

"Did Bach Compose Musical Works? The Case For as Made by T. W. Adorno"

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In my book *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, I offered this statement almost as a first line: "Bach [Johann Sebastian] did not intend to compose musical works." My aim was to rescue musical production from both a too imperialistic and a too generic use of the work-concept. If Bach did categorically compose works, I argued, it was because the compositions were brought under a work-concept that organized music in a way not of his times, but of times to which the name Beethoven and particularly his Fifth Symphony had become attached. To attach a name or work to an entire way of packaging music's production and reception was to capture a collective intentionality in a worldview that had come to sustain an increasingly authoritative way of going on in a practice. Had I written that Bach did not intend to compose according to a work-concept that would make Beethoven's Fifth Symphony exemplary, I would better have stated my purpose to liberate not only Bach's compositions from the work's concept's strict regulation, but Beethoven's also, and then potentially all the many more ways of making and composing music. The proposed revision of my statement gives me the point for this talk: that Adorno had already made a comparable case; only coming to know this too late to impact what I wrote in the 1980s, I've been grappling with the differences of our views ever since. This talk investigates the case made by Adorno.