and petitions would lead us to expect four cellists and four bassists in the church orchestra. Except in cases where the sets are obviously incomplete, performance parts for Dresden's liturgical music and oratorios contain two parts each for cellos and basses. The parts do not specify how many players should have read from each sheet, naming the instruments simply in the plural—'Violoncelli' or 'Bassi'. If two players shared a stand, four on each instrument would have been easily accommodated.

In contrast to the church orchestra, the opera

orchestra seems to have had a smaller number of lower strings. Part sets have cello parts only about a quarter of the time, and then only one part is extant. Single bass parts survive in nearly all complete opera sets, but there are virtually no duplicate parts. Single parts do not necessarily mean that only two of each instrument played, because either cellists or bassists could have read from the keyboard part. Max Maria von Weber, writing of his father Carl's experiences in Dresden in 1817, complained

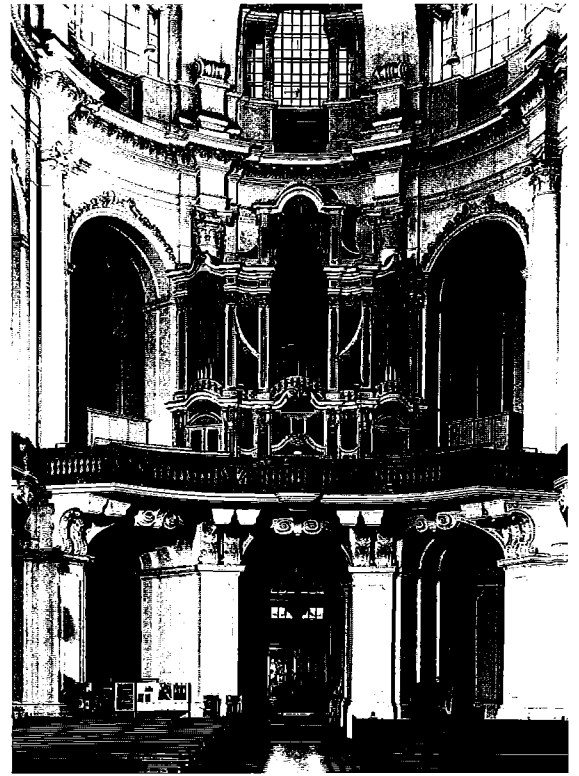
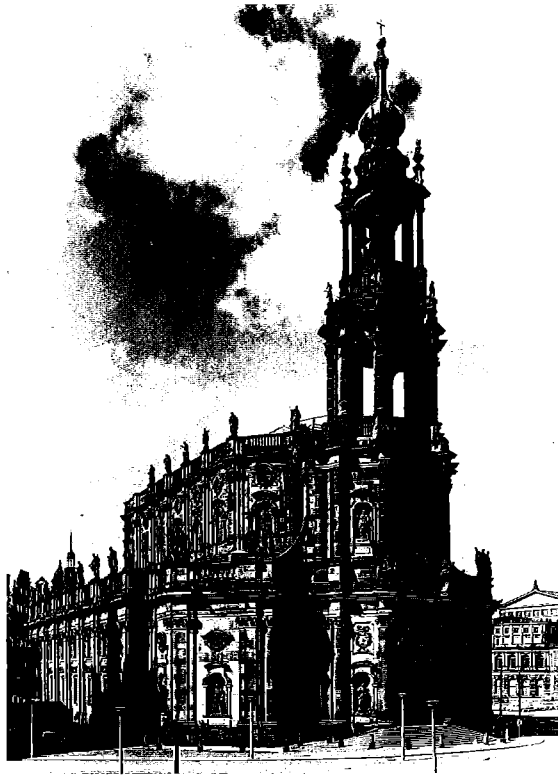
1 The three Dresden *Kapellmeister* Naumann, Schuster and Seydelmann: (right) Johann Gottlieb Naumann (1741–1801), chalk portrait by Anton Graff (1736–1813) (Dresden, Kupferstichkabinett, Inv. Nr. 1874–5)—F. Rosmäsler's engraving taken from this drawing appeared in *Early music*, xxvi (1998), p.614; (below) Joseph Schuster (1748–1812), engraving by J. C. B. Gottschick (1776–1844), after Fr. Lud. Vieth von Golßenau (1768–1848) (Dresden, Stadtmuseum, A 181118); (below right) Franz Seydelmann (1748–1806), engraving after a painting by J. C. Berkenkamp (1782) (Courtesy of Sächsische Landesbibliothek—Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden)



that a cellist and a bassist reading from the conductor's score had their line of sight blocked by the conductor's arms.⁴ For that year Weber listed three basses and two cellos in the opera orchestra, with one of each reading from the conductor's score; a fourth contrabassist, he wrote, could be added for a 'full orchestra'. Jean-Jacques Rousseau drew a diagram of the Dresden opera orchestra in 1754 with similar over-the-shoulder reading; he showed three basses and three cellos, with one of each sharing the conductor's score and one of each sharing the continuo player's score.⁵ But Rousseau wrote before the reorganization of the *Kapelle* in 1763, and Carl Maria von Weber's tenure came after another reorganization in the early 19th century. Rather than relying on secondary sources that may not be entirely appropriate, I use the petitions of the *Directeur des Plaisirs* to hypothesize a contrabass section of two players in the opera orchestra.

Although the *Directeur* is less specific about the cello section, I infer from the performance parts that it also contained two players.

Only one set of symphonic performance parts survives from Naumann's, Schuster's and Seydelmann's oeuvre. The *Sinfonia* in D major by Joseph Schuster is accompanied by an apparently complete set of performance parts containing two parts marked 'Basso'.⁶ Although we do not know with any certainty which instruments might have played from the two parts, it appears that at least some lower strings customarily played in Dresden's chamber orchestras. In three collections of songs for solo voice and orchestra the scores' 'Basso' lines include the notation 'Violoncello' at places with reduced scoring.⁷ Two of those collections specify 'Violoncello' where the *basso* line divides into notes with ascending stems above and semibreve rests below.⁸ Apparently another *basso* instrument, most likely



2 The Hofkirche, Dresden: (left) exterior (1968); (right) interior (1975), looking towards the west end with the organ loft where the musicians were probably positioned. The organ is by Gottfried Silbermann (1653–1753). (photos: Sächsische Landesbibliothek—Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden)



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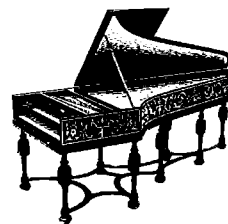
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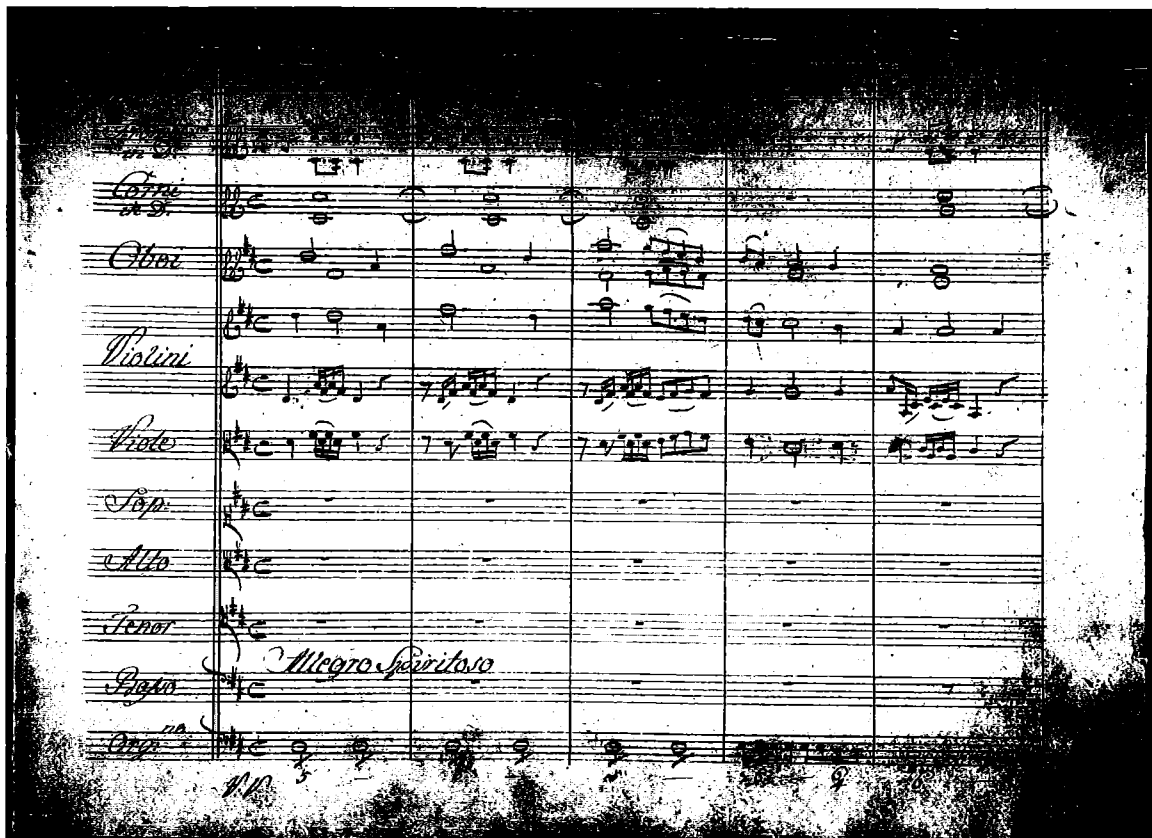
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3 Autograph score of Franz Seydelmann, Offertory 'Laetamini in Deo' (D-Dlb Mus. 3550-B-41, 1)

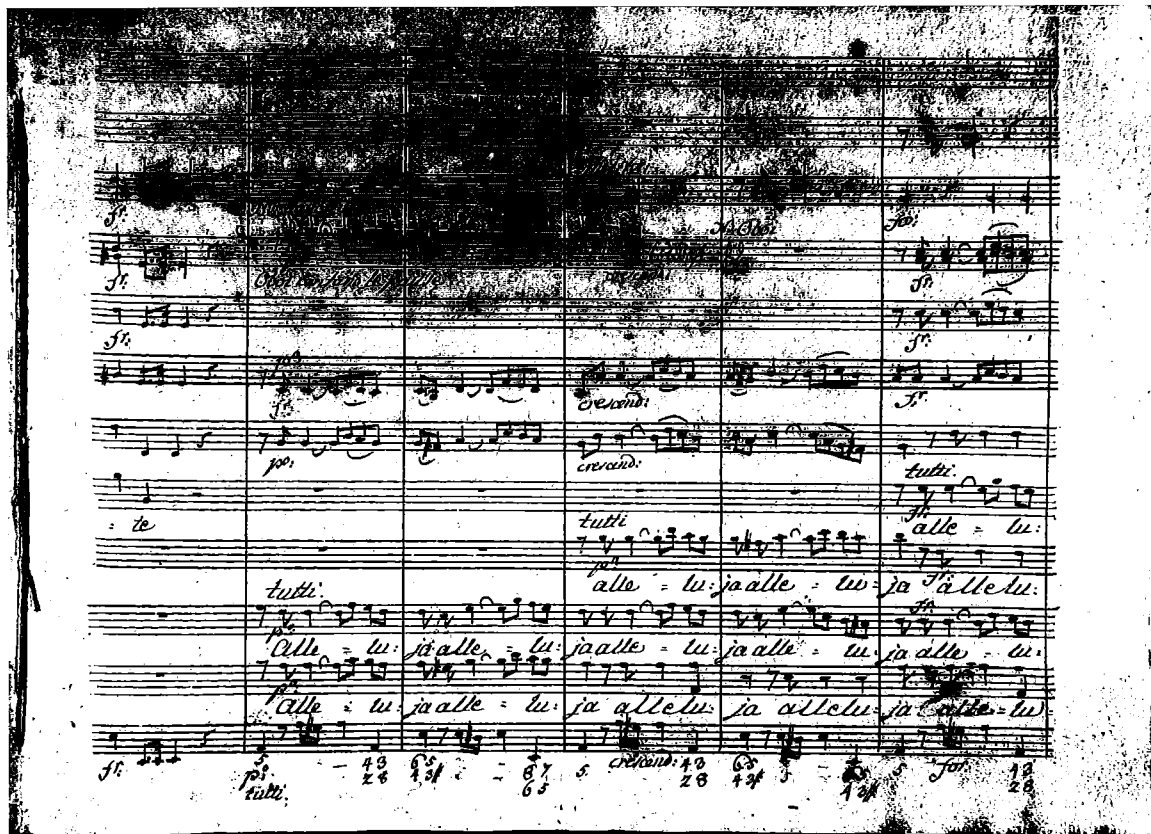
one or more contrabasses, played below the 'Violoncello'.

Although the viola section was not part of the *basso* group, its performance parts can help us confirm the number of string players reading from a single stand. Two viola parts usually survive for liturgical scores and oratorios, for which (as has been shown above) four players were considered the norm; thus in the church two violists probably shared a stand. For operas only one viola part is extant, but the part is sometimes divided into Viola I and Viola II. At least two players, then, performed in the opera from a single stand.

The music manuscripts from Dresden are specific about the requisite numbers of bassoons: at least two, and in the church as many as four, were consistently included. In roughly half the surviving scores, bassoons do not appear in the instrumentation at all; but as with the cellos and basses, surviving perfor-

mance parts attest to their regular use. Comments in composers' scores offer further clues. An autograph offertory of 1791 by Franz Seydelmann does not include bassoons in the instrumentation (see the prefatory staves in illus.3). But a few pages later in the same score, Seydelmann wrote in a part for bassoons on the oboe staff at a point where the oboes rest: 'NB: Fagotti / Oboi cantano le pause' ('NB: bassoons / oboes count rests') (illus.4). At the end of their brief passage, the bassoons are returned to 'Col Bas[so]' ('with the bass line'), where they had presumably been playing all along.

I hypothesize that it was not musical considerations that governed whether bassoon parts were included in scores, but the size of the music paper. Where extra staves were available, bassoons were scored; where the page was vertically cramped, the bassoon line was expendable. Only in passages where bassoons have material independent of the bass line,

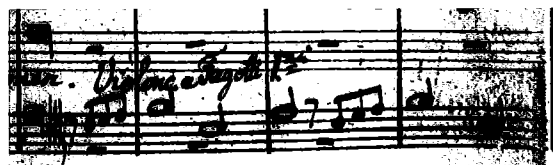


4 Autograph score of Franz Seydelmann, Offertory 'Laetamini in Deo' (D-Dlb Mus. 3550-B-41, 1); note the indications 'NB: Fagotti ... Oboi cantano le pause ... Col Bas.' on the fourth staff

as in illus.4, was it necessary to write out their part in detail.

Whether scored or not, bassoon performance parts for church music always come in pairs, one each for first and second bassoon. We can safely assume that at least two bassoonists played. The question remains: did only a single player perform from each part, or were the lines doubled? It appears that, at least some of the time, four bassoonists played in the church. We have seen from tables 2-4 that four musicians were available, and two manuscript examples provide evidence that all four played at once. Illus.5 shows a few bars from the score of the Gloria of Naumann's Mass no.17, where the *basso* line is marked 'Violonc[elli] e Fagotti 1^{mi}' ('cellos and first bassoons'). We assume that there were also 'Fagotti 2^{di}': Naumann was fluent in Italian and was unlikely to use plural endings by mistake.⁹ Earlier in

the same manuscript, at the *Christe*, he marked the *basso* line 'Violoncelli e due Fag: / senza Org:' ('cellos and two bassoons / without organ'). The gentle *Christe* has a reduced texture from the previous *Kyrie*; if two bassoons are used here then it is likely that more were used elsewhere in the piece. Later in the *Christe* the *basso* returns to 'tutti Bassi', which presumably includes more than two bassoons. (This score is not an autograph, nor is the next score cited; but the copyists in question, Dreyßigsche Singakademie Copyist 1 and Carl Gottlob Uhle, made



5 Naumann, Mass no.17, Gloria (D-Dlb Mus. 3480-D-512)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Naumann's Mass no. 20, 'Christe'. It features ten staves of music. The top staff is marked 'Allegretto'. The seventh staff has the instruction 'due Soli / l'altri col B.' at the end. The eighth and ninth staves contain the lyrics 'son e-le-i-son e-le-i-son e-le-i-son'. The bottom staff is marked 'Allegretto'. The number '8' is printed at the bottom center of the page.

6 Naumann, Mass no. 20, *Christe* (D-Dlb Mus. 3480-D-23): note the indication 'due Soli / l'altri col B.' at the end of the seventh staff

perfect copies of many Naumann scores, and their work may be considered nearly as reliable as the autographs.)¹⁰

A further example of a doubled bassoon line, again from a Naumann score, is corroborated by the surviving performance parts. In the *Christe* of Naumann's Mass no. 20 (illus. 6) the bassoons are notated 'due Soli / l'altri col B.' ('two solo, the others with the bass line'). In the performance parts to this Mass (illus. 7) the first bassoon part, which is labelled 'Fagotti obbligati', divides into two separate lines, marked '1^o' and '2^{do}', requiring two players to read from this single sheet; presumably two musicians were also playing from the second bassoon part, which is labelled 'Fagotti Ripieni'.

Thus, for at least some Masses, four bassoons seem to have been intended. If four bassoons were

used in the church, can we come to any conclusions about their use in opera or chamber music? Performance sets from the opera include only one bassoon part. We can be sure that these single parts were played by at least two bassoonists, because several have a *divisi* split. Weber provides some corroboration, listing two bassoonists in the opera pit in 1817.¹¹ In contrast, Rousseau's diagram of 1754 has five bassoons. This discrepancy does not necessarily indicate a decrease in the orchestra's size between 1754 and 1817, but may be due instead to a change in theatre space: court documents from late in the century repeatedly refer to opera performances in the 'little theatre', a room in the palace that would have required a smaller orchestra than the separate opera house built by Daniel Pöppelmann in 1719. Lacking further evidence, I conjecture that opera audiences

of the late 18th century heard an orchestra with two bassoons.

The single set of symphonic performance parts from this repertory contains no bassoon parts. While one set is too small a sample to disprove the use of bassoons in orchestral music, neither does it verify their use.

Finally, the *basso* line was reinforced by keyboard instruments. In the church, the organ provided the continuo: the bass line of liturgical scores is marked 'Organo' and a performance part with the same label invariably consists of a bass line with figures. Keyboard parts do not survive for chamber or opera, and were probably never required. In the opera the composer most likely conducted at the

harpsichord from the full score. In chamber music, if a keyboard was used at all, the harpsichordist or pianist also probably used the full score.

Two instruments from the *Kapelle's* roster remain unaccounted for: the lute and the second organ. Neither appears in scores or performance parts; it is unclear what function they served. Until further evidence comes to light, we cannot say with any assurance when, or with what ensembles, these instruments might have performed.

The assembled *basso* group, certainly sturdy, was also pliant and adjustable. Far from the routine doubling that we might expect, the ensemble's performance of the bass line was careful and varied. The composers' meticulous specification of particular textures can be seen at gentle passages, especially those for solo vocalists, where the continuo group is reduced. Illus.8 shows a page from the *Christe* of Naumann's autograph Mass no.19, in which the 'Organo' line is reduced to cellos alone: 'Senza Contrabassi / tutti Violoncelli' ('without basses, all cellos'). (The absence of figures implies that the organ was also silent.) In illus.9, from the 'Qui



7 Naumann, Mass no.20, *Christe*, bassoon 1 part (D-Dlb Mus. 3480-D-552)

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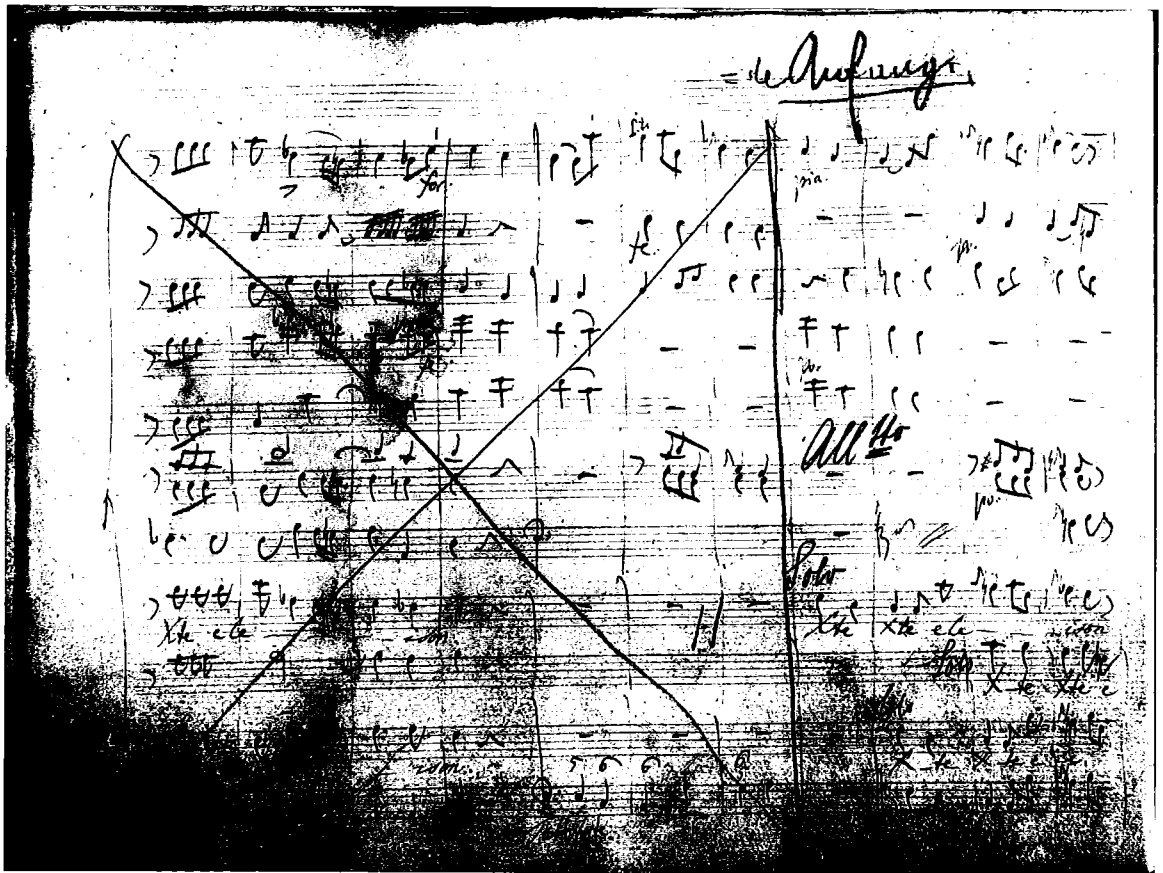


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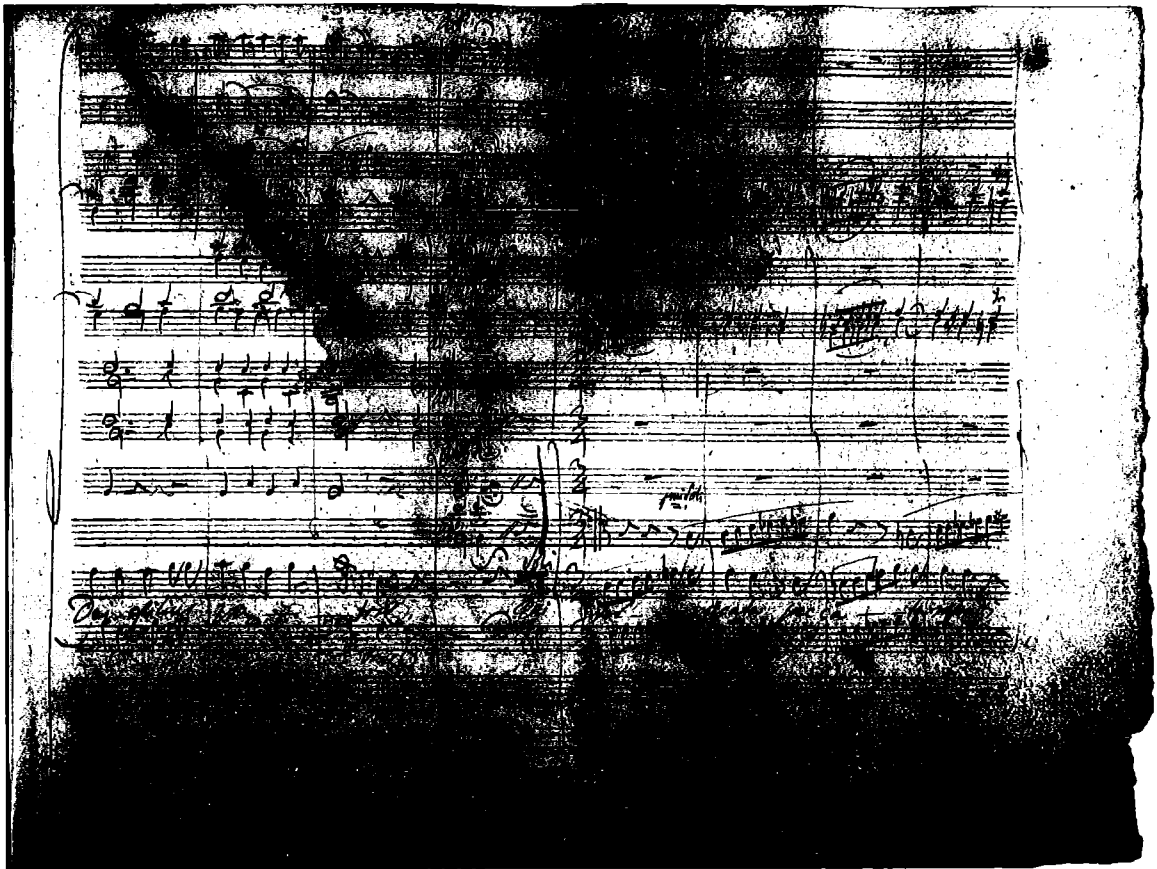
8 Autograph score of Naumann, Mass no.19, *Christe* (D-Dlb Mus. 3480-D-29a): note the indication 'Senza Contrabassi/tutti Violoncelli' at the foot of the page

tollis' of the same Mass, Naumann instructs the first bassoons to play alone with the 'Violoncelli'. In some cases where the cellos have melodic material, the *basso* staff is divided into two groups: one for cellos and one for basses.

We have seen that the *basso* group in Dresden included a full complement of bass-line instruments even where the scores designate merely 'Basso' or 'Organo'. Even though bassoons are scored only some of the time, and cellos and basses not at all, all three instrument types certainly played. But the constitution of the *basso* group depended on the performance venue. The church required more instruments than the opera, and probably more than the concert hall. Data for chamber performance are still too sketchy for firm conclusions about size, but we are on firmer ground

for church and opera performances. I maintain that table 2 is an accurate representation of the church orchestra, but that the opera orchestra was only about half as large.

We cannot assume that performance practices at one court necessarily mirrored those at other musical centres. But the procedures followed at Dresden would have influenced, and been influenced by, other musical establishments in Europe. Writers as diverse as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Joachim Quantz, Johann Friedrich Reichardt and the Swedish diplomat Frederik Samuel Silverstolpe cited the Dresden orchestra as a model for others to emulate.¹² Modern performers who want to follow 18th-century practices can confidently use Dresden's instrumentation as an exemplar.



9 Autograph score of Naumann, Mass no.19, 'Qui tollis' (D-Dlb Mus. 3480-D-29a); note in the first 3/4 bar the indications 'mi Soli' (sixth staff from the bottom) and 'Violoncelli' (bottom staff)

1 'Vortrag', *Acta Das Churfürstl. Orchestre*, ix (1787 and following), Dresden, Staatsarchiv, Loc. 383, f.144v.

2 'Vortrag', *Acta Das Churfürstl. Orchestre*, x (1789 and 1790), Loc. 911, pp.242-3.

3 'Vortrag', *Acta Das Churfürstl. Orchestre*, ix, ff.1-1v.

4 Max Maria von Weber, *Carl Maria von Weber: ein Lebensbild*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1864-6), ii, pp.139-40.

5 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1768), s.v. 'Orchestre'. A note in the text explains that the section on the Dresden orchestra was written in 1754.

6 D-Dlb Mus. 3549-N-4 (score) and

Mus. 3549-N-4a (parts). A modern edition of the score is printed in *The symphony in Dresden*, ed. H.-G. Ottenberg, *The Symphony, 1720-1840*, C/x (New York, 1984), p.131.

7 D-Dlb Mus. 3549-F-36, Mus. 3480-F-48 and Mus. 3480-I-10.

8 D-Dlb Mus. 3480-F-48 and Mus. 3480-I-10, both collections of songs by Johann Gottlieb Naumann.

9 One inconsistency in Naumann's Italian is his alternation between 'Violino' and 'Violini'. He seems to have considered the line singular but the instruments plural, and he appears to switch arbitrarily between these terms.

10 These and other Dresden copyists are discussed in L. H. Ongley,

Liturgical music in late eighteenth-century Dresden: Johann Gottlieb Naumann, Joseph Schuster, and Franz Seydelmann, 2 vols. (PhD diss., Yale U., 1992), i, pp.77-103.

11 Weber, *Carl Maria von Weber*, ii, p.140.

12 Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, ii, p.62; Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', in *On playing the flute*, trans. E. R. Reilly (New York, 1966), pp.xiii-xiv, xx; Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Ueber die Pflichten des Ripien-Violinisten* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1776), p.80; Silverstolpe's letter of 1796 is cited in H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: chronicle and works*, 5 vols. (Bloomington, IN, 1976-80), iv, p.37.