

I - GENESIS

The Denton Bach Society had a remarkably sudden beginning, and it seems to have fairly "hit the ground running." From a rather fixed point of origin in late August, 1976, it performed its inaugural program in October of that year, and offered five full concerts in its first season!

Charles S. Brown began it all. It was he who had the germinal idea and took the decisive first steps to form the organization. Dr. Brown, then a faculty member in the School of Music at North Texas State University (now University of North Texas), approached Hildegard Froehlich, also a member of the music faculty at NTSU, with the notion of starting a Bach Society in Denton, Texas. Dr. Froehlich, a new arrival on campus and steeped in the Bach tradition since childhood in her native Germany, was an enthusiastic collaborator. (These co-founders served as co-directors of the organization in its early years.)

By September 8, scarcely a fortnight later, a letter was mailed to "Friends of Music in Denton," over the signature of Dr. Charles Brown and representing an ad hoc group of ten "persons who are involved in community music projects of one kind or another." This letter announced the formation of the Denton Bach Society (Appendix A).

The group, the letter asserted, had "adopted a name, worked out an organization structure, and proposed a series of programs for the coming year." Included was a schedule detailing rehearsal times, and specific dates and program titles for a full season of five concerts.

Charles Brown's enthusiasm and skill were translated into immediate action. Some early members of the Society have commented on the aggressiveness with which Professor Brown recruited them and moved the group forward. Billy Ham, a charter member of the choir, has recalled that during an organ lesson with Professor Brown, "He grabbed me by the arm, and said, 'I am getting a group together to sing Bach. You are a tenor, and you will sing with us.'"

Although no specific statement of purpose was articulated, the title of the Society, perforce, basically defined its intentions. Director Brown, in this initial letter, foresaw "a place in Denton for the kind of music-making- that a Bach Society would encourage." He referred also to "other ways in which the Society could encourage the study and performance of music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in our community."

There were related, but more personal and practical, motives for the organization's genesis. Dr. Froehlich has recalled that, at that time, there were many music professionals and paraprofessionals in the Denton community who had no opportunity to perform this type of music, i.e. of Bach and the Baroque

period. And church choirs and other community musical organizations did not provide sufficient outlet for their musical interests and talents.

Many of the founding committee members had ties to the two universities in Denton--Texas Woman's University and North Texas State University. However, it was the group's intention that the Denton Bach Society be a community-based enterprise, that it not be "university-dominated." Moreover, it was to be composed of musicians performing for pleasure, as volunteers, but with serious musical interest and intent.

Identified as a Bach society (one of numerous such societies around the world), the group also understood that it was committed, centrally, to music that was not of a common or popular variety, but music which nevertheless would have wide and increasing appeal in the community. It was, in Hildegard Froehlich's words, frankly to be "high brow, but not elite."

This letter also sounded a call for help, to "publicize among your students, church and choir members, or organizational members our need for singers and instrumentalists ...who have a special interest and enthusiasm for performing the music of J. S. Bach..."

Despite this auspicious beginning, the Denton Bach Society did not immediately spring into mature existence. Inevitably, it experienced severe challenges and growing pains. But its continuous history and steady growth over the next two decades offer evidence of the industry, imagination, and organizational talents, of Director Charles Brown, co-founder Hildegard Froehlich, and this original group of Denton musicians.