

INTRODUCTION

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Concerto in E-flat Major, Wq 47, for harpsichord and fortepiano, composed in 1788, closes his voluminous output as a composer of keyboard concertos—a genre perfected by his father, Johann Sebastian Bach, whose contributions manifestly influenced the works of his son. Whereas most of J.S. Bach's concertos for one to four harpsichords represent transcriptions from original works for non-keyboard soloist(s)—a salient exception is the Concerto in C Major for two harpsichords, BWV 1061 (arranged from an original version without orchestra, BWV 1061a)—C.P.E. Bach's keyboard concertos were mostly conceived for keyboard soloist, taking the textures and rhetoric perfected by his father's keyboard concertos as a point of departure.

The creative trajectory of composers active in the second half of the eighteenth century coincided with the gradual ascendancy of the fortepiano over the harpsichord. The identification of which solo instrument is intended in keyboard concertos is not unequivocally clear. Apart from Wq 47, there are only two other keyboard concertos by C.P.E. Bach (Wq 34 and 35, both originally for organ) intended for a soloist other than the harpsichord. The term “cembalo” was used long after the fortepiano supplanted the harpsichord: as late as 1786 Mozart used “cembalo” in his Concerto in C Major, K 503. A lack of dynamics might suggest harpsichord as the intended instrument in solo works, but composers often refrained from supplying dynamics in the solo parts to concertos.

In Wq 47 the designations of the two soloists are entered into the autograph score: “Flügel” (harpsichord) and “Fortepiano.” Both parts contain dynamics, created through registration for the harpsichord and through the dynamic contrasts indigenous to the piano. Bach uses considerable ingenuity to characterize the timbres and

articulations possible on the two instruments by presenting similar motives and figuration for them antiphonally. Balancing such alternating passages for each soloist with flamboyant collective passagework allows for maximum contrast. In addition, Bach provides at times differing materials for the soloists in order to take full advantage of their acoustic properties. The choice to include a pair of flutes rather than the more standard oboes gives the orchestral texture a transparent coloration, and the choice of E-flat major enables the use of the most popular crook of the horn.

The first performance was probably given in the salon of Sara Levy, née Itzig (1761–1854), the descendant of a prominent Prussian Jewish banking family and the apparent commissioner of Wq 47. She was herself a fluent performer and an enthusiast for music of C.P.E. Bach and his family; Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy was her great-nephew. Levy received the autograph score from Bach in 1788 and prepared a wrapper for the manuscript. Her collection eventually passed to Carl Friedrich Zelter and the Singakademie zu Berlin. (It was Zelter who introduced Mendelssohn to the music of the Bach family.)

The autograph score of Wq 47 was one of only a handful of C.P.E. Bach's scores that remained in Berlin during World War II, in the possession of Georg Schumann, the director of the Singakademie, and it was eventually given to the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (D-B, N. Mus. SA 4).

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