



# J. D. Q. BACH

## Black Forest Bluegrass

Cantata: **BLAUES GRAS** (Bluegrass Cantata)  **NO-NO NONETTE** for assorted wands and toys  
**HEAR ME THROUGH** from *Diverse Ayres On Sundrie Notions*

JOHN FERRANTE, *bargain counter tenor*  THE NEW YORK PICK-UP ENSEMBLE



### Cantata: *BLAUES GRAS*

Much has been written about the English, Scottish and Irish influences on the white folk music of the southeastern United States, but the recent discovery of the manuscript of P.D.Q. Bach's cantata *Blaues Gras* should cause students of the subject to sit up and take notice (and about time, too) of the substantial debt owed by so-called "bluegrass" music to a certain late eighteenth century southern German composer. Most of the credit for establishing the characteristic sound of bluegrass music is usually given to William Monroe, known to his friends as "Bill," but it will be immediately apparent to anyone hearing this cantata that omitting the name of P.D.Q. Bach in any future discussion of the origins of this "typically American" music will constitute a sin of omission on the part of the ommitter, serious enough to warrant, at the very least, an academic slap on the wrist.

The importance of the cantata, however, goes beyond proto-chauvinistic considerations. A quarter of a century has passed since this writer made his first discovery of a P.D.Q. Bach composition, with literally dozens of other pieces having been found since then, but this is the first time the original manuscript, in the original German, of a vocal work has come to light. Most of our knowledge of P.D.Q.'s vocal oeuvre comes from the editions published after his death by the composer's drinking companion Jonathan "Boozey" Hawkes; these editions were brought out after Hawkes's return to his native Liverpool, and are all in English, with no identification of the original (presumably German, in most cases) librettists. Although even the autograph of the *Bluegrass Cantata* does not provide us with the name of its librettist, it at least affords us, at long last, the opportunity to hear P.D.Q. Bach speaking, as it were, in his native tongue.

By all accounts the most popular Black Forest string band during the 1790's was the group pictured on the cover of this album. Tommy Mann and his Magic Mountain Boys. Both Tommy Mann and the outfit's banjo player, Erl "König" Skruggsendorfer, came from Wein-am-Rhein and knew P.D.Q. Bach, so it is perhaps not surprising that before making their first American tour in 1806 they asked their hometown composer to write them a piece that would ingratiate them with audiences in the (still quiet young and intensely patriotic) United States of America. That the resulting cantata was extremely successful is attested to by the fact that ever since the Magic Mountain Boys' triumphant tour, Kentucky has been affectionately known as the Bluegrass State.

How often is an artist appreciated more abroad than at home? The manuscript of the cantata (now safely ensconced in the P.D.Q. Bach Museum at the University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople) was found not in Europe, but deep in a Kentucky coal mine, where it was being used to stuff up a hole leading (as this writer discovered in the nick of time) to a vein of methane gas.

As is usually the case with P.D.Q. Bach, some of the innovative aspects of the cantata can be tied to practical considerations. The use, for instance, of harmonicas to accompany the recitatives meant that no keyboard instrument was required — certainly a boon to any touring ensemble, but especially to one touring a country whose roads were often little more than game trails. The need for compactness is undoubtedly also the reason for asking the members of the orchestra to double as a chorus in singing the chorale "*Ich gehe am Krippel Bach hinauf*," which practice

was followed on the present recording. And when a third voice is needed for harmony at the end of the duet "Ich Sehe," the conductor (presumably the concertmaster in Tommy Mann's back-up group) steps in to fill the role.

Certain enigmas remain — the significance of the soldier who has but four words to speak, and the meaning of the last line of the entire text — but even with these small air pockets of unintelligibility, *Blauer Gras* stands as one of the most important additions to the increasingly impressive pantheon of P.D.Q. Bach pieces for the human voice.

### NO-NO NONETTE

P.D.Q. Bach, like all the other children of Johann Sebastian Bach, received music lessons at an early age from his father. Although J.S. had given up on P.D.Q. by the time the latter was three years old, he had already shown the baroque toddler how all the string, wind and keyboard instruments around the house were played, and he had also found it necessary to point out to his son that certain things, in spite of the fact that they could be made to produce sounds, were not to be considered musical instruments and were not to be employed in formal musical compositions. Of course it was inevitable, P.D.Q. being the obstinate son-of-a-Bach he was, that he would eventually write a piece using exactly those things he had been told not to use; in fact, he seems to have been in a hurry to do so, since the *No-No Nonette* is one of the earliest pieces written during the Soused Period. The following is a list, in order of appearance in the score, of the toys played by the percussionist: popgun, heavy cloth, boing box, toy drum, toy cymbals, harmonica, squeeze toy, bird whistle, moo cow cylinder, crying doll, jawbone of an ass (now usually called vibra-slap), toy cowbell, baby rattle, slide whistle, toy xylophone (actually glockenspiel), flexitone, large taxi horn, small bike horn, music box, doggie pull toy, bike bell, saucepan, wooden spoon, two inflated balloons, and ice pick.

### HEAR ME THROUGH

As a final tidbit we offer one of the singing commercials which, together with the products they promoted, turned P.D.Q. Bach from a besotted failure into a besotted wealthy man. Like so much of P.D.Q.'s output, these baroque jingles were years ahead of their time; they were sung by the fun-loving countertenor Enrico Carouso, while P.D.Q. peddled the touted potions from the wagon upon which they both stood, and in which they traveled over much of Europe in search of a fast *pfennig*.

This particular air makes use of a most unusual instrument; in fact, the snake (distantly related to the serpent but much smaller) appears in no other piece of music (by P.D.Q. Bach or anyone else) known to modern scholars. It consists of a brass mouthpiece connected by a tube to a penny whistle-type flute, thus producing two notes simultaneously; it also gives listeners fair warning by rattling before it plays.

—PROF. SCHICKELE

**P.D.Q. BACH**  
**BLACK FOREST BLUEGRASS**

**Cantata: BLAUES GRAS (Bluegrass Cantata)**

- 1. Recitative and Aria: "BLAUES GRAS" 4:57**
- 2. Recitative: "O"  
Aria: "DU BIST IM LAND" 3:46**
- 3. Recitative: "O"  
Duet: "ICH SEHE" 4:22**
- 4. Chorale: "ICH GEHE"  
Duet: "SAG' MIR" 3:24**

for tenor, bass, Bluegrass band and Baroque orchestra (S. 6 string)  
JOHN FERRANTE, tenor / PROF. SCHICKELE, bass  
Eric Weisberg, mandolin and harmonica / Bill Keith, banjo and  
harmonica / Happy Traum, guitar and harmonica / Donald "Don"  
Palma, bass and harmonica / Special Guest Artist, Ben Herman  
The New York Pick-Up Ensemble / ROBERT BERNHARDT,  
conductor.

JOHN FERRANTE, bargain counter tenor

PROF. SCHICKELE, snake with string ensemble

Gerald Tarack, violin / Jacob Glick, viola / Charles McCracken, cello / Gerald Ranck, harpsichord

Produced by Seymour and Maynard Solomon, Peter Schickele and William Crawford.

Engineer: Tom Lazarus

Cover illustration: Mel Klapholz

Design: Rafael Rovira

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Also available on record and digitally mastered cassette.

Original liner notes included.

**NO-NO NONETTE for assorted  
winds and toys (S. 86)**

- 5. First Movement 4:08**
- 6. Second Movement 3:03**
- 7. Third Movement :47**
- 8. Fourth Movement 3:08**
- 9. Last Movement 2:08**

**Wind octet and percussion /**

**PROF. SCHICKELE, conductor**

**10. "HEAR ME THROUGH" from**

**Diverse Ayres on Sandrie Notions  
(S. 99 44/100) 2:45**



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