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## Samuel Besler (1574–1625): The Introduction to Life and Art<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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Samuel Besler (1574–1625) was born in Brzeg, Lower Silesia. He spent a major part of his life in Wrocław as a cantor at St Bernardine's Church and then a headmaster of the Holy Spirit school, which belonged to St Bernardine's parish. The article presents a biography of the composer including the latest discoveries of the author, made in Wrocław University Library and the State Archive in Wrocław. Biographical information is followed by the short description of Besler's artistic work in which both symptoms of changes in the music of the early 17th century and manifestation of the composer's fascination with Gregorian chant are present.

### Keywords

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church music, Protestantism, Samuel Besler, 17th century, Wrocław

- <sup>1</sup> The article is an extended version of the speech *Life and Musical Art of Samuel Besler (1575-1625) in Holy Spirit and St Bernardine's Parish in Wrocław* based on the fragment of the MA thesis of the author (A. Wróblewska, *Life and Work of Samuel Besler in the Context of the Social-Religious Changes in Wrocław at the turn of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, MA thesis written under the guidance of Prof. Dr hab. Remigiusz Pośpiech, University of Wrocław, Wrocław 2017). The speech was given on the 17th of May 2018 during the 10th State Conference of Students of Musicology in Lublin.

Samuel Besler<sup>2</sup> was born on the 15th of December 1574 in Brzeg, Lower Silesia. He was a son of Franz Besler,<sup>3</sup> a rector of municipal school in Brzeg, which in 1569 was transformed into gymnasium. At this school, Samuel may have taken first classes, but there is a lack of sources which would confirm this assumption. There is also no proof for the information about receiving the title of a master at the university in Frankfurt (Oder), given by certain researchers.<sup>4</sup> The dates of facts from Besler's life in existing works are doubtful as well. Among uncertain dates, there is e.g. the day of hiring the composer a St Bernardine's Church in Wrocław and Latin Holy Spirit's school at the church. According to Reinhold Starke, the author of the article published in the journal "Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte", Besler became a cantor in the mentioned centre yet in 1594.<sup>5</sup> The authors of entries in the contemporary encyclopedias (such as *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*,<sup>6</sup> *Schlesisches Musiklexicon*<sup>7</sup> or *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*<sup>8</sup>), however, avoid providing this date due to the lack of preserved sources, which would confirm its truth. What they recognise as confirmed is only 1602, when Besler's compositions are printed, in which the artist

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- 2 The composer is mentioned in Polish musicography, e.g. R. Pośpiech, *Muzyka wielogłosowa w celebracji eucharystycznej na Śląsku w XVII i XVIII wieku*, Opole 2004, pp. 107, 207; R. Hanke, *Silesia cantat. Dzieje polskiego śpiewactwa kościelnego na Śląsku*, Katowice 1996, p. 78.
  - 3 Certain authors (such as Michael Morgenbesser, cited in this article) use the name Laurentius for Samuel Besler's father. This situation, including 17th- and 18th-century sources, is described wider by Reinhold Starke. *Vide*: R. Starke, *Biographie Samuel Besler's*, "Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte" 33 (1901), pp. 141–142.
  - 4 Compare: W. Steude, A. Adrio, *Besler Samuel*, [in:] *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Personenteil*, L. Finscher (ed.), Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1999, col. 1504.
  - 5 Reinhold Starke, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143. Compare: *idem*, *Kantoren und Organisten der Kirche zu St. Maria Magdalena zu Breslau*, "Monatshefte für Musikgeschichte" 36 (1904), p. 99; J. Sass, *Die kirchenmusikalischen Aemter und Einrichtungen an den drei evangelischen Haupt- und Pfarrkirchen der Stadt Breslau*, PhD thesis, Breslau 1922, pp. 92–93.
  - 6 W. Steude, A. Adrio, *op. cit.*, cols. 1504–1506.
  - 7 L. Hoffmann-Erbrecht, *Besler*, [in:] *Schlesisches Musiklexicon*, L. Hoffmann-Erbrecht (ed.), Augsburg 2001, pp. 33–34.
  - 8 F. Feldmann, D. Schröder, *Besler Samuel*, [in:] *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, S. Sadie, J. Tyrrell (eds.), Vol. 3, New York 2001, pp. 485–486.

was signed as a cantor at St Bernardine's Church in Wrocław.<sup>9</sup> The discrepancies appeared also in terms of employing the discussed musician as a teacher. In 1607 the print was published,<sup>10</sup> in which Besler is described as *Schulmeister bey S. Bernhardin zu Breslaw*. On the contrary, in the mentioned encyclopedias hiring him as a headmaster at Holy Spirit's school is dated only on 1609.<sup>11</sup>

What is interesting, Starke pays attention to the fact of providing wrong date of employing the composer from Brzeg in the Wrocław's church by the researchers.<sup>12</sup> Namely in the lexicon of Carl Julius Adolph Hoffmann from the beginning of the 19th century the year 1599 is provided.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for this error, repeated by other authors, Starke sees in misunderstanding of the organisational structure of St Bernardine and Holy Spirit's parish. Putting the facts from the life of the Wrocław's cantor in the order, the researcher cites the work of Michael Morgenbesser, titled *Geschichte des Hospitals und der Schule zum heiligen Geiste*.<sup>14</sup> In the introduction

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- 9 Namely two Christmas songs: *Nu last uns zu dieser Frist* (S. Besler, *Ein schön alt Gottselig Weihnachtlied [...] mit fünff Stimmen Componirt [...]*, Bresslaw 1602, PL-WRu 50021 Muz.) and *Nu last uns alle frölich sein* (S. Besler, *Von der frölichen und gnadenreichen Geburt und Menschwerdung unsers HERREN [...] ein schön geistlich Lied [...] mit fünff Stimmen Componirt [...]*, Bresslaw 1602, PL-WRu 50022 Muz.).
- 10 S. Besler, *ECHO. Harmonischer Hall vnd Widerschall zu hochzeitlichen Ehren vnd Brautgeschenck Dem [...] Herren CASPARO CUNRADO, der Philosophi, vnd Artzney Doctori, Breutigam. So wol der Ehrentugentreichen Jungfrawen Christianae, Weiland des [...] Herren M. MELCHIORIS TILESII, [...] geliebter Tochter, verehret vnd gestellet [...]*, Breslaw 1607. The work was published in partbooks, one of which (containing cantus and tenor) is kept in National Library (PL-Wn Mus.I.163/Cantus/Tenor); the second one (with the parts of alto and bass)—in the collection of the Library of Association of Friends of Sciences in Legnica (PL-LEtpn S/19), and the third one (in which there are second alto and second bass) in the Library of the Catholic University of Lublin (PL-Lk N-3848 adl.). There is the lack of information about the book containing remaining two voices of the composition.
- 11 L. Hoffmann-Erbrecht, *op. cit.*, p. 33; W. Steude, A. Adrio, *op. cit.*, col. 1504. The authors of cited entries indicate clearly that the source of the given dates are title cards of the particular works of Besler. In the entry from *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* the uncertainty referring to dating is additionally stressed by the use of the phrase “until the year”. Compare: F. Feldmann, D. Schröder, *op. cit.*, p. 485.
- 12 R. Starke, *Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143.
- 13 C.J.A. Hoffmann, *Tonkünstler Schlesiens*, Breslau 1830, p. 33.
- 14 M. Morgenbesser, *Vorrede*, [in:] *idem, Geschichte des Hospitals und der Schule zum heiligen Geiste so wie auch der Bibliothek zu St. Bernhardin zu Breslau zum Andenken der 600jährigen Dauer des Hospitals*, Breslau 1814, [without pages].

to the mentioned publication, Morgenbesser refers to the account books of Holy Spirit's hospital, the archive of the school and other manuscript sources referring to the described centre. Unfortunately, he does not give precise references, which would allow identifying particular documents. The verification is additionally complicated by the fact that numerous archival sources from St Bernardine and Holy Spirit's parish has not been preserved until today or are illegible. However, it can be assumed that Morgenbesser as a rector of Holy Spirit's church at the first half of the 19th century had access to complete acts concerning the school. Moreover, Starke also mentions his careful study on the bills from the years 1594–1625 in his article.<sup>15</sup> Yet based on this—despite the lack of the documents themselves—the year 1594, given by both authors, as a starting moment of Besler's work at the Wrocław's church can be recognised as reliable. What is more, Starke cites the whole content of the composer's letter to his employers,<sup>16</sup> the author of which is signed as *Cantor zu S. Bernhardin und Heiligen Geist*. The document is dated on the 13th May 1597, so it is known, that the artist must have held the mentioned position earlier.

It is also important that in the mentioned letter Besler writes about both his service at St Bernardine's church and Holy Spirit's school. According to Morgenbesser, the care for the musical dimension of the liturgy at the temple was the additional responsibility connected with the position of a teacher.<sup>17</sup> Here it is worth noticing that since 1541 the parishes of St Bernardine and Holy Spirit became a one Protestant parish,<sup>18</sup> and thirty-six years later, after demolishing Holy Spirit's church, the school and hospital connected with it were relocated to the building opposite to St Bernardine's church. As there is a lack of the sources confirming that there were two schools in the parish, it can be assumed that the names *die Schule zum Heiligen Geist* and *die*

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15 R. Starke, *Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 149. Compare: *idem, Kantoren und Organisten...*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

16 *Idem, Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147.

17 M. Morgenbesser, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

18 G. Wąs, *Klasztory franciszkańskie w miastach śląskich i górnośląskich XIII–XVI wieku*, series «Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Historia», Vol. 142, Wrocław 2000, p. 150.

*Schule zum S. Bernhardin*, appearing in the sources, were used interchangeably and referred to one institution, which sometimes—due to the historical reference to John of Capestrano, coming from Naples, the founder of Wrocław's Bernardine's Monastery—was called also by the Latin term *schola neapolitana*.<sup>19</sup> At this school, at the end of the 16th century there was a headmaster, called *Ludimoderator*, *Ludimagister* or *Schulmeister*, as well as his three assistants, called *Coadjutori* or *Collegen*, being subject to internal hierarchy, between whom—depending on their musical abilities—the additional functions were given: of the cantor, organist and *Auditor* (the last name referred to the person who was responsible for leading the choir and was identical with the term *Signator*, appearing in the earlier sources). From the list of teachers at Holy Spirit's school, provided by Morgenbesser, it appears that in 1595 Besler received the position of a second *College*<sup>20</sup> and at the same time he took the responsibilities of a cantor from the first *College*, Georg Hammer, who earlier had held the functions of a cantor and organist at the same time (the place of a second *College* had remained empty). A year after Hammer's death, namely in 1599, Besler became the first *College*, and for the function of a headmaster, he was nominated yet in 1605, giving the position of the cantor to the second *College*, Abraham Ursinus. In the annotation of Nikolaus Pol in *Jahrbücher der Stadt Breslau*, the daily date of taking this function by the musician from Brzeg was given. In the column referring to 1605 there is a note:

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19 B. Wiermann, *Die Entwicklung vokal-instrumentalen Komponierens im protestantischen Deutschland bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, series «Abhandlungen zur Musikgeschichte», Vol. 14, Göttingen 2005, p. 339.

20 Starke writes that Besler received the position of the third *Schulkollege* then, and the position of a second teacher (*zweiter Lehrer*) was taken by him in 1599. The difference results from other system of naming the positions at Holy Spirit's school by the scholar, according to which the headmaster was called as the first teacher; *vide*: R. Starke, *Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 142. Compare: E. Maetschke, *Vorgesichte und Geschichte des Realgymnasiums zum heiligen Geist in Breslau*, [in:] *idem*, W. Richter, M. Kopka et al., *Festschrift zur fünfzigjährigen Jubelfeier des Realgymnasiums zum heiligen Geist in Breslau*, Breslau 1899, p. 7.

On the 18th of April at the age of 60 Oswald Hager died, who for 32 years had served at the schools in Wrocław and other cities, especially 3 years at St Mary Magdalene's and 22 years as *Ludimoderator* at the Holy Spirit and St Bernardine in the New City. His place was taken by the cantor from there, Samuel Besler from Brzeg.<sup>21</sup>

The search of the author of this article, done in the Old Prints Department of Wrocław University Library, allowed to gather new facts from the composer's life, which—despite the fact that they do not link strictly to his musical activity—are the element which is worth noting in the artist's biography. Namely, it is about Besler's marriage. Hitherto published literature contains information about only one wife of the composer—in the mentioned letter from 1597 the Wrocław's cantor writes about marrying the widow of deacon at St Bernardine's church (died in 1593, Kaspar Rossmann) and taking care of their four children. Moreover, based on another letter from 1604, the whole content of which Starke cites as well, the researcher makes the assumption that the first wife of Besler was older than the musician at least twenty years.<sup>22</sup> The author of the article has gained the information about another two wedding ceremonies of the artist in the form of congratulations prints. The ceremony from the 9th December 1606, during which Besler married Barbara Schindler (the daughter of the Wrocław's innkeeper Valentin Schindler), was celebrated by publishing as many as two praise texts by the Oleśnica's publisher Johann Bössemesser.<sup>23</sup>

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21 N. Pol, *Jahrbücher der Stadt Breslau*, J.G. Kunisch, J.G. Büsching (eds.), series «Zeitbücher der Schlesier», Vol. 5, Breslau 1824, p. 25. Orig. "Den 18. April starb Oswaldus Hager, 60 Jahr alt, welcher zu Breslau und anderswo in Schulen 32 Jahr gedienet, sonderlich aber zu S. Maria Magdalena 3 Jahr und in der Neustadt zum h. Geist und S. Bernhardin als Ludimoderator 22 Jahr. An seine Statt kam Samuel Besler Bregensis, damals Cantor".

22 R. Starke, *Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–149.

23 *EYKTIKA MEΛH HUMANISS.O ET DOCTISSIMO VIRO DOMINO SAMUELI BESELERO [...] SPONSO, ET Lectissimae & pudicissimae Virgini BARBARAE, Integerrimi Viri Domini Valentini Schindleri [...] Filiae, SPONSAE*, Olsnae Sil. 1606 (PL-WRu 558759) and *Deo propitio VOTA SECUNDA PRO NUPTIIS SECUNDIS DN. SAMU[EL]IS BESLERI [...] SECUNDUM SPONSI cum PUDICISSIMA VIRGINE BARBARA Honesti Viri Dn. Valentini Schindleri, Cauponis & Civis quondam VratisL. relicta filia SPONSA*, Olsnae Sil. 1606 (PL-WRu 444191, PL-WRu 533956, PL-WRu 532564). The last of them has been preserved in the collections of the Wrocław University Library in as many as three copies.

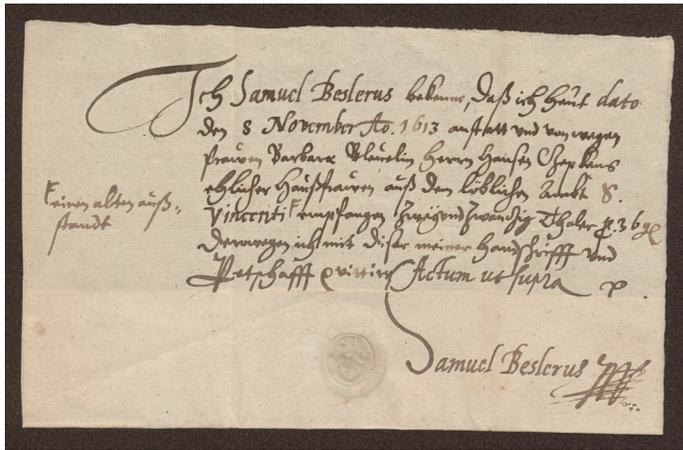
The authors of them were people from the closest circle of the couple, among others: Simon Besler—the younger brother of Samuel and later (since 1610) cantor at Wrocław’s St Mary Magdalene’s church, Caspar Cunrad—a poet, publisher and doctor of medicine, as well as already mentioned Abraham Ursinus, who in his epithalamium also mentions the name of the earlier wife of the artist—Anna. The headmaster of Holy Spirit’s school got married for the third time on the 6th of November 1615, after the death of Barbara neé Schindler. This time, the widow Barbara Fuserger became his wife. The ceremony took place in Wrocław and the print prepared for this occasion was published in the hometown of the composer.<sup>24</sup>

Among the newest discoveries about Samuel Besler, there is also the note found in the State Archive in Wrocław, made by the composer himself.<sup>25</sup> This document, belonging to the archive collections taken from Wrocław’s Monastery of St Vincent after its dissolution, made on the 8th of November 1613. The musician confirms there, on behalf of “Barbara” (probably a laundress, as there is the word *Bleuelin* next to the name), the receipt of payment of 22 thalers and 36 groshes. The found note is precious not only due to containing the handwritten signature and the seal of Besler, but also as the certificate of the role played by the headmaster of Holy Spirit’s school in the society of Wrocław. Being educated, holding the significant position in the parish, being subject to the city council, he may have held the function of a trusted person, authorised to represent the interests of other, illiterate citizens.

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24 *Viro Doctissimo & Integerrimo Domino SAMVELI BESLERO BREGENSI, [...] ET Honestissimae Matronae BARBARAE FUSPERGERIAE, Tertias Nuptias [...] Bona verba dicunt AMICI. Typis Bregensibus Sigfrideis, [Brzeg] 1615 (PL-WRu 404997).*

25 The State Archive in Wrocław, Rep. 67, cat. No. 1224.



Illustr. 1: The note with the signature and seal of Samuel Besler. Source: State Archive in Wrocław, collection Rep. 67, cat. No. 1224.

Samuel Besler died due to the plague epidemic on the 19th of July 1625 in Wrocław, leaving the rich artistic output. Hitherto preserved sources contain only works of a religious character, with Latin and German texts. Except one six-voice mass *Quem vidistis pastores* (the existence of which was noted by Emil Bohn in his catalogue of the manuscripts of Wrocław's City Library)<sup>26</sup> and the duet *Jehovah Deus turris fortissima* (which was published only in 1838),<sup>27</sup> all were printed during the composer's life. Starke mentions twenty-two prints, among which there are both the collections of the compositions and occasional prints, prepared for such occasions as weddings, visits of important personas and other occasions which were significant for the city.<sup>28</sup> The frames of the article do not allow more scrupulous analysis of any work;

26 E. Bohn, *Die musikalischen Handschriften des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts in der Stadtbibliothek zu Breslau. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Musik im XVI. und XVII. Jahrhundert*, Breslau 1890; reprint: Hildesheim 1970, p. 126.

27 S. Besler, *Jehovah Deus turris fortissima. Hymnus gratulatorius ad inclutam Wratisl. Turris Neapolitanae exstructionem [...]. Jehovah der Herr ist der festeste Thurm. Gratulations-Hymnus zur Erbauung des Neustädter Thurms in Breslau [...] in Partitur gesetzt und mit Anmerkungen versehen von Ernst Köhler*, Breslau 1838. One of the copies of the score (published in Wrocław by Carl Cranz) is currently kept in the collections of Wrocław University Library (cat. No. 35608 III N).

28 R. Starke, *Biographie...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 162–167.

because of that, only the main characteristics of the headmaster of *schola neapolitana* will be presented, with indicating the characteristic features of his output against the background of other Wrocław's composers of that time.

Norbert Hampel, writing about Besler in his dissertation on the topic of Protestant music in Silesia, makes a rather obvious division of his work. He distinguishes simple works written for the home and school use and the group of sophisticated compositions, which he calls as religious music “in the more precise meaning”.<sup>29</sup> Taking into consideration the fact that the discussed musician held the function of a teacher at school and the composer working in the city church, which was St Bernardine's church, it is not surprising that in his output we can find on one hand the works that should be easily performed by the beginners, on the other—the works much more demanding in terms of technique. In the first group, Hampel includes three collections containing four-voice settings of Latin and German songs using *nota contra notam* technique, devoted to: Easter and Ascension Day (from 1610),<sup>30</sup> Christmas (1615)<sup>31</sup> and the celebration of the praise at the table during the meal (1615).<sup>32</sup> Hampel claims that the simplicity of compositional techniques served to teach easier the bases of music and Latin, as well as raising youth in the spirit of the Christian faith,

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29 N. Hampel, *Deutschsprachige protestantische Kirchenmusik Schlesiens bis zum Einbruch der Monodie*, Breslau 1937, p. 68.

30 S. Besler, *DE GLORIOSA RESURRECTIONE ET ASCENSIONE D.N.I.C. HYMNI ET CANTUS ECCLES. Latino Germanici. XX. Zwanzig Deutsch vnd Lateinisch Geistlicher Lieder, Von der Stegreichen Aufferstehung vnd Himmelfart vnsers HERREN vnd Heylandes Jhesu Christi [...]*, Bresslaw 1610 (PL-WRu 50276 Muz.).

31 *Idem*, 12. *Gottselige Weihnacht Liedlein [...]* 4. *stimmig componiret [...]*, Breßlaw 1615 (PL-WRu 50280 Muz.). In Wrocław University Library only the bass is preserved. The analysis of one of the songs from the mentioned collection, together with the earlier Christmas work of Besler published in 1602, was presented by Wolfgang Vetter. *Vide*: W. Vetter, *Altschlesische Kunst des Weihnachtsliedes*, “Schlesische Monatshefte” 4 (1927), pp. 539–542; reprint with the changed title: *Zum Liedschaffen Samuel Beslers* [in:] *idem*, *Mythos – Melos – Musica. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Musikgeschichte*, Vol. 2, Leipzig 1961, pp. 283–288.

32 S. Besler, *Delitiar. mensalium APPARATUS HARMONICUS ferculis selectioribus BENEDICTIONUM ET GRATiarum actionum refertus. XXX. Tisch benedictie und gratiae, dere zwar elliche vor im Druck, und bekandt, meisten theils aber mit newen Melodiis gezieret [...]*, Bresslaw 1615 (PL-WRu 50279 Muz.).

what was superior for the officials of church school.<sup>33</sup> The last issue is discussed by the composer himself in the preface to the mentioned collections.

Giving the example of religious music “in the more precise meaning”, Hampel presents two publications: *Concentus Ecclesiastico-Domesticus* published in 1618 in two volumes<sup>34</sup> and *Citharae Davidicae*<sup>35</sup> from two years later—the occasional print containing eight-voice settings of two psalms, written for the occasion of arriving of Frederic V Wittelsbach in Wrocław. The author pays attention to the stylistic variety of the works in these prints. In *Concentus* he notices the compositions in *nota contra notam* texture, typical for Protestant religious songs, motets based on the chant *cantus firmus melodies* and the settings showing the influences of Italian music. On the other hand, in the works from the second print, he underlines the use of poly-choral and *concertato* style.<sup>36</sup> Another researcher of Silesian church music, Fritz Feldmann, calls them as “full of splendor”, due to its two-choir setting.<sup>37</sup>

In the sketch of Besler’s work presented by Feldmann there is the following opinion about the composer: “typically contemporary because of his truly Silesian care for tradition, and on the other hand also some progressiveness”.<sup>38</sup> The first part of this sentence seems to be particularly interesting. It indicates the feature which was underlined by the Besler’s contemporaries, such as Christian Heinrich Cunrad, the son of mentioned Caspar

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33 N. Hampel, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

34 S. Besler, *CONCENTVS Ecclesiastico-domesticus. Kirchen vnd Hauß Musica Geistlicher Lieder, Auff den Choral Musicalischer Art [...]. Erster Theil*, Breßlaw 1618 (PL-Kj Mus.ant.pract. B 540 [1]); *idem*, *CONCENTVS Ecclesiastico-domesticus. Kirchen vnd Hauß Musica Geistlicher Lieder, Auff den Choral Musicalischer Art [...]. Ander Theil*, Breßlaw 1618 (PL-Kj Mus.ant.pract. B 540 [2]).

35 S. Besler, *CITHARAE DAVIDICAE psalmoreum selectiorum PRODROMUS. Pro Augusto Auspicatoq; AUGUSTISSIMI BOJEMORUM REGIS FRIDERICI I. WRATISLAVIAM Silesiae Metropolin Ingressu adornatus & humilime dedicatus*, Breslae 1620 (PL-WRu 50024 Muz.).

36 N. Hampek, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–62.

37 F. Feldmann, *Die schlesische Kirchenmusik im Wandel der Zeiten*, series «Das Evangelische Schlesien», Vol. 6/2, Lübeck 1975, p. 67.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 66. Orig. “typisch gleichzeitig, für seine echt schlesische Traditionspflege, andererseits aber auch für eine gewisse Fortschrittlichkeit”.

Cunrad. In his collection of distiches, published posthumously in 1706 under the title *Silesia Togata*, the poet wrote about the discussed composer:

I study the chants of our old Church,  
And I enrich them, and ornament with my harmonies.<sup>39</sup>

The author referred to the particular interest of Wrocław's artist in the Gregorian chant, what in Protestant circle was not common, despite the fact that in Silesia, where Besler worked, many liturgical practices from the Catholic Church were kept.<sup>40</sup> The discussed composer's interest was visible mainly in the field of music for Lent. The artist published three collections of one-voice chants of the Passion theme, titled *Hymnorum et threnodiarum Sanctae Crucis* (1611, 1613, 1614).<sup>41</sup> The works in them (approximately about two hundred) are the musical settings of the texts from the Office about Passion of Jesus, the authorship of which is prescribed to Saint Bonaventura, and which in 1521 was published in Wrocław by the poet and writer Wawrzyniec Korwin. Rooting of the melody in the medieval tradition is visible in the syllabic setting of the text (only with short melismas) and the fluent melodic line. Besler cared also for the visual side of the prints, writing music in gothic neumes on the staff. The complement of the cycle are

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39 J.H. Cunradus, *JO. HENRICI, CASP. FIL. CUNRADI SILESIA TOGATA Sive Silesiorum doctrina & virtutibus clarissimorum ELOGIA* [...], K.G. Schindler (ed.), Lignicii 1706 (PL-WRu 337104), p. 19. Orig. "Quos vetus incinuit, quos nostra Ecclesia cantus / Rimor, & harmoniis augeo & orno meis".

40 Compare: T. Jeż, *Łacińska twórczość muzyczna w ewangelickim Wrocławiu. Problem trwałości tradycji w czasach przemian konfesyjnych*, "Barok" 11 (2004), pp. 185–205.

41 S. Besler, *HYMNOR. ET THRENODIARVM SANCTAE CRVCIS IN DEVOTAM PASSIONIS JESV CHRISTI DEI ET HOMINIS COMMEMORATIONEM FASCICVLVS AD HEBDOMADAM MAGNAM SVA CVIQVE MELODIA AFFICTA* [...], Wratislaviae 1611 (PL-WRu 51112 Muz.); *idem*, *HYMNOR. ET THRENODIARVM SANCTAE CRVCIS IN SALVTAREM PASSIONIS JESV CHRISTI DEI ET HOMINIS MEMORIAM PARS TERTIA AD HEBDOMADAM MAGNAM SVA CVIQVE MELODIA AFFICTA* [...] *CUI ACCESSERUNT Cantiones et Lamentationes aliorum aliae selectiores* [...], Wratislaviae 1613 (PL-WRu 50030 Muz.); *idem*, *HYMNORUM & THRENODIARUM SANCTAE CRUCIS in sacratissimam PASSIONIS AC MORTIS* [...] *primum in ecclesiarum usum* [...], Wratislaviae 1614 (PL-WRu 50277 Muz).

settings of four evangelical descriptions of the Passion from 1612,<sup>42</sup> belonging to the genre of chorale (responsorial) passion, which is characterised by juxtaposing the traditional chant melody in the parts of *soliloquentes* with the polyphonically set parts of *turba*.<sup>43</sup> Two of these passions (St John's and St Matthew's) are direct copies of Johann Walter's works, known in Protestant circles, but the origin of the remaining ones have not been found. Therefore, it is possible that Besler based them on the works which are not preserved until today or he is the author himself.<sup>44</sup> To finish the topic of the composer's interest in the medieval tradition, it is worth mentioning his own words from the preface to the first volume of *Hymnorum et threnodiarum*:

When I considered [...] this sacred time of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ and I wondered what particular I could do to celebrate it piously, the noble simplicity of this non-rhythmised and old chant singing came to my mind, which due to the devoted piety and the biggest focus was recognised by all apostles of Christian faith of all centuries to celebrate the sacred ceremonies, so that it is understood and performed by everyone, both in public and in private.<sup>45</sup>

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42 *Idem*, *THRENODIARVM SANCTAE CRVCIS IN salutiseram PASSIONIS D.N.I.C. CONTINVATIO HISTORICA* [...], Vratislaviae 1612 (PL-WRu 50028 Muz.). The fact that the print is the supplement of the collection *Hymnorum et threnodiarum* is confirmed by the fact that the volume from 1613 is described as third, and there is the lack of the second volume, which was probably the mentioned publication.

43 F. Blume, *Die evangelische Kirchenmusik*, Potsdam 1931, pp. 95–96.

44 Compare: N. Johnston, *A Study of the Four Passions of Samuel Besler with an Emphasis upon the Sources from which They Were Derived*, MA thesis, University of Rochester, [Rochester] 1952, pp. 40–50. The scan of the thesis is available also in the digital repository of the University of Rochester: <http://hdl.handle.net/1802/30205> [accessed: 27.06.2017].

45 S. Besler, *HYMNOR. ET THRENODIARVM SANCTAE CRVCIS IN DEVOTAM...*, *op. cit.*, [fol. 3r]. Orig. “Cum hoc sacro Passionis D.N.J.C. tempore [...] cogitarem, mecumque reputarem, qvid potissimum ejus pie recolendi causa agerem, in mentem mihi venit pia simplicitas Cantus Choralis, plani illius & vetusti, qvi devotae pietatis ac majoris attentionis causa ab omnibus omnium seculorum Christiani nominis professoribus in celebra[n]dis sacris mysteriis est assumptus, ut nimirum ab omnibus intelligeretur facilius, & commodius usurparetur passim publice ac privatim”.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is *Heptalogus in cruce pendentis Christi*,<sup>46</sup> published in 1624 and containing seven works, the text of which comprises the last words of Jesus on the cross. Despite the similar topic, the setting is based on the trend of the Baroque music. Its vocal setting consists of only one voice, but in the melodic line there are rich ornaments. On the title card there is the annotation that the work should be performed with the accompaniment of organ, what clearly indicates the influence of accompanied monody.<sup>47</sup> From the same year, there is also the already mentioned duet *Jehova Deus turris fortissima*, composed for the occasion of building a new tower in Wrocław, except vocal parts also comprising the part of *basso continuo*.<sup>48</sup> These two works, being at the same time the last known compositions of Besler, very clearly cross the borders of the techniques which were used earlier by the artist, at the same time confirming the second part of the cited statement of Feldmann, namely the innovativeness of the creator.<sup>49</sup>

From the presented outline of Samuel Besler, it is visible that he was both engaged in the life of school, parish and city and caring for his family. The newest discoveries of sources —such as numerous epithalamia for him and authorising him to signing the documents referring to the other people's cases—confirm the fact that Besler was recognised and respected in Wrocław's environment. From the analysis of his artistic achievements it can be concluded that he was a versatile composer, not only competently using the achievements of his epoch, but also courageously involving the music of early epochs as well as introducing innovation.

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46 *Idem, Heptalogus IN CRUCE PENDENTIS CHRISTI, ad ipsum crucifixum directus voce sola, cum basso generali pro organo, lamentatus [...]*, Vratislaviae 1624 (PL-WRu 50025 Muz).

47 Compare: F. Feldmann, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

48 Compare: N. Hampel, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–63.

49 More on the topic of new trends in music at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries and their influence on Besler's music *vide*: A. Wróblewska, *Kompozycje Samuela Beslera (1574–1625) na tle przemian stylistycznych w muzyce początku XVII wieku, "Dziela i Interpretacje 15"* [in print].

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