

INTRODUCTION

The autobiography of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach was first published in the German translation of Charles Burney's *Present State of Music in Germany*.¹ Burney had asked Bach for a summary of his life and a list of his published works when he visited the composer in Hamburg in 1772. Indeed, Burney included a paraphrased and redacted translation of the autobiography in volume 2 of the *Present State of Music in Germany*.² In the German edition, a note was added to explain that it made more sense to replace Burney's summary with the actual text of Bach's autobiography.³ Several other composers published their autobiographies in the late eighteenth century, and these became sources for works like Burney's *General History of Music* (4 vols., London, 1776–89) and Ernst Ludwig Gerber's *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* (2 vols., Leipzig, 1790–92). Such histories went hand-in-hand with the popularity

1. *Carl Burney's der Musik Doctors Tagebuch seiner musikalischen Reisen*, Bd. 3, *Durch Böhmen, Sachsen, Brandenburg, Hamburg und Holland*, trans. Johann Joachim Christoph Bode (Hamburg, 1773), 199–209.

2. See *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, 1st ed. (London, 1773), 2:259–68; 2:245–79 in the 2nd ed. (London, 1775). Burney refers specifically to his having commissioned the autobiography in his entry on C.P.E. Bach for *Rees's Cyclopaedia*, 45 vols. (London, 1802–1820): "Emanuel Bach, in his life, written at our request by himself, . . ."

3. See *Carl Burney's Tagebuch seiner musikalischen Reisen*, 3:198–99: "Man ist immer am besten daran, wenn man aus der Quelle schöpfen kann; – Der Uebersetzer des gegenwärtigen Buches, glaubte, die Leser würden die Lebensumstände dieses Mannes, . . ., von ihm selbst erzählen hören. Sollten einige Anmerkungen des Herrn D. Burney darüber verlohren gehen, so wird die simple Wahrheit hingegen dabey gewinnen. Der Herr Kapellmeister Bach hat sich durch seine gütige Freundschaft gegen mich bewegen lassen, mir folgendes mitzutheilen." (It is always best if one can go to the source. The translator of this book assumed that the reader would appreciate hearing the circumstances of his life from the man . . . himself. Even if some remarks by Dr. Burney might get lost this way, we will gain access to the simple truth. Kapellmeister Bach, in his gracious friendship towards me, has agreed to share the following.) See Markus Rathey, "Defining the Self: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Autobiography as an Attempt at Self-Fashioning in the Middle of the Eighteenth Century," in *Music in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. Mary Sue Morrow (Ann Arbor: Steglein, 2016), 170–90, here 173. Rathey, in his excellent discussion on the context of the autobiography, points out that C.P.E. Bach prepared a slightly different version of his life for the German edition than what he sent to Burney. Unfortunately, the autograph copy of the autobiography is not extant.

of painted and engraved portraits of famous composers and musicians during that time. Bach himself amassed a large collection of some 400 portraits of musicians, from ancient times to his own day, but focusing on his near contemporaries.⁴

The autobiography has few anecdotes and covers Bach's life and career up to 1772 in a few paragraphs. Typical of Bach's brevity is his statement about joining the service of Friedrich II: Bach completed his academic study in 1738 and went to Berlin, with an opportunity to accompany a young gentleman abroad, but instead Crown Prince Friedrich called him to service; however, Bach did not formally enter his service until after Friedrich became king in 1740.⁵ His list of published works includes more than 30 items, though he would later publish six collections of keyboard music "für Kenner und Liebhaber" (Wq 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61), three sets of accompanied sonatas (Wq 89, 90, 91), four orchestral symphonies (Wq 183), two oratorios (Wq 238 and 240), the double-choir Heilig (Wq 217), *Klopstocks Morgengesang* (Wq 239), four more song collections (Wq 196–198, 200), chorales and litanies (Wq 203, 204), and other keyboard music. His comments regarding the comic style (*Komisches*) point to the change in musical style emerging before his father's death in 1750 and reaching a high point in the late music of Mozart and Haydn and their (mostly Italian) contemporaries.⁶ Also, near the end of the autobiography, Bach takes a swipe at critics. This seems to refer to a short passage in Burney's English version, where Burney hints about "complaints" by critics without naming names.⁷

4. See Annette Richards, "Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Portraits, and the Physiognomy of Music History," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 (2013): 337–96, and Christoph Wolff, "C.P.E. Bach and the History of Music," *NOTES* (2014): 197–218. A catalogue of Bach's portrait collection is available in CPEB:CW, VIII/4.

5. The date and circumstances of his appointment (and the identity of the young gentleman) are discussed by Ellen Elizabeth Exner in "The Forging of a Golden Age: King Frederick the Great and Music for Berlin, 1732 to 1756" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2010), 152–61.

6. See especially Daniel Hertz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720–1780* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003).

7. See *Present State of Music in Germany*, 1st ed., 2:265–66: "Complaints have been made against his pieces, for being long, difficult, fantastic, and far-fetched. In the first particular, he is less defensible than in the rest; yet the fault will admit some extenuation; for length, in a musical composition, is so much expected in Germany, that an author is thought barren of ideas, who leaves off till every thing has been said which the subject suggests."

After listing his published works, Bach confesses that he has felt constrained in writing pieces on commission or for public consumption, and has only been free in the pieces written for himself alone: "At times I even have had to follow ridiculous instructions, although it could be that such not exactly pleasant conditions have led my genius to certain discoveries that I might not otherwise have come upon." (Bach does not elaborate on these discoveries.) Not surprisingly, the most frequently quoted passage has to do with Bach's *Empfindungen*: "It seems to me that music primarily must touch the heart"; he had written a similar phrase in his keyboard treatise, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*: "A musician cannot move others unless he himself is moved."⁸

C. P. E. Bach said little about his father, Johann Sebastian Bach, and godfather Georg Philipp Telemann. He does not mention his brothers and sisters at all, though he does account for his wife and three children. Nor does he discuss his colleagues at Berlin, or any other musicians he met in Leipzig, Dresden, or Hamburg (except Galuppi), despite the fact that he claims he could "fill up a lot of space with the names of composers, female and male singers, and instrumentalists of all varieties that I have become acquainted with." Bach was approaching 60 when he wrote his autobiography, and was already honored throughout Germany as one of the most distinguished and renowned composers of his generation. Entering the late stage of his life, he did not feel the need to brag about or apologize for his career in music. Burney, always effusive in his praise for C. P. E. Bach, wrote:

He is not only one of the greatest composers that ever existed, for keyed instruments, but the best player, in point of *expression*; for others, perhaps,

"*Easy and Difficult*, are relative terms; what is called a hard word by a person of no education, may be very familiar to a scholar: our author's works are more difficult to express, than to execute. As to their being fantastical, and far-fetched, the accusation, if it be just, may be softened, by alledging, that his boldest strokes, both of melody and modulation, are always consonant to rule, and supported by learning; and that his flights are not the wild ravings of ignorance or madness, but the effusions of cultivated genius. His pieces, therefore, will be found, upon a close examination, to be so rich in invention, taste, and learning, that, with all the faults laid to their charge, each line of them, if wire-drawn, would furnish more new ideas than can be discovered in a whole page of many other compositions that have been well received by the public."

8. *Versuch* I:3, §13; CPEB:CW, VII/1, 144: "Indem ein Musikus nicht anders rühren kann, er sey dann selbst gerührt."

have had as rapid execution: however, he possesses every style; though he chiefly confines himself to the expressive. He is learned, I think, even beyond his father, whenever he pleases, and is far before him in variety of modulation; his fugues are always upon new and curious subjects, and treated with great art as well as genius.⁹

The autobiography was earlier translated into English with commentary by William S. Newman.¹⁰ This new translation includes Wotquenne (Wq) numbers in brackets to identify the works, and the music itself can be found in the volumes of *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works* (CPEB:CW), the critical edition published by The Packard Humanities Institute. Some of the publication dates in the list of works are at odds with other documentary evidence; Bach must have made the list from memory. These dates have been corrected in brackets.¹¹ Otherwise, the commentary has been kept to a minimum. I want to thank in particular Richard Kramer and Jason B. Grant for making many improvements to the English translation.

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9. *Present State of Music in Germany*, 1st ed., 2:270.

10. "Emanuel Bach's Autobiography," *The Musical Quarterly* 51 (1965): 363–72. Newman also prepared a facsimile edition of the German original along with the estate catalogue. (See n. 11 below.)

11. Bach compiled a list of all his keyboard music up to 1772, presumably to send Burney a fairly complete list. The "Clavierwerkverzeichnis" (CV 1772) lists 168 keyboard pieces. See Christoph Wolff, "Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Verzeichnis seiner Clavierwerke von 1733 bis 1772," in *Über Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke: Aspekte musikalischer Biographie. Johann Sebastian Bach im Zentrum*, ed. Christoph Wolff (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 217–35. After Bach's death, a complete list of his works and music library was published in the "Nachlaß-Verzeichnis" (NV 1790); see the facsimile edition with an introduction by Peter Wollny, published in CPEB:CW, series VIII supplement.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, was born in March 1714, in Weimar. My late father was Johann Sebastian, kapellmeister at several courts and lastly music director in Leipzig. My mother was Maria Barbara Bach, youngest daughter of Johann Michael Bach, a thoroughly grounded composer. After completing studies at the Leipzig Thomasschule, I studied law first in Leipzig and later in Frankfurt an der Oder; in the latter place, I both directed and composed for a music academy as well as all the music for public ceremonies.¹ In composition and keyboard playing I never had any other teacher than my father. When in 1738 I completed my academic years and went to Berlin, I had a very favorable opportunity to accompany a young gentleman to foreign countries; an unexpectedly gracious call to the then Crown Prince of Prussia, now King [Friedrich II], in Ruppin, caused my intended journey to be canceled. Due to certain circumstances, I did not formally enter into his service until the start of his Prussian Majesty's reign, in 1740. And I had the honor to accompany him alone at the harpsichord in the first flute solo that he played as king at Charlottenburg. From this time on, until November 1767, I stayed in the Prussian service continuously, although I had several opportunities to pursue advantageous positions elsewhere. His Majesty was so gracious as to put an end to all of this with a substantial increase in my salary. In 1767 I obtained the appointment at Hamburg as Music Director, succeeding the late Kapellmeister Telemann!² After persistent [and] most respectful petitions, I received my discharge from the king; and the king's sister, her Highness the Princess Amalia of Prussia, did me the honor to nominate me as chief kapellmeister upon my departure. To be sure, since arriving here [in Hamburg] I again have had some very lucrative offers elsewhere, but I have always declined them. My Prussian service never left me enough time to travel in foreign countries. Thus, I have always

1. Bach matriculated at the university at Frankfurt/Oder in 1734. Several librettos of cantatas survive from this period, including a birthday cantata for Crown Prince Friedrich; surviving facsimiles are published in CPEB:CW, VIII/3,3.

2. Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767) was one of C.P.E. Bach's godfathers, and he served as Music Director of the city of Hamburg from 1721 until his death.

remained in Germany and have taken only a few trips in this, my fatherland. This lack of foreign travel would have been more harmful to me in my profession if I had not had the special good fortune from my youth to hear locally the finest of all kinds of music and to make a great many acquaintances with masters of the first rank, and occasionally to receive their friendship. In my youth I already had this advantage at Leipzig, for hardly any master of music passed through this place without becoming acquainted with my father and getting heard by him. The greatness of my father's reputation in composition, in organ and harpsichord playing, which was his own, was much too renowned for a musician of standing to miss the opportunity, if at all possible, of getting to know this great man better. Of everything that was to be heard, especially in Berlin and Dresden, I need not say much; who does not know the point in time in which music, both overall and in its most accurate and refined performance in particular, began a new period altogether, whereby musical art rose to such a height, but I fear it has already fallen a long way in certain respects. I believe, along with many insightful men, that the current beloved comic style is mostly to blame for this. Without citing individuals who, one might argue, have contributed nothing or only a little to comedy, I shall name one of the greatest masters of the comic style now living, Signor Galuppi,³ who, in my house in Berlin, fully agreed with me and at that time related some very ridiculous incidents that he had experienced, even in a few Italian churches. It is enough that I have had to content myself, and have contented myself very happily, with hearing, in addition to the great masters of our fatherland, the most excellent of every sort that the foreign lands have sent over to us in Germany; and I believe that there is no piece of music by some of the greatest masters that I have not heard.

If I were to be rambling and wished to strain my memory, it would not be hard for me to fill up a lot of space with the names of composers, female and male singers, and instrumentalists of all varieties that I have become acquainted with. This much I know for sure, that there were geniuses among them of a

3. Baldassare Galuppi (1706–1785) passed through Berlin on his way to St. Petersburg in 1765.

kind and stature such as have yet to reappear. Quite apart from all this, I do not deny that it would have been of exceptional pleasure to me, as well as advantageous, if I could have had the opportunity to visit foreign lands.

In the year 1744 in Berlin I married the young woman Johanna Maria Dannemann, youngest daughter of a wine merchant living there at that time, and this marriage produced two sons and a daughter now living. The eldest son practices as an attorney here [in Hamburg], the daughter is still living with me at home, and my youngest son is currently in Saxony and is studying at the art academies in Leipzig and Dresden; his main profession [is] painting.⁴ The following works by me have been published with my knowledge and consent:

(1) In the year 1731, a minuet for keyboard, with hand-crossing. An idiomatic and then very clever trick. This minuet I engraved myself in copper. [Wq III; CPEB:CW, I/8.2]

(2) 1742, six keyboard sonatas, engraved and published by Schmidt in Nuremberg. ["Prussian" Sonatas, Wq 48; CPEB:CW, I/1]

(3) 1744, six keyboard sonatas, published by Haffner in Nuremberg. ["Württemberg" Sonatas, Wq 49; CPEB:CW, I/1]

(4) 1745, a harpsichord concerto in D major with accompaniment, from Schmidt's press in Nuremberg. [Wq II; CPEB:CW, III/7]

(5) 1751, two trios from the same press, of which the first is in C minor for two violins and bass, with annotations; and the second is in B-flat major for flute, violin, and bass. [Wq 161; CPEB:CW, II/2.1–2.2]

(6) 1752, a harpsichord concerto in B-flat major with accompaniment, from the same press. [Wq 25; CPEB:CW, III/7]

(7) 1753, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, part I, with examples and six sonatas in 26 copper plates, published by the author. [*Versuch* I, in CPEB:CW, VII/1; "Probestücke" Sonatas, Wq 63, in CPEB:CW, I/3]

4. Johanna Maria was about ten years younger than C. P. E. Bach. Their children were Johann August (1745–89), Anna Carolina Philippina (1747–1804), and Johann Sebastian (1748–78). The youngest son eventually went to Rome, where he died at the age of 30.

(8) Between 1755 and 1765 Haffner in Nuremberg published ten keyboard sonatas of mine in miscellaneous anthologies [*Musikalisches Allerley, Œuvres mêlées*, etc.], namely: F major [Wq 62/9], D minor [Wq 62/4], E major [Wq 62/5], B-flat major [Wq 62/1], B minor [Wq 62/22], C major [Wq 62/10], B-flat major [Wq 62/16], A major [Wq 65/32], A minor [Wq 62/21], and E major [Wq 62/5]. [CPEB:CW, I/5.1–5.2]

(9) 1757 and 1758 [*recte* 1756 and 1757], two keyboard sonatas by me were published in the Breitkopf *Raccolta*, namely: D major [Wq 62/13; CPEB:CW, I/5.1] and D minor [Wq 62/15; CPEB:CW, I/5.2], in addition to a few single keyboard pieces [Wq 117/17–117/22; CPEB:CW, I/8.2] and a fugue [Wq 119/4; CPEB:CW, I/9].

(10) 1758, a two-voice fugue in D minor by me was printed by Marpurg in his *Fugen-Sammlung*. [Wq 119/2; CPEB:CW, I/9]

(11) 1759 [*recte* 1758], Winter in Berlin printed my melodies to *Gellerts Geistlichen [Oden und] Lieder*. [Wq 194; CPEB:CW, VI/1]

(12) 1758, my twelve short little two- and three-part pieces were issued in pocket format by Winter. [Wq 81; CPEB:CW, II/5]

(13) 1759 [*recte* 1760], Winter published the first part of my “Reprises” Sonatas. [Wq 50; CPEB:CW, I/2]

(14) 1759, Schmidt in Nuremberg engraved in copper a symphony by me for two violins, viola, and bass, in E minor. [Wq 177; CPEB:CW, III/1]

(15) 1760, Winter printed a harpsichord concerto in E major by me. [Wq 14; CPEB:CW, III/7]

(16) 1761, the same press likewise printed the *Fortsetzung* [continuation] of my [“Reprises”] keyboard sonatas. [Wq 51; CPEB:CW, I/2]

(17) 1761, the second part of my *Versuch* was published by me, which deals with the practice of accompaniment and free fantasy. [*Versuch* II; CPEB:CW, VII/2; commentary to *Versuch* I and II is in CPEB:CW, VII/3]

(18) 1761, Wever in Berlin published my *Oden mit Melodien*. On the subject of odes I should mention that others of the sort by me are already to be found earlier in the ode collections of Graf, Krause, Lange, and Breitkopf. [Wq 199; CPEB:CW, VI/3]

(19) 1762 [*recte* 1763], Winter printed the second *Fortsetzung* of my [“Reprises”] keyboard sonatas. [Wq 52; CPEB:CW, I/2]

- (20) 1764, my first sonatina in C major for keyboard and other instruments appeared from the same press. [Wq 106; CPEB:CW, III/11]
- (21) The appendix to *Gellerts Oden* appeared in the same year, also from the same press. [Wq 195; CPEB:CW, VI/1]
- (22) 1765 [recte 1764], Winter printed the second and third sonatinas in D minor and E-flat major. [Wq 107 and 108; CPEB:CW, III/11]
- (23) 1765 [recte 1766], my six easy keyboard sonatas appeared from Breitkopf. ["Leichte" Sonatas, Wq 53; CPEB:CW, I/3]
- (24) 1765, Birnstiel printed the first part of the four-part chorales by my father, collected by me.
- (25) 1765, the first collection of keyboard works of various types appeared from Winter. [*Clavierstücke verschiedener Art*, Wq 112; CPEB:CW, I/8.1]
- (26) 1765 [recte 1766], the first collection of my twelve short and easy beginners' pieces for keyboard, likewise appeared from Winter. [*Kurze und leichte Clavierstücke*, Wq 113; CPEB:CW, I/8.1]
- (27) 1766, a cantata by me, *Phyllis und Thirsis*, came out in print from the same press. [Wq 232; CPEB:CW, VI/4] Further:
- (28) Appeared from Winter also in the same year, *Der Wirt und die Gäste*, a song ode by Gleim. [Wq 201; CPEB:CW, VI/3]
- (29) 1768, Winter printed the second collection of my twelve short and easy beginners' pieces for keyboard. [*Kurze und leichte Clavierstücke*, Wq 114; CPEB:CW, I/8.1]
- (30) 1770, Hummel in Amsterdam engraved my [six] sonatas for women ["Damen" Sonatas, Wq 54; CPEB:CW, I/3]
- (31) 1771, Bock issued the *Musikalisches Vielerley*, which I had supervised, and in which numerous works of mine appear. [Wq 62/23 and 62/24 in CPEB:CW, I/5.2; Wq 116/3–116/8, 117/1–117/4 in CPEB:CW, I/8.2; Wq 122/5 in CPEB:CW, I/10.2; Wq 140 in CPEB:CW, II/5]

Since I am supposed to list everything by me that has been published, I must take this opportunity to mention that there are to be found by me a canonic Einfall [Wq 257] in the third volume of the Marpurg [*Historisch-kritische*] *Beiträge* [5 vols., Berlin, 1754–62] along with different examples and canons occurring in the same [author's] *Abhandlung von der Fuge* [Berlin, 1753–54], particu-

larly all those examples at the end of part II that concern and have made up the supplement to part I. Many of my works also appear in Marpurg's *Kritische Briefe* [Berlin, 1760], in the *Musikalisches Allerley* [Berlin, 1761] and *Mancherley* [Berlin, 1762–63], in Marpurg's *Clavierstücke mit einem practischen Unterrichts* [3 vols., Berlin, 1772–63], in Wever's *Tonstücke* [Berlin, 1762] in Birnstiel's *Nebenstunden* [Berlin, 1762] and *Kleine Clavierstücke* [Berlin, 1760], in Spener's *Clavierstücken* [Berlin, 1772–63], in *Unterhaltungen* [Wq 202C], and in Münter's collection of sacred songs [Wq 202E]. The second *Versuch [eines einfachen Gesanges; attempt at a simple song]* in hexameter is also by me [Wq 202A].⁵

(32) 1770, Schönemann here [in Hamburg] engraved in copper, in pocket format, twelve little two- and three-part pieces by me. [Wq 82; CPEB: CW, II/5]

(33) 1772, six easy harpsichord concertos with accompaniment were published by me. [*Sei concerti per il cembalo*, Wq 43; CPEB: CW, III/8]

(34) 1773, I received a commission to compose six four-part symphonies. [Wq 182; CPEB: CW, III/2]

I have composed a fair number of vocal pieces for church and various ceremonies, but none of these has been printed.⁶ All together my compositions consist of about a couple of dozen symphonies; thirty trios for keyboard and other instruments; eighteen solos for instruments other than keyboard; twelve sonatas for one keyboard with accompaniment; forty-nine concertos for keyboard and other instruments (the latter, however, I also arranged for keyboard), there being among the keyboard concertos one for two harpsichords [Wq 46; CPEB: CW, III/10]; 170 solos for keyboard, which are mostly sonatas, with a few of them comprising little collections of character and other little pieces, also concertos, symphonies, and fugues.

Because I have had to compose most of my works for specific individuals

5. The *Einfall*, canons, and examples are published in CPEB: CW, VIII/1; the songs are published in CPEB: CW, VI/3, and the keyboard works in series I (CPEB: CW, I/5, I/8, I/9).

6. *Die Israeliten in der Wüste* (Wq 238), though first performed in 1769, was only published in 1775; see CPEB: CW, IV/1.

and for the public, I have always been more restrained in them than in the few pieces that I have written for myself alone. At times I even have had to follow ridiculous instructions, although it could be that such not exactly pleasant conditions have led my genius to certain discoveries that I might not otherwise have come upon.

Since I have never liked excessive uniformity in composition and taste, since I have heard such a quantity and variety of good things, since I have always been of the opinion that one could derive some good, whatever it may be, even if it is only a matter of minute details in a piece: probably from this and my natural, God-given ability arises the variety that has been observed in my works. At this point I must observe that the critics, even if they write without passion, as still rarely happens, very often treat the compositions that they review too harshly, since they do not know the circumstances, proscriptions, and occasions of the pieces. How very rarely does one encounter a critic with an appropriate degree of sensitivity, knowledge, fairness, and courage—four attributes that simply must exist to a sufficient extent in every critic. Hence it is very sad for the world of music that criticism, very useful in other respects, often is an occupation of persons such as are not endowed with all these attributes.

Among my works, especially for keyboard, there are only a few trios, solos, and concertos that I have composed in complete freedom and for my own use.

My chief effort, especially in recent years, has been directed towards both playing and composing as lyrically as possible for the clavichord, notwithstanding its lack of sustaining power. This thing is not at all easy if the ear is not to be left too empty and the noble simplicity of the melody is not to be disturbed by too much bustle.

It seems to me that music primarily must touch the heart, and the keyboard player can never accomplish that through mere rumbling, drumming, and arpeggiating, at least not in my opinion.

