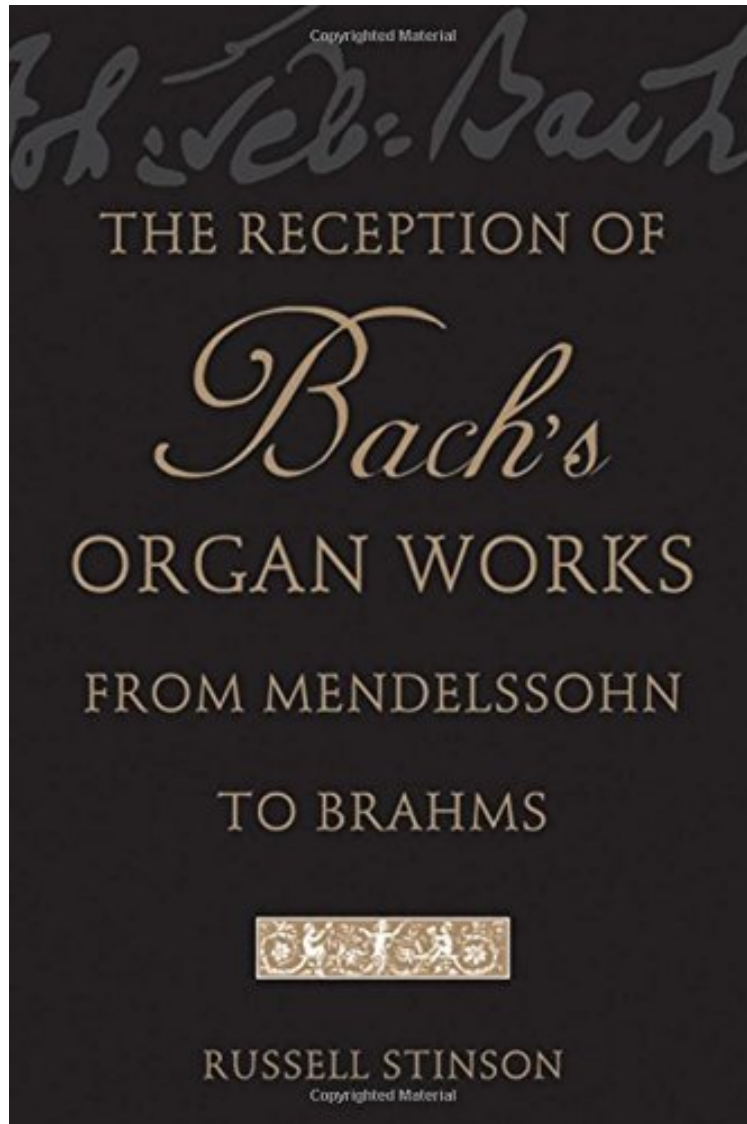


# The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms

*Russell Stinson*

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**Russell Stinson : The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms:

0 of 3 people found the following review helpful. One Star By Joy Schroeder Book came bent over. 4 of 8 people found

the following review helpful. Reviewing Stinson's *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works* By David L. Mitchell Russell Stinson's *The Reception of Bach's Organ Works* One of Arnold Toynbee's *Ten Great Lessons of History* states that societies progress only by standing on the shoulders of the giants who came before them. This is the premise of reception studies, which attempt to show how those giants impacted the societies that came after. A large corpus of Bach reception studies testifies to the fact that few musical giants had shoulders as broad as those of Johann Sebastian Bach. This is quite a turn of events, considering the fact that Bach was dismissed as an old fuddy-duddy by most of his contemporaries, and that his contrapuntal style was rejected even by his own sons, who preferred the lighter and more tuneful Rococo style. Some Bach reception studies are little more than adoring odes to a musical hero in his afterlife while others go much farther, illuminating ways in which Bach's music helped shape later composers' musical styles. Russell Stinson's contribution to Bach reception studies, "The reception of Bach's Organ Works from Mendelssohn to Brahms", makes a minimal contribution to this genre, due in large part to its narrow focus. While some excellent organ music was written during the 19th century, the spotlight was focused elsewhere. The piano, for instance, was far more influential in the general concert scene, and Stinson spends much time discussing nineteenth-century piano arrangements of Bach's organ works. These arrangements were certainly an important factor in spreading the appreciation of Bach's organ music, which suggests that Stinson's major accomplishment in this book is not so much in elucidating stylistic influences but rather in demonstrating how the nineteenth-century Bach devotees promoted his music to a public that held little regard for Baroque style in general. Could we, then, simply consider this a performance history? It would be nice if things were that simple. Unfortunately, Stinson relies much too heavily on speculation. His pages are replete with, "It may be that..." "It is likely that..." "One can suppose that ..." Yes, historians must at times speculate. But they must do so with great caution and in far greater moderation than we find here. In the most egregious of his speculations, Stinson tells us, "Few can deny" that Franz Liszt's huge Fantasy and Fugue on "Ad nos, ad salutarem undam" represents a kind of homage to Bach (p.116). This writer is one of those few who would strenuously deny any such relationship, unless one is willing to stretch the meaning of "homage" to the point of total meaninglessness. More likely candidates as homages to Bach would be Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue on BACH, which receives only passing mention from Stinson, or Liszt's "Variations on Weinen, Klagen..." which is not mentioned at all. Just as unfortunate is the very last paragraph of the text (p. 175), in which Stinson repeats that old canard about Bach dictating "Vor deinen Thron..." from his deathbed. Many years ago Christoph Wolff showed this touching story to be a myth and, in failing to cite Wolff's correction, Stinson gives the impression that he still subscribes to this unhistorical concoction. Stinson is easily derailed by the inconsequential, as in his lengthy discussion about the chorale prelude, "Wir glauben all" (p. 25), at the end of which he acknowledges recent scholarly opinion that this piece is not by Bach at all. This is indeed a lovely setting, but why is it given so much space here when it is not likely by Bach? Also, the author tends to get stuck in a groove, belaboring an issue far beyond what is necessary in order to make his point. Such is the case with his extended description of Brahms's written notes in Bach editions (p.153 ff). Discussions like this do fill up pages, but this same space might have been better used in more substantive descriptions of Bach's influence on Brahms's musical style. Stinson is successful in showing how deeply committed many nineteenth-century composers were to furthering appreciation for Bach's music and how hard they worked to understand it themselves. We had hoped for more than this, though, and look forward to a time when Stinson acquires a more disciplined, focused and less speculative writing style. David L. Mitchell Madison, Maine

In this penetrating study, Russell Stinson explores how four of the greatest composers of the nineteenth century--Felix Mendelssohn, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, and Johannes Brahms--responded to the model of Bach's organ music. The author shows that this quadrumvirate not only borrowed from Bach's organ works in creating their own masterpieces, whether for keyboard, voice, orchestra, or chamber ensemble, but that they also reacted significantly to the music as performers, editors, theorists, and teachers. Furthermore, the book reveals how these four titans influenced one another as "receptors" of this repertory and how their mutual acquaintances--especially Clara Schumann--contributed as well. As the first comprehensive discussion of this topic ever attempted, Stinson's book represents a major step forward in the literature on the so-called Bach revival. He considers biographical as well as musical evidence to arrive at a host of new and sometimes startling conclusions. Filled with fascinating anecdotes, the study also includes detailed observations on how these composers annotated their personal copies of Bach's organ works. Stinson's book is entirely up-to-date and offers much material previously unavailable in English. It is meticulously annotated and indexed, and it features numerous musical examples and facsimile plates as well as an exhaustive bibliography. Included in an appendix is Brahms's hitherto unpublished study score of the Fantasy in G Major, BWV 572. Engagingly written, this study should be read by anyone at all interested in the music of Bach or the music of the nineteenth century.

"Stinson presents a well-focused study of a narrow field, making the book attractive to amateur musicians and Bach enthusiasts." --*Music and Letters* "The chief strength of the monograph, as one might expect from Stinson's earlier books, is its detailed discussions of musical texts and their transmission." -James Garratt, University of

Manchester" This fascinating study combines history, biography, and musical analysis in revealing the signal importance of J. S. Bach's organ music in the lives and work of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms. Conversely, it defines the crucial role of these four masters in the Bach renaissance of the 19th century. Stinson's splendid book is absorbing, eminently readable, and arguably the most impressive contribution yet to the growing field of Bach reception." --Robert L. Marshall, Sachar Professor of Music emeritus, Brandeis University "Stinson takes us on a stimulating and often surprising journey through countless sources recording the infectious enthusiasm that Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms felt for Bach's organ music. Many of these materials, together with the insights that Stinson derives from them, are entirely new, and throughout we gain a vivid impression of what it must have been like to encounter Bach's organ music for the first time. Stinson's book will surely teach us that music from that past need not be relegated to an exhausted, mummified state, and that our changing perspectives--just like those of these nineteenth-century pioneers--furnish us with the enduring potential to experience it afresh and thereby stimulate our own creative potential." --John Butt, Gardiner Professor of Music, University of Glasgow "This book will captivate you and hold your attention as it takes you on a journey into the minds and lives of four early receivers and promoters of the Bach tradition." --CrossAccent About the Author Russell Stinson is the Josephine Emily Brown Professor of Music and College Organist at Lyon College in Batesville, Arkansas. He is the author of *J. S. Bach's Great Eighteen Organ Chorales* (Oxford, 2001), *Bach: The Orgelbchlein* (reissued by Oxford, 1999), and *The Bach Manuscripts of Johann Peter Kellner and His Circle*.