

Malcolm Boyd: *Harmonizing 'BACH' Chorales* – a half-century reconsideration, 1967–2017

Let me take you back to the start of the academic year 1967–68. Directors of Music in British schools seeking new resources would (I'm sure) have been delighted by two books that had newly landed on the shelves of music shops. Both were written by a musicologist (at what would, in 1999, become Cardiff University), and both were relatively brief monographs on aspects of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. Indeed, their handiness and corresponding economy of price were noted in a review in *The Musical Times* of that October (vol.108, no.1496, p.912: "In Bach's Style", a review by Roy Jesson – 'A warm welcome for textbooks such as these which are brief, musically sound, and centred on music rather than on theory. ... The modest price [10s. each] of these booklets will appeal to students'). These booklets were *Harmonizing 'BACH' Chorales* and *Bach's Instrumental Counterpoint*, and their author was Malcolm Boyd.

Fast-forward to the present day: if one were to make a survey of the books on the shelves of every secondary-level Music Department, it would be my best guess that two appearing in the highest portion of the list would be, first Albert Riemenschneider's 1941 American edition of the '371' chorale harmonisations by J. S. Bach, and second Malcolm Boyd's 1967 British monograph based on the chorales through reference to Riemenschneider's edition of them. Together with Boyd's book on Bach's counterpoint (with which the book on the chorales is currently bound), these are works that continue to sell, just as the topic with which they are each concerned continues to form a central plank in public examinations such as A-level specifications.

Old habits die hard, and 'Riemenschneider' is still the usual reference for Bach's chorale harmonisations (as Boyd noted that it was in 1967 – see page 8),¹ despite its problems.² So what are we to make now of Boyd's advice to students of half a century ago?

It goes without saying that times have changed. I took my own Music A-level in 1977, a decade after Boyd's books appeared. In the 1970s, the preliminary Music O-level had required four-part harmonisation in a simple hymn-tune fashion, acting as a foundation for the rigours of the 'Bach chorale' style at A-level (and, way back then, these exams were taken without musical aids of any sort). GCSE examinations – replacing both O-level and CSE – arrived a further decade later in 1987, for which 'Harmony and Counterpoint' had given way to composition in any style personal to the individual student-composer. However, Boyd's books have not been revised in the light of these changing educational conditions, even though Boyd himself, a leading Bach scholar, died only in 2001 at the relatively early age of 68.

1. Context

The blurb on the back cover of an original copy includes the statement:

Certainly, many diploma examinations and B.Mus. degrees have at least one question on the lines of 'Harmonize the following chorale tune in the style of Bach' ...

Some of that remains true today – the ARCO diploma in Britain currently includes Bach chorale harmonisation, as does the AMusA diploma in Australia – but undergraduate degree courses had for decades presumed that the topic was covered at A-level, as indeed it was for most if not all students until the arrival of the revised A-levels (and the introduction of a new-style AS-level) at the end of the last millennium, within which, under the general heading 'techniques of composition', a wider range of topics

was offered. But, with some students consequently entering university without this grounding in traditional harmony, many degree courses are once again incorporating Bach chorale harmonisation into their students' early studies – even though many of these students will nonetheless have spent a year or two at A-level on that very subject. Clearly, the preliminary understanding of harmony at this higher level is still thought to be best illustrated by Bach's chorale examples.

Referring again to the original back-cover blurb, the comment

The value and success of the study of Bach's chorale harmonizations largely depends on the extent to which the student assimilates ... Bach's style.³

tells us something of the assumptions underlying the assumed pedagogical value of this topic. Rather than providing the student with specific techniques, he or she was expected (as much as possible according to their intellect and musicality) to absorb⁴ Bach's style intuitively, helped by examples and advice. Boyd's book was therefore designed to provide reliable and authoritative examples and advice, for both teachers and students. Perhaps the ultimate proof of the skills that could be achieved in this way was the completion by Donald Tovey of the unfinished fugue from Bach's *The Art of Fugue* and his composition of an extra, completely invertible fugue on four subjects.⁵

The wider world in which students of the 1960s and 1970s developed their skills was, unsurprisingly, rather different from today. Hymns were then a prevalent part of everyday experience: I sang one in assembly nearly every morning during my seven years at secondary school, and a high proportion of families were traditional church-goers so that even more hymns were sung by many students each Sunday. This in itself provided a solid basis of experience on which to build skills in four-part harmony for O-level. And in Britain, classical music in general formed a far bigger part of the mass culture of the 1960s and 1970s – with regular concerts of 'classical music' on television as well as radio programmes such as David Munrow's *Pied Piper* and Anthony Hopkins's *Talking about Music*. O- and A-levels, then, were predicated on the sort of musical education that would not have been unrecognisable to Bach, Beethoven or Brahms, and syllabuses presumed that the musical classics provided the main if not the only material worthy of such serious-minded study.

As the GCSE reforms of the 1980s permeated through to A-level, the referenced repertoire became evermore far-reaching, to the extent that 'classical music' has now been relegated to something like 25% of the styles and genres of music studied, sharing a platform equal by quantity (if not necessarily by quality) with each of Popular and World musics as well as with the musical reforms and experiments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Thus, with the growth of mass media, the broadening cultural influences experienced socially by the general student across the past three or four decades have been reflected in Music syllabuses and specifications, while the influence of the classical masters such as Bach has proportionately dwindled. And so the presumptions upon which Boyd based his work no longer apply with anything like the same relevance. Indeed, the biggest problem in using Boyd's book today is identified on page 7 in only the third paragraph of his Introduction:

The present booklet ... presupposes some experience in 'traditional' harmony ...

As discussed above, in 1967 that experience was gained principally at O-level, which is not the case today. Boyd was nonetheless justified in stating on the same page that his intention was to 'guide' and 'assist' rather than to teach *per se*.

*

Boyd's book was, for its day, ground-breaking in its focus solely on one style and genre within the general context of harmony – and remained unique in its field, at least until recently. In 1967, books that might well have been on the shelves of British school music departments could have included Annie O. Warburton's *Harmony* (1938) and R. O. Morris's *The Oxford Harmony* Part I (1946); in the latter,

Bach's chorale harmony appears in the concluding chapter, the only part of either of these two works to incorporate reference to a specific compositional style. But Bach's music is not presented as immune from criticism: Morris uses such words as 'eccentricities' (page 133) and 'licentious' (page 135); this is a view that I remember from my school studies, that Bach was a sort of super-genius who could therefore break 'the rules' (whatever they might be – Morris implies that these 'rules' are what is expounded in the principal chapters of his book before showing us Bach's apparently controversial examples).

A contrasting approach was offered nearly two decades later by Anthony Milner in his *Harmony for Class Teaching* of 1960. Although principally a primer first of triadic harmony (Chapters 1–9 in Part I) and then of harmony more generally (Chapters 11–17 in Part II), he did make some concession to the factor of style: Chapter 13 introduces 'The Harmonic Idiom of Bach's Chorale-Settings', and Chapter 17 ('Simple Problems of Applied Harmony') is based on Haydn's Piano Sonatas and Schubert's song-cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*. Beyond this Milner was unwilling to explore: 'It is unprofitable for a simple harmony book to examine the development of harmony beyond the middle of the nineteenth century' (Part II, page 63), though musical examples from Wagner and Elgar precede this statement (pages 61–3). Milner's approach to the understanding of Bach's Chorale Harmony is not dissimilar from Morris's, with examples and exercises provided to illustrate a variety of features. Milner does give the bass line serious consideration, with two or three alternatives given for a number of melodies, selected from Bach's different harmonisations. And Milner is more allowing of what makes Bach's style unique – 'Bach's idiosyncrasies always convince' (page 39) – though he is still bound to the notion of 'rules', a word that appears frequently throughout his two volumes.

Against this background, Boyd's book aimed to offer a revised view of Bach's harmonies and what we should make of them. As is stated on the back cover,

This lucid booklet illuminates the procedures adopted by Bach ...

Boyd's formulation for managing this is partly stylistic and partly statistical; the sentence above continues:

... [he] discourses on how often various harmonies occur, in what contexts and, where possible, why they occur.

The statistical approach has been a strong influence on these studies ever since, promulgating the idea that knowing how often Bach did something in a certain way is a good guide to what a student should consequently do. Since what Bach did a lot is found mainly at cadential moments, this is an aspect that Boyd understandably focused on. In the section on Cadences, he presents (perhaps using research undertaken by his students at the time) a table of totals and percentages for the four principal cadences (Perfect, Imperfect, Plagal and Interrupted) with all other examples corralled under the generalisation 'Others' (2.5%), which nonetheless exceeds each of Plagal (2%) and Interrupted (1.5%).

2. Content

The book consists of seven principal sections – not quite 'chapters' as such, as they are listed but not numbered in the Contents (and some are as short as just a couple of pages) – preceded by an Introduction and followed by Exercises and an Appendix.

When, in the Introduction (pages 7–8), Boyd states that

Students themselves nearly always find it stimulating to write 'real' music ...

he is probably referring to his own university students rather than to the sixth-formers of 1967. In then referring 'even to those for whom the exercise remains purely one of imitation ...' he puts his finger on what the 'exercise' has indeed seemed to be for many teachers and students, i.e. not actually *creative* in any way. In other words, this is not really addressed as '(re)composition' but as 'reconstitution'. The astronauts of 1967 were not able to cook their own food during their space-flights, having to rely on the reconstituting of freeze-dried supplies, and that is what such an approach to the recreation of Bach's style of harmonisation seems to me to be rather too close to: a reconstitution of the basic content of the music using familiar tropes. Just as the taste and texture of reconstituted food is not the same as the real thing, so 'reconstituted Bach' does not really sound like the master himself. Nonetheless, Boyd does give this type of study creative credit:

... the more gifted student will find that the restrictions which a given style imposes will stimulate his invention, perhaps even to the extent of entirely original composition, not necessarily in the same style.

an aspirational comment, though more in hope, it seems to me, than in evident outcome. I was told that the composer Alexander Goehr, who in 1977 was Professor of Music at Cambridge University, did not find any creative value in pastiche compositional exercises, and in over thirty years of teaching this topic I have rarely come across anything that could properly be categorised as a 'technique'.

For a student to be successful in this work, according to Boyd,

... he must be able to distinguish the typical from the exceptional so that he may know what to imitate and what to avoid in his own attempts to reproduce Bach's chorale style.

This is once more a statistical approach – 'the exceptional' means that which appears rarely; but Boyd's approach doesn't address the reason why it appeared in the first place, especially since any rare example is, of course, just as much a result of Bach's thinking as is any other product of his creative imagination.⁶

*

After the Introduction, the first principal section (pages 9–10) is entitled Melodic Characteristics of the Chorale. However, apart from a brief allusion on page 10 to the 'preponderance of stepwise movement' in the melodic line, the characteristics described are mainly rhythmic and metrical, with a little justification:

The chorales which embody these melodic and rhythmic features accord well with the Lutheran images of God or Christ as a rock, a fortress, a shield – *ein feste Burg*, in fact.

But elsewhere (page 24), Boyd makes a false assumption about one general characteristic of the chorales' melodies:

The chorale melody itself, because it was designed for congregational use, is necessarily low-pitched as a rule.

Perhaps it depends on how far we are to take 'as a rule'; there are surprisingly many chorales with rather high-pitched melodies, such as the two in E flat in the *Johannes Passion*, both of which regularly reach top G (the latter rising on one occasion to A flat) – clearly, even in 'Baroque pitch', out of the reach of a general congregation⁷ – and yet they were sung again in a number of repeat performances of this Passion directed by its composer. Bach was the subject of various criticisms during his career as a church musician, both in Leipzig and earlier,⁸ and, were a congregation to have been expected to sing along, there would surely have been some adverse comments afterwards. After all, for congregations used to hearing a cantata each week (most of which closed with a single verse of a chorale), a Passion was only the same thing on a larger scale (lasting some two hours instead of around half-an-hour), presenting the narrative from a Gospel rather than a collation of theologically-related texts – so the same parameters would have applied to the chorales in both cases.

Another aspect of Bach's melodies that Boyd does not mention is the occasional decoration and/or variation of the principal notes.⁹ Again, examples abound in the two Passions and, again, the confusions this would give rise to would surely not have been ignored at the time. Indeed, an examination of the 25 melodies supplied in the Exercises which close the book immediately delivers up many examples of decorative features that would be inappropriately challenging (or just plain annoying) for a general congregation.

Intriguingly, Boyd concludes this section of his book with a statement not about melody but about harmony, that acts as a balancer to the one quoted above¹⁰ from page 7:

... the student needs no particularly advanced knowledge of harmony to begin a study of Bach's chorale style. A good grasp of the formation and function of simple triads and of the dominant seventh is all that should be required in the way of harmonic resource; it is a very simple matter to assimilate the supertonic seventh needed at cadences, and idiomatic use of the diminished seventh soon comes with observation and practice.

In other words, the early chapters of books such as those by Warburton and Morris are, to Boyd, all that is needed by way of preliminary harmonic study. While the concept of a dominant seventh chord as an entity in itself within Bach's chorale style is (to this writer) debatable, to many reading this (especially experienced teachers) it might be the somewhat casual mention of the diminished seventh chord that will seem the more surprising.

*

The second principal section (pages 11–15) is, unsurprisingly, about Cadences. Starting with descriptions of 'what', 'where' and 'how often',¹¹ the focus is surprisingly quite soon (page 12) on why *not* to use the Interrupted Cadence:

... the student should think again before using an Interrupted cadence in a 'Bach' chorale.

The first musical example (page 12) is immediately somewhat controversial, with the penultimate harmony of a Perfect Cadence being labelled as 'V¹³' (with 'IIIb' given as an alternative). This reading derives from the melodic shape of the close, which falls conjunctly to the tonic from a mediant placed on the penultimate beat. Boyd's advice, reasonably enough, is that this is 'Still more to be avoided [than an Interrupted Cadence]' and to manage this by substituting different harmony within a different key (the relative minor) – which is what, in fact, this chorale goes on to do in its second phrase which repeats the melody of the first. The identification of an unstylistic harmony is surely, however, evidence that the analysis is inappropriate. All becomes simple and stylistic if the mediant is taken as an unusual melodic decoration introduced between the repeated supertonic (itself a highly regular feature) and therefore as a note which does not contribute to the harmony around it. It could be interpreted as an appoggiatura, or as a sort of accented auxiliary note (perhaps because putting this latter decoration in its more usual place, on the off-beat a quaver earlier, would have produced parallel fifths with the tenor.)

One aspect of Cadences (and of harmony in general) that is not overtly discussed by Boyd is the bass line. The harmony in Example 2 (page 13) is not only a response to the melody (here, a fall from mediant to tonic) but also an outcome of the bass line; in subsequently discussing the use of first inversions on pause chords, Boyd is implicitly describing the bass line; the following section on Harmonic Resource also mentions the bass line when discussing how to start a phrase; and his discussion of the music in Example 6(d) – see below – similarly refers to its bass line. Therefore it seems to me that this is a subject that would have benefited from having its own focus: its importance can be gleaned not only from the Baroque practice of *thorough bass* (Boyd notes on page 28 that Bach started his own pupils' harmony lessons with this topic) but also from the 69 chorales harmonised with only figured bass in Schemelli's *Gesang-Buch* which are included in Riemenschneider's edition.

On page 14, in his descriptions of the varieties of ways in which cadences can be constructed, Boyd remarks, about the counterpoint of a Perfect Cadence's closing chord progression, that the student might be tempted to connect the leading note to the succeeding dominant by a passing note, and then asserts that 'this is *never* found in Bach's work.' This is a dangerous assertion, as just one counter-example would prove it wrong – and there is indeed at least one: see the second cadence of R.326. (Of course, the rarity of this sort of event would be Boyd's principal justification for not doing the same.)

Immediately following, on page 14, is a discussion of suspensions at cadences. Once again, the approach is statistical:

Suspensions ... should seldom be used at the end of a line. ... the student who writes to follow Bach's example in this will introduce a suspension at such places only once in about twenty-five cadences, ...

The trouble with that statement is simply this – what if the twenty-fifth time that the student harmonised a cadence was one where a suspension was used in the pause chord (as allowed by Boyd), but that this time it happened also to be one of the handful of worked cadences in an exam question? How would the examiner take into account Boyd's statistical advice? Would the student necessarily be marked right (or wrong)?

*

The third principal section (pages 16–17) is on Harmonic Resource, which is presented as if rather much was obvious (at least, presumably, to the talented student):

If the student takes care in preparing the modulations, the cadences and their approaches, he will find that the rest of the harmony often falls into place with little trouble.

And further:

This means, in technical terms, placing great reliance in the major and minor triads
[The student] will probably be astonished to find how far Bach restricts himself to the major and minor triads.

It's as if there were an underlying assumption that, in the wake of the influence exerted in preceding decades by (for example) Vaughan Williams and Jazz, what any student of the 1960s is desperately going to want to write are seventh chords at least, perhaps even thirteenthths like the one proposed in Example 1. However, Boyd has strong views about this:

The student will go astray if he attempts to base his chorale style on some of those in the *St Matthew Passion* or on particularly chromatic ones elsewhere ...

But nowhere does Boyd seem to recognise that the student could learn a great deal by exploring how these more exotic harmonies can express or be influenced by the emotions in the words. Just because words are omitted from typical exercises in this genre should not mean that a student should be discouraged from exploring the expressive potential, within Bach's time and place, of his harmonic language!

*

The fourth principal section (pages 18–20) is entitled Unessential Notes. As with Cadences, the emphasis is soon on what *not* to do – in this case the student is (rightly) advised to eschew appoggiaturas (which in any case, as they are themselves principally melodic features rather than harmonic or contrapuntal ones, would not usually be written as part of the harmonisation of a melody – though they should be recognised if they do actually arise in a given melody, as in my alternative interpretations above of the melody's B in Boyd's Example 1). Passing notes were earlier dealt with briefly under Melody ('quavers will, in general, be treated as passing notes'),¹² and accented passing notes are recommended here for their 'invigorating effect'.

Of the four illustrations in Example 6, the first three show decorations to the melodic line, while the last illustrates an unprepared semi-disjunct addition to the bass line (an off-beat subdominant preceding the expected dominant) which worries Boyd: 'It is precisely the absence of any ... explanation which makes the passage shown in Example 6(d) far less acceptable to the ear, to the singer, and to the student who aims to write in Bach's style.' – and thus Bach is comprehensively damned. Yet this is once more something that crops up occasionally in Bach's harmonisations,¹³ often enough to make it clear that it is fully acceptable to the master, and so (like the melodic-harmonic conjunction in Example 1) it needs a wider perspective to make sense of the matter. In fact, quite a few of Bach's bass lines at Perfect Cadences are like this; what is different between them is the note preceding the subdominant, which can be either the mediant (making a rising scale), or another dominant (turning the 'problem' note into a lower auxiliary), or the higher or lower tonic (as in Boyd's illustration); in this last case, Bach certainly accepts the effect (perhaps by analogy to the other types of instances), even though it makes a sort of unprepared dissonance.¹⁴

*

The fifth principal section (pages 21–23) focuses on Consecutives (forbidden ones, of course, though why they are not allowed in this style is not explained); Boyd finds Bach's handling of them to be 'The most interesting and instructive aspect' of his chorales. As with most Music Departments today, fifty years ago Boyd relied on the chorale texts that had been published by Albert Riemenschneider just 26 years earlier. The *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* had been initiated in 1954, but its volume representing the four-volume publication of the '370' chorales (as enumerated: actually 371) produced by C. P. E. Bach in 1784–7 was only to appear in 1999. In relying on Riemenschneider, Boyd had to assume that the text was authoritative, as its editor had stated it was,¹⁵ though Boyd had justifiable concerns about at least one of the examples. In Example 8(b), the given bass moves in parallel fifths with the soprano. Boyd surmised that either 'the text is at these points corrupt' or that 'Bach has not spotted the consecutives'. In this case, the former is correct: this is one of many examples of unfortunate and misleading misprints in Riemenschneider's edition.

In another of his assertions about consecutives (and one perhaps again based on the researches of his students), Boyd is definitely incorrect. On page 21, he presumes that

What is sometimes forgotten, or not understood, is that many of the '371' chorales are taken from cantatas (including some which are now lost) and that in the originals each line of the chorale was separated from the next by an instrumental passage. When these instrumental passages are removed, as they were for the purpose of inclusion in the '371', consecutives often appear in the vocal parts where, in the original, they do not exist.

In my own investigations of Bach's chorale harmony in Riemenschneider's collection, I have found 31 examples of consecutives between phrases, of which thirteen are unverifiable as no source cantata has survived, and four were created by misprints or by repeated sections and duplicates within the collection. In checking the remaining fourteen against their original cantatas in the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe* edition, a mere two turned out to be the result of the removal of intervening instrumental passages!¹⁶ One example from the others, by far the most blatant in its double consecutives between the last two phrases (with no intervening passage to compensate), is one that Boyd should surely have known well: it occurs in the three instances of the Passion Chorale in Part II of the *St Matthew Passion*. And in the *Christmas Oratorio* there is an example of a chorale of the sort that Boyd refers to but which was excluded from the '371', very likely because of the consecutives (and other problems) that would have been created in this way.¹⁷

In proposing solutions to the problem of forbidden consecutives, Boyd states on page 22 that

Crossing of parts ... will often remove unacceptable fifths and octaves – or at least make them more acceptable ...

But the examples given in support of this are surprising, not only because they do not actually contain any supposed consecutives, but because the crossing of parts shown in them does not consequently remove what might have been previous occurrences of them and therefore certainly does not make them ‘acceptable’ (because they wouldn’t have been wrong in the first place ...). While it might appear, to a student playing these examples on a piano, that there are parallel fifths and octaves between highest and lowest notes, in actual fact there are none because the bass line – even when it crosses above the tenor – remains the true bass because it is doubled an octave lower by the orchestral double basses in performances of the original cantatas (as Boyd subsequently explains three pages later). This is an aspect of part-writing that would be clearer if the music were presented in open score.

*

The sixth principal section (pages 24–25) is on Texture, an aspect that has in many ways been assumed in all Boyd’s preceding discussions and has especially been referred to in the context of crossing parts under Consecutives above – perhaps that is why this section is one of the shorter ones, with more advice on crossing parts towards its end. As in the section on Melody, somewhat surprisingly Boyd’s initial emphasis is on something else: here he focuses on rhythm. Boyd takes the preponderance of crotchets and quavers as evidence that in Bach’s chorales ‘the basic texture remains harmonic.’

The simultaneous appearance of Boyd’s two books reflects the common term within which this subject found its place: ‘Harmony & Counterpoint’; it is easy to see the Chorales book as pertaining to ‘harmony’, implying that ‘counterpoint’ is not part of that picture, despite the obvious fluidity of Bach’s harmonisations when compared with the norms of his time as well as of the hymns in the collections of our own day. Boyd uses the term ‘contrapuntal’ in the specific sense of ‘imitative’, noting the occasional instances in the ‘371’ where this can be found. But a more general sense of ‘contrapuntal’ – simply, and more literally, as ‘one note against another’ – gets immediately to the individuality of the style of Bach’s harmonisations (as Boyd had already noted on page 18 in the section on Unessential Notes, ‘... it is by the texture, as well as by the harmony itself, that we recognise [Bach’s] distinctive chorale style.’). Indeed, it is the very freedom of the four lines of the harmony that were remarked upon at the time:

But the highest purity of writing does not suffice to make the four-part song perfect; each voice must have an individual and flowing melody of its own, and, at the same time, all the voices must combine agreeably.¹⁸

*

With the brief section on Modal Chorales (pages 26–27), Boyd brings his *exposé* of Bach’s work to a close. In his description of ways of applying ‘modern’ tonality to examples of melodies in a modal style, another omission from Boyd’s overview of Bach’s work is evident: he does not anywhere focus on modulation or give advice on how, when, or where it is to be applied. The occasional instance of it in progress can be glimpsed on a few pages (see Examples 2, 5 and 8), but that is all.

3. Conclusion

How useful would Boyd's book have been in 1967?

As was remarked at the beginning of this article, it was unique in its time for its focus solely on not just one composer's style but on just one genre within that style; it thus expands on R. O. Morris's single chapter of a couple of decades earlier. It also readdresses the whole idea of what Bach was about, and by implication what (if any) the 'rules' of this music are. It manages on the whole to avoid value-judgements, treating Bach's harmonisations as valid in themselves though not entirely without surprises and puzzles. It surveys the corpus from various relevant perspectives, but it omits consideration of modulation (a feature that is present in every chorale setting to a greater or lesser extent and particularly so in the more chromatic examples) and addresses features of the bass line in a somewhat haphazard manner.

As a teaching aid, it guides teacher and student helpfully into the genre's stylistic world, though it remains on the side-lines in some respects, providing encouragement but not any actual techniques. Users of the book are expected to somehow absorb a sense of 'how to do it' by immersing themselves in Bach's harmonisations, and the book's aim is to help readers make sense of this music. How successful this turns out to be for each student is dependent more on each one's innate musicality than on the learning of specific skills. Formulae are proposed – and that is as true of today's teaching as it was in 1967 – but the harmonisation of at least half of any phrase is left to the creative imagination of the student. In this, it reflects something of Bach's own approach:

As for the invention of [musical] ideas, [Bach] required this from the very beginning, and anyone who had none he advised to stay away from composition altogether.¹⁹

*

How helpful, then, is Boyd's book today?

As was noted right at the start, the musical world in the twenty-first century is a very different thing from that of 1967, both for the much wider range of musical influences now bearing upon music students and for the less technical foundation that studies prior to A-level now provide. And thus some of the presumptions on which Boyd based his work no longer apply. The general understanding of Bach's music has also developed enormously, partly through the completion of the *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, and partly through the wider exploration of Bach's music in performance, and in particular of his cantatas (inspired by the half-millennium celebrations of 2000, with a number of complete series of recordings now available) which has brought the chorales in their original settings to far greater prominence and familiarity than might have been envisaged in the previous millennium. There are better editions available to us now of the chorales, even containing more of them than the traditional '371' – my preferred version, which sources the examples directly from the cantatas rather than via the mediation of C. P. E. Bach, is Breitkopf's edition of 389 examples ('Edition Breitkopf 3765').

Boyd's pioneering work has lived on through these changing times. His two volumes, originally published separately, were reissued as one volume in 1999 (the first part now called 'Bach Chorale Harmonization'). Boyd retired from his university post in 1992, though he continued to research and write. Sadly, despite taking the opportunity of the 1999 republication to make a few corrections to both music and text, the ideas which he had put forward in 1967 were not revised to take into account changes in the worlds both of music education and of Bach research. An opportunity missed, perhaps.

Notes

- 1 Page numbers are the same in the original separate edition and in the combined edition
- 2 See my comments in the journal *Music Teacher* (Rhinegold Publishing), May 2015
- 3 This is a rewording of the opening of the second paragraph on page 7
- 4 Roy Wilkinson's *ABC of Harmony* Book C (Classical Spectrum Publications, 1992) uses exactly this verb – see page 92
- 5 *Die Kunst der Fuge* by J. S. Bach, edited by D. F. Tovey (Oxford University Press, 1931)
- 6 Unusually for Boyd, a rare harmonic progression, one that 'occurs in all less than a score of times' (page 13), is described as 'nevertheless characteristic', and is followed by the thought that 'the student might like to experiment with it from time to time.'
- 7 Unlike a number of the chorales in 'Riemenschneider', these were not transposed down into more singable keys for that publication
- 8 One example is the rebuke that Bach received in Arnstadt for 'many curious *variationes* in the chorale' – see *The New Bach Reader*, ed. David/Mendel/Wolff (W. W. Norton, 1998), page 46
- 9 R. O. Morris brings this to his readers' attention – see *The Oxford Harmony* Part I (1946), page 132
- 10 'The present booklet ... presupposes some experience in 'traditional' harmony ...'
- 11 See the end of the second paragraph on page 7 for an assertion of why this approach is valid
- 12 See page 10 – perhaps this statement is even truer the other way round, as there are quite a few exceptions to this: some are illustrated in Example 6 on page 19
- 13 R. O. Morris called it a 'subsidiary seventh' – see *The Oxford Harmony* Part I (1946), page 134
- 14 Boyd makes no mention of the absence of the harmonic third from the final chord of his example, which is provided by the orchestral accompaniment (another feature of this music which is not given much due)
- 15 See *371 Harmonized Chorales and 69 Chorale Melodies with figured bass by Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Albert Riemenschneider (G.Schirmer, 1941): footnote on page 1
- 16 See Cantata 41 (last movement) and the *Christmas Oratorio* Part II (last movement); in this latter example, C. P. E. Bach 'cleaned up' his father's music for his publication of the '371' by rewriting the harmony where removal of the instrumental interludes created problems (and he also simplified the metre into common time), but Albert Riemenschneider used the original version, thus giving us these apparent consecutives
- 17 See the *Christmas Oratorio* Part VI (last movement)
- 18 Johann Philipp Kirnberger (a student of Bach), writing in 1774 – see *The New Bach Reader*, page 367
- 19 Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, reporting on his father's teaching methods – see *The New Bach Reader*, page 399