

The Five Versions of the Bach Film

Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach was filmed in the autumn of 1967. During the editing stage, and at a time when the question of the film's French release arose, and therefore of subtitles, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet had the idea of recording the voice-over commentary directly in French, and of subtitling only the dialogue. At first a purely technical solution to avoid a surfeit of reading-matter on the screen, this procedure became a part of the creation.

“Then we acquired a taste for it”, says Straub, “and we did the Dutch, English and Italian versions of the commentary.” Gustav Leonhardt read the small part of commentary by Bach in all the versions except the Italian (which is subtitled), while Anna Magdalena's commentary was read in French by Christiane Lange, in Italian by Rita Erhardt, in Dutch by Margret Schumacher and in English by Gisela Hume - in each case with a German accent of varying strengths. This was done in order not to lose the bond with the country and original language of the film, thus going deliberately against the principle of dubbing, whose intention is to create the belief that the action is taking place wherever the film is being projected.

In parallel, subtitled copies of the original version have always existed; and little by little, memories of the different initial sound-tracks have been effaced. The principal idea of this DVD box issued on the occasion of Jean-Marie Straub's 80th birthday was, then, to restore these five original versions.

Chronik – Chronique – Chronicle – Cronaca – Kroniek d'Anna Magdalena Bach: the Bach film is not only an extremely precise cinematic (re)construction and an extremely rigorous piece of musical research, it is also a human and collective adventure. The second DVD takes account of this, with its treasures, most of them previously unissued: the 'documents' section on CD-ROM shows the preparatory stages, while the 'photos' section is a slide-show that allows us to discover the locations and the ambience of the filming.

During the summer of 2012, forty-five years after the filming, six years after the death of Danièle Huillet and six months after that of Gustav Leonhardt, Christiane Lang-Drewanz (Anna Magdalena Bach) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt (the Prince of Anhalt-Cöthen) evoke this adventure in their two interviews. They reminisce about their first meeting with the Straubs. Nikolaus Harnoncourt tells of the beginning of his friendship with Gustav Leonhardt and the ‘evidence’ of his participation in the film; while Christiane Lang takes us into her life as a young woman, and explains how, without either being aware of it or wanting it, between the beginnings of the project and the making of the film she becomes more and more the woman the film needs. The tenacity, enthusiasm and emotion, so lively and sensitive in both her and Harnoncourt when they speak of the filming, bear witness to this adventure... as if they were echoing what Gustav Leonhardt says in 1968, in the documentary *Signalement*, when he talks about the birth of the project, the idea he has of his ‘role’, his place in the film and his relationship with the Straubs.

In this documentary - filmed by Henk de By in 1968, and of which only the second half was known until now – the Straubs locate their film very precisely among the political inquiries of post-war Germany, and raise aesthetic considerations that are linked to them. It is precisely to this that Gilles Deleuze responds at the end of his lecture ‘What is an act of creation?’, in speaking of *Chronik*.

The booklet of this DVD box allows us to fill in the scheme around *Chronik* – *Chronique* – *Chronicle* – *Cronaca* – *Kroniek d’Anna Magdalena Bach*. In it will be found:

- The ‘Bach Film’, the reference text by Jean-Marie Straub drawn up in 1966, before the filming, and translated by Danièle Huillet.
- The complete shooting-script of the French version, reproducing not only the scenario of the film broken down into shots, but also indicating the locations, the music performed, and the text spoken ‘live’ as well as the commentary. It also allows us to read all the inscriptions, titles and letters shown on-screen.
- ‘Jeunesses musicales! L’invention de *Chronik der Anna Magdalena Bach*’ by Benoît Turquety. This describes the cinematographic, aesthetic and political areas to which

Chronik belongs, both on the level of the bio-filmography of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, and on the politico-historical level.

- Extracts from a conversation, held in the spring of 2010, between Jean-Marie Straub and Helmut Färber, who had published the shooting-script of the film in German as long ago as 1969. Their progress from reel to reel and from one piece of music to another reveals, thanks to examples, details, corrections, and via personal stories and considerable erudition, the idea contained in the opening sentence of the text ‘The Bach Film’ - ... music as aesthetic material...’ – and of which *Chronik – Chronique – Chronicle – Cronaca – Kroniek d’Anna Magdalena Bach* is the graceful and inexhaustible present.

Barbara Ulrich

translation Misha Donat