

We recently asked Elias N. Kulukundis, one of our contributing editors and perhaps the foremost collector of C. P. E. Bach source materials today, about his long association with the composer's music: how this involvement came about, what characterized it, and what has sustained this deep engagement over the years. He has kindly indulged us, providing an opportunity to learn more about his particular vantage point as scholar, admirer, and collector. Mr. Kulukundis edited several keyboard concertos for CPEB:CW, including Wq 11, 14, 25 (III/7); Wq 15–17 (III/9.5); Wq 26–27 (III/9.8); and Wq 35 (III/9.11). He has contributed articles to *Bach-Jahrbuch* and other scholarly journals and Festschriften, including his own, *The Sons of Bach: Essays for Elias N. Kulukundis*.

Investigating and Collecting the Music of C. P. E. Bach

Discovering Bach through the Back Door

I have often been asked what led me to become involved with C. P. E. Bach, as I have been for much of my life. I came to his music, you might say, through the back door.

From my early teenage years I had developed a great liking for the music of Mozart, and read Alfred Einstein's biography so many times I almost knew it by heart. I developed a special fondness for Mozart's piano concertos. As an undergraduate at Yale majoring in History of Music in the 1950s, I was exposed to the keyboard concertos of J. S. Bach among much other music. I was struck by the structural and stylistic differences between Bach's and Mozart's concertos, and I began to wonder how the one evolved into the other.

At that time, C. P. E. Bach was a name mentioned only in passing; little of his music was available in print and almost none in recorded form. I used to spend quite a bit of time in the music library at Yale and one day chanced on a copy of the Wotquenne catalogue of C. P. E. Bach's works. I was excited to find that here was a composer who wrote fifty-two keyboard concertos of which only one had, at the time, appeared in print (Wq 23 in the *Denkmäler Deutscher Tonkunst*, edited by Arnold Schering). Perhaps somewhere in these works I could find the answer to the question that was troubling me.

I spoke about this with my advisors (who later became my good friends) William Waite and Beekman Cannon, and they suggested that C. P. E. Bach's keyboard concertos could be an interesting topic for my senior essay. Getting hold of the music was a problem. Fortunately, Hans Uldall provided a partial list of manuscript sources for the works in his 1928 dissertation. Brooks Shepard, then librarian at the Yale School of Music, led me to the Westphal manuscripts in Brussels, and Brooks and Ralph Kirkpatrick told me about the manuscripts in the Library of Congress. With their help, I obtained microfilms of many of these sources, and the project was born.

I read through the microfilms, making notes as appropriate; scored a few of the works; read through the secondary sources (of which I found Uldall's dissertation and Schering's *History of the Concerto* to be the most valuable) and wrote the paper. I learned a lot about C. P. E. Bach and the mid-eighteenth century keyboard concerto in the process, information that would be of great use in the future. I was pretty proud of the essay when I finished it; but, looking back on it with hindsight and in the context of what

I know now, it was simplistic, unduly derivative, and entirely forgettable. It deserves to be consigned to oblivion, just as C.P.E. Bach did with his own early works. But it served as the springboard that led me to subsequent studies (mostly unpublished) and editions of the concertos.

So you might say I came to C.P.E. Bach through Mozart.

Becoming an Editor and Collector

I never took up musicology as a career. After completing one year in the doctoral program at Yale, I decided to withdraw and went to work in the family shipping business. But I managed to maintain my interest in C.P.E. Bach in two ways.

First of all, I continued to undertake musical investigations on my own. At the time, my primary interest was in the music of Joseph Haydn, but I continued to copy or score the occasional concerto by C.P.E. Bach, and edited one (Wq 27) for publication in the Yale Collegium Musicum series. However, between my job and my responsibilities to my family (in the interim, I had married and was busy helping raise four children), I had little time to do anything substantive.

Secondly, as a way to keep my interest in music alive, Beekman Cannon had suggested that I start collecting old music. Again with the help of Brooks Shepard, I became acquainted with three or four important music dealers in England, and my collection was off and running. At first, I was collecting anything printed in the mid- and late eighteenth century. I quickly realized that this was an awfully big universe to deal with and my resources suggested it would be advisable to narrow down the focus. I then decided to limit myself to publications of the music of C.P.E. Bach. That in turn proved to be too narrow a focus—I had quickly acquired all the easily available material—and so I broadened the scope of my collecting to include publications by Bach's brothers as well. And even though I have since added to the collection some interesting items coming on the market by other eighteenth-century composers, the music of the Bach brothers remains the primary focus. The collection has grown to include manuscripts, letters, autographs, and documents as well as printed editions. [\[Click here to view the Kulukundis collection currently on deposit at the Bach-Archiv.\]](#)

In the late 1970s, I got a letter from Rachel Wade. She was working on her dissertation on C.P.E. Bach's concertos, and friends suggested that she get in touch with me. We exchanged a couple of letters, which brought me back into the world of C.P.E. Bach's keyboard concertos. When Rachel began planning the ill-fated *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach Edition* (CPEBE), she invited me to join other musicologists as a contributing editor and assigned me five concertos to edit. All were works I had already scored (Wq 12, 14, 17, 27, and 37), so the biggest task was to correlate readings in the various sources and evaluate them.

I jumped at the opportunity to get back into the thick of things. By then, I had more time on my hands: my children were growing up, and I took early retirement when our company decided to close its office in New York. I now had the entire day to devote to pursuing my interest in the music of C.P.E. Bach and his brothers.

Subsequently, Rachel asked me to edit another four concertos (Wq 15, 16, 26, and 35) which I undertook willingly. Of the nine works which I edited for CPEBE and submitted, only one, Wq 37, ever made it into print. CPEBE failed for want of funding in the mid-1990s.

It was succeeded in 1999 by CPEB:CW. The editorial staff of that organization invited me to undertake editions of various concertos. Accepting this invitation was a decision I never regretted. Not only did it bring me back into active musicological work, but I got to work with friends, I made many new friends, and it led me into all sorts of new and interesting paths.

Keyboard Concertos as Primary Interest

In addition to editing nine keyboard concertos by C.P.E. Bach for CPEB:CW, I have scored and studied a great many keyboard concertos by several of Bach's associates in Berlin, as well as by his brother Friedrich. I have looked into other aspects of C.P.E. Bach's work as well, and am of course familiar with a great deal of his output, most of which is now accessible through CDs as well as in printed editions. To be sure, when I started out on this journey, I was aware of Bach's significance as a composer of keyboard sonatas, and I had written a seminar paper at Yale on the song in eighteenth-century Germany, which required becoming familiar with C.P.E. Bach's contributions to that genre. I also discovered the Magnificat through a Bach Guild recording from the early 1950s. But that was incidental.

My primary interest was and still is the keyboard concertos. I consider them one of the most important groups of compositions from the mid-eighteenth century, works of greater scope and complexity than Bach's contributions in any other genre of instrumental music, imaginative works of the highest musical quality, and, at the same time, works with a not inconsiderable influence on the concertos of his contemporaries.

Sometimes I'm asked if I have a favorite concerto. Obviously I am partial to some of the works I have edited. Both Wq 14 and Wq 27 are fine works. I like their outer movements very much. But I feel the slow movements are melodically backward-looking, which in my estimation drops them from the top rung. So, if I must choose a favorite among Bach's keyboard concertos, I would have to argue for Wq 17. It is Bach's first fully mature keyboard concerto and all three movements display the highest level of inspiration. The outer movements are full of excitement, especially the conflict between the descending scales and wide melodic skips in the first movement, played out against the rhythmic impetus of repeated 8th notes in the bass line. And the slow movement sings, with mutes on the violins and a pizzicato bass creating an unusual and sensual orchestral coloring. Because of the slow movement, I think it is one-up on its slightly later sister work Wq 23, also in the key of D minor. Unfortunately, in my opinion, most recordings of Wq 17 take the tempo of the outer movements too slowly, in the process debasing the inherent excitement. I remain partial to the first recording of the work, a performance on a Oiseau-Lyre LP by Isabelle Nef. [\[Click here to access this album on iTunes.\]](#)

As I mentioned above, I was attracted to C. P. E. Bach's keyboard concertos in an effort to understand how the concerto as practiced by Mozart evolved from the procedures governing J. S. Bach's examples in the form. While I was indeed looking for a missing evolutionary link, I did not find it in C. P. E. Bach's keyboard concertos, and I do not know if there is a missing link to be found. A lot of different things were happening to the concerto in the mid-eighteenth century: the evolution of the Italian violin concerto from the works of Locatelli and Tartini to the concertos of Giornovich and Viotti; the development of the *sinfonia concertante* and the double exposition in Paris; the transformation of Italian sonata principles into the first London concertos of J. C. Bach. The north German keyboard concerto as practiced by C. P. E. Bach was another of those strands. They all came together at some unspecified point in time, evolving into a structure and an aesthetic out of which Mozart's concertos were born. Did they come together in any one work? Or in the works of any one composer? I do not know. In my opinion, the history of the concerto in the eighteenth century has yet to be written.

Assessing the Keyboard Concerto Genre

The north German keyboard concerto as practiced by C. P. E. Bach represents a significant step forward from the works of his father. This is particularly true with regard to structural considerations. Firstly, the constant interplay of tutti and solo—by definition the fundamental generating impulse of the concerto—has been rationalized. Tutti and solo sections have been clearly delineated, with the tutti passages, either four or five in number, positioned at certain fixed strategic points throughout the movement, stable tonally (sometimes excepting the third tutti section) in contrast to the frequently modulating solo sections. During solo sections, the keyboard is king. Nonetheless, the orchestra is not uninvolved. Sometimes it accompanies the soloist with melodic figures drawn from the ritornello; sometimes it plays chords to emphasize the underlying harmonic patterns; sometimes it interrupts the figurations of the soloist with fragments derived from the ritornello; and sometimes it remains silent for extended passages. The principal modulating sequences throughout the movement have been standardized, proceeding from the tonic to the dominant, the relative minor/major, and then back to the tonic. Features common to sonata form start appearing. The penultimate ritornello usually brings back a few bars from the beginning of the initial ritornello, and the final solo concludes with the same figural patterns as conclude the first solo, giving a sense of recapitulation. The second and third solo sections explore aspects of the basic thematic material in various combinations and through different keys, not unlike a development section. And the use of *empfindsam* procedures in slow movements, with constantly changing dynamic levels and moods, is a considerable advance on the single affect dominating the movement in most baroque works.

At the same time, I think the north German keyboard concerto also looks backward. The second ritornello always—and sometimes the third as well—begins with the opening theme of the first ritornello and continues with a moderately abbreviated repetition of the material of that ritornello. This is no different than what appears in the later concertos of Vivaldi and those of Tartini. Secondly, there is no

clear-cut second subject, a typical feature of sonata form, either in the ritornellos or in the solo sections; just segments of momentary contrast that do not fulfill the requirements of a proper second theme. The introductory material at the commencement of the first solo section is in no sense a second subject. Furthermore, there is no effort to emphasize the arrival of the dominant in the opening solo section with a clear-cut theme of any sort. Thirdly, new material is often introduced in the final solo section, a frequent occurrence in older works, undermining the recapitulation-like character of the section. And fourthly, the expansion of the basic thematic material in the central solo sections is more typical of the procedures of *Fortspinnung* than it is of the dissection and analysis usually found in development sections.

In sum, I think that the north German keyboard concerto represents a significant step forward from its predecessors earlier in the century. But at the same time, it retains many older features. It is a middle ground, neither here nor there. It never progressed beyond that mold. There is little difference structurally between C.P.E. Bach's earliest Berlin concertos and his last such work from Hamburg in 1788. Features which were developed and perfected in Berlin in the middle of the century were carried over into concertos written in other places. It is probably in those places rather than in north Germany that one should look for the possible "missing link." But that does not diminish the importance of the north German concerto, and the works of C.P.E. Bach in particular, in the evolution of the concerto in the mid-eighteenth century.

Assessing the Composer

Without question, C.P.E. Bach was one of the most talented composers active in the mid-eighteenth century. His music stands out above that of most if not all of his contemporaries for its originality, its development and expansion of structures and procedures inherited from the past, and the quality and character of its melodic and harmonic invention. I think that he recognized this not only in his comments in his autobiography, but also occasionally in his letters, and certainly in the fact that he preserved most of his compositions in his library for the ultimate financial benefit of his family. He knew that there would still be a demand for them from musicians after his death.

However, I think there was more than one C.P.E. Bach. I see his compositions as falling into three distinct stylistic periods: the first period covering his life up to the time of the Seven Years' War; the second the less-than-ten-year period from his return to Berlin from Zerbst in 1758–59 to his departure for Hamburg in 1768; and the third his years in Hamburg. Of these, the most important historically was the first. These were the years when his works most frequently exhibited the characteristics which I mentioned above. The second is transitional: much of the excitement inherent in Bach's earlier works is toned down; he begins to make accommodation for the change in musical tastes that took place in Europe after 1760, shifting the center of rhythmic interest from the lower to the upper voices, subtracting some of the excitement in the invention of his thematic material, and writing down to the level of his audiences in order to sell his publications. The third, in Hamburg, finds him freed from the strictures of

the conservative musical taste dominant in Berlin. He begins to experiment with new kinds of melodies, unusual rhythmic patterns often involving moments of silence, and to introduce elements of free fantasy into most categories of instrumental music.

It is in this third period that Bach, in my opinion, was at his most original, a characteristic acknowledged by most writers privileged at the time to hear him improvise at the keyboard. But however original his music in this third period may have been, with the likely exception of the oratorios and the *Passions-Cantate* (Wq 233), it had little influence on the course of music history. His instrumental music in those years was outstanding in and of itself, forging new paths within the context of the established categories and structures that he had practiced all his life. But history had passed him by. The innovations of his late period were an evolutionary dead end. New structures (sonata form, the rondo) had evolved, and his melodic and harmonic innovations reflected his own musical personality rather than conforming with the musical tastes then prevalent in most of Europe. His late instrumental works, for all their originality, were dated in many ways. One need only compare the finale of Bach's double concerto (Wq 47) of 1788 with that of Mozart (K. 365) written ten years earlier for this to seem abundantly clear.

It is perhaps in his emphasis on the fantastical element in music that the instrumental works of Bach's Hamburg years have any real historical relevance. With the exception of the three quartets (Wq 93–95) and the double concerto, all composed in 1788, Bach had stopped writing large-scale instrumental music in 1775. Additionally, the last totally original religious work that he wrote, the *Heilig* for two choruses (Wq 217), by his own admission his swan song in the genre, was completed two years later. It would seem that writing large-scale works had become too taxing for him and tired him excessively both physically and creatively. He was only 61 in 1775, but that was relatively old in those years, and besides he had come down with serious episodes of gout that continued to bother him the rest of his life. Nonetheless, ceasing to write large-scale works is not as extraordinary as it seems. Nearly thirty years later, Joseph Haydn was so exhausted after writing *The Seasons* that he gave up all composition for the rest of his life, leaving his last string quartet unfinished notwithstanding that he had already sketched out ideas for the two outer movements.

Of course Bach did not give up composition altogether; his active imagination would not allow that. He focused instead on writing sonatas and songs, pieces that could be worked out as he improvised on the keyboard, and he also concentrated on publishing some of his older as well as much of his newer music in those genres. As for the brief resumption of the composition of instrumental music in 1788, those works were composed at the request of a friend in Berlin, Sara Levy, for the use of her family. I think Bach was titillated by the challenge and the idea of getting back into the game when he accepted the commissions.

To be sure, from 1769 until his death, Bach was writing a steady stream of Passions and cantatas for various purposes, in the process fulfilling his duties to the city of Hamburg, for which he was being paid. But in the greater majority of these works, much of the material is not original but is recycled from already existing compositions, many not even by Bach himself but by his contemporaries. This is especially

true of the large-scale choral movements where Bach's active involvement appears to have been rather limited in scope.

One should not criticize Bach for using recycled material in the large majority of the Passions and occasional choral works that he wrote in Hamburg. This was not unusual at the time. Numerous examples of such borrowing can be found in the works of Bach's father and of Handel. It is, however, a question of degree. In Bach's case recycled material tends to dominate original compositions. The 1769 St. Matthew Passion is the only Passion for which Bach wrote a considerable amount of new material, presumably hoping to make a good impression on his new audience. But even in that work, most of the chorales and recitatives were recycled from his father's St. Matthew Passion. Accordingly, I cannot help wondering just how enthusiastic Bach was about writing the church music for which he was being paid. I know the latest research has established that throughout his Hamburg years Bach made significant changes in the material that he borrowed. But I cannot escape the feeling that he really did not care for the task and did not devote his best efforts to it. He was going through the motions just enough to keep the town council happy.

In that context, I wonder what sort of music Bach might have written if the Leipzig town council had accepted his application to succeed his father at the *Thomasschule*. As in Hamburg, he would have been responsible for much of the music performed at the town churches. Would he have adopted such a cavalier attitude to his compositional duties there? I strongly suspect that in 1767, his primary motivation for accepting the job in Hamburg was to get away from Frederick the Great who, at best, was a difficult taskmaster, and not the challenge of working with a new and more open-minded audience and of writing music, particularly religious music, in categories in which he had previously made only very occasional contributions.

A Lasting Influence

Overall, I think C.P.E. Bach's greatest contribution to musical history is the *Versuch*. Firstly, the *Versuch* is the most important treatise on keyboard playing to appear in the eighteenth century. It transmitted to all budding keyboard players the secrets of Bach's considerable technique as a performer, secrets acquired directly from his father, who was reputed to be the best keyboard performer in Germany if not the world, secrets which rationalized and simplified the ability to play the keyboard. Secondly, Bach infused the *Versuch* with his own aesthetic beliefs: the need to make the keyboard sing, the proper way to compose a fantasy, and the importance of incorporating fantastical elements into rational structures. He urges all his readers to take these into consideration when performing or improvising. Thirdly, in the second part of the treatise, he devoted a considerable amount of space to the characteristics of different chords and their function within a simple phrase or a larger musical structure. In some respects, this section amounts to a course on the proper way to compose music. And fourthly, the impact it had on future

generations of composers was significant. Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all acknowledged the debt they owed to C. P. E. Bach. We know Haydn owned a copy of the *Versuch*, which he studied intensely during his process of self-education in the late 1750s and early 1760s. He was also familiar with various of Bach's published collections of keyboard sonatas, as Hermann Abert pointed out nearly a hundred years ago. Beethoven too had direct contact with Bach's music in the course of his studies with Christian Gottlob Neefe, and almost certainly with the treatise as well.

In my opinion, the most telling comment comes from Mozart. He expressed his debt to C. P. E. Bach most simply, noting that "He (Bach) is the father, and we are the kids." This is a curious comment since it is very difficult to trace any direct influence of Bach's music in Mozart's mature style. It seems that sonatas by Bach were among the examples of contemporary music to which Leopold exposed his son. It is possible that Mozart may also have become familiar with some of Bach's music through Bach's brother Johann Christian during his visit to London in 1764–65. More likely, his principal contact with Bach's works may not have come until he met Baron van Swieten in Vienna in the early 1780s. But for Mozart to have made such a comment as he did suggests that he must have had some exposure to the *Versuch*, particularly to those sections dealing with chord sequences and composition, and that it played an important part in his education.

If all the great composers of the era felt a debt to Bach in the context of their own musical training, imagine the impact of Bach's writing on the lesser composers of the era whose early musical experiences are undocumented.

The importance of the *Versuch* in the training of composers of the era is, in my opinion, Bach's greatest contribution to the course of music history in the eighteenth century. Through the *Versuch*, he conveyed to future generations not only the secrets of his own technical expertise at the keyboard, but the logic of his compositional process and his musical aesthetic as well. These are the lessons that Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all learned from him and which profoundly influenced the development of their musical style.

In closing, I would say there is still a lot about C. P. E. Bach that remains to be explored, notwithstanding that the *Complete Works* edition has filled a great many of the lacunae which existed in our knowledge of Bach the musician twenty years ago. Apart from his music, for example, we know very little about what sort of a person Bach was except what we can determine from his music; in the few documentary sources which shed a bit of light on that subject Bach rarely lets us into his most personal thoughts and innermost feelings. But that is a topic for another time.

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