

Editing C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*

The critical edition of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, edited by Tobias Plebuch and published as Series VII of *C.P.E. Bach: The Complete Works* (CPEB:CW) in 2011, consists of separate volumes for parts I and II of Bach's *Versuch* in the original German plus a volume of commentary in English. For all of its fame and longevity, the *Versuch* had never before been published in a complete modern critical edition. Most readers of today access the *Versuch* through facsimile reproductions of the first editions or, for English speakers, through William Mitchell's 1949 translation. None of these, however, present all of the material that Bach eventually intended to include.

Part of the reason for the confusion surrounding what should be included in the *Versuch* is its convoluted publication history during and shortly after Bach's lifetime. The original conception, probably developed in the late 1740s, was for a single volume of instruction on playing keyboard instruments, accompanied by extensive music examples and a set of composed pieces to illustrate the points being made in the text (these latter he called "Probestücke"). Unfortunately, the technology of the time limited what Bach was able to achieve in his first attempt to realize his plan in the early 1750s.

The combining of text and elaborate music examples on the same page in an extended book had been a rarity. Bach therefore chose to separate the music examples from the text in his treatise, and have all notational aspects engraved on plates and printed separately. Starting in 1753, Bach sold copies of the text (135 pages) and the music examples/"Probestücke" (20 pages), but since the formats were different (the pages of music were much larger) many exemplars of the text became separated from their musical mates over the years.

The *Versuch* sold so well that Bach had to reprint it only six years later. The 1759 edition was typeset anew so that it fit onto 118 pages, but the unchanged music examples remained a separate item, still being printed from the engraved plates. Bach corrected errors he had noticed in the 1753 edition and also made a few very small edits to the text, but the 1753 and the 1759 editions are otherwise identical. The major differences are on the title page, where the new printer (Winter) is given instead of the old (Henning), the book is listed as being the second edition, and the whole is officially referred to as part I (erster Theil), meaning that Bach was definitely planning—if not already working on—a second part. This he brought out a few years later with a text dealing with basso continuo accompaniment.

Just two years after the first edition of part I of the *Versuch* had appeared in 1753, the printer Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf in Leipzig demonstrated the first commercially viable method of

printing complex music using movable type. Bach realized that he would now be able to incorporate his new music examples for part II of the *Versuch* directly into the text. But in order to save space and keep costs down, Bach reduced most of the music examples in part II—which are generally much more complex than the part I examples—onto a single staff. Even so, when the first edition of part II appeared in 1762 it was more than twice as long as part I. The printer again was Winter, who apparently had licensed the new typesetting technology from Breitkopf, and again the publisher was Bach.

Even though part II was a single entity with the music examples incorporated into the text, Bach now had three items to inventory, sell, package, ship, and collect money for: part I; the supplement to part I, containing the music examples/“*Probestücke*”; and part II. He continued to sell the *Versuch* (or the *Versuchs*, as he usually referred to both volumes collectively) himself, even after moving to Hamburg in 1768. Eventually, though, he tired of the administrative work involved, and in 1780 he sold his intellectual property rights along with all unsold stock to the Leipzig printer Engelhard Benjamin Schwickert. Schwickert wanted to offer something new to spur sales, but initially could only offer a new title page. The 1780 “editions” of both parts I and II are nothing more than leftover stock of the 1759 and 1762 editions with new title pages identifying the new publisher, although in Schwickert’s defense he made no claim for either one being a new edition. Schwickert did, however, manage to extract a promise from Bach to update both volumes with additional information and new sonatas like the “*Probestücke*” whenever Schwickert ran out of stock and had to reprint the volumes. In the late 1780s, when Schwickert’s stock of part I ran out, he was able to get Bach to deliver on his promise for additions to the texts and the new sonatas (or sonatinas, as Bach now called them).

Schwickert’s new edition of part I with Bach’s additions came out in 1787. By that time Bach had little interest in spending hours proofreading texts or music examples, most of which he had already proofread decades earlier, and thus he left it to Schwickert to make sure no errors were introduced.

Schwickert’s original stock of part II lasted even longer, and it wasn’t until the late 1790s that he needed to reprint that volume. Of course by then Bach had been dead for several years, but he had supplied Schwickert with additions to part II—probably at the same time he supplied the additions to part I—that were even more extensive than those for part I. Unfortunately Bach’s manuscript with the part II changes does not seem to have survived. Since the original part II music examples had been typeset from the outset, Schwickert had to re-typeset them along with the new examples; with Bach not being there to proofread them, Schwickert managed to introduce a considerable number of errors in the process of producing the second edition of part II.

Thus in order to obtain a complete picture of what Bach ultimately intended for his “*Versuchs*” one must rely on the 1787 and 1797 Schwicker editions to include all of the material Bach provided, while at the same time reading that material with a critical eye to correct the errors introduced by Schwicker. The CPEB:CW edition represents the first time such an undertaking has been attempted. Facsimile reproductions of any of the original editions fall short by not presenting all of the material, and while Mitchell included much of the added material in his translation, he did not include all of it, nor did he catch all of Schwicker’s errors.

The CPEB:CW edition accounts for all significant variant readings between the various original editions (1753, 1759, and 1787 for part I; 1762 and 1797 for part II). Variants are flagged by marginal call-outs, and the original readings are given at the bottom of the same page to spare the reader continual flipping back and forth to the critical report. (See image below.) Editorial footnotes are called out in the text with normal footnote numbers, and the notes themselves are found in the separate commentary volume, allowing the editorial commentary to be followed alongside the text.

98 2. HAUPTSTÜCK 3. ABTHEILUNG



EX. 1:117 [TAB. IV, FIG. XLVI]

§. 34. Dieser Prall-Triller kann nicht anders als vor einer fallenden Sequenz vorkommen, sie mag nur durch einen Vorschlag oder eine grosse Note entstehen Fig. XLVII. [EX. 1:118] Man findet ihn über kurzen Noten (a), oder solchen, welche durch einen Vorschlag kurz werden (b). Deswegen wenn er auch über fernirenden Noten vorzukommen pflegt, so hält man den Vorschlag ganz lang, und schnappet hernach ganz kurz mit diesem Triller ab, indem man den Finger von der Taste entfernt (c).



EX. 1:118 [TAB. IV, FIG. XLVII]

§. 35. Man findet ihn oft ausser den Cadenzen und Fermaten, bey Passagen, wo drey oder auch mehrere Noten herunter steigen Fig. XLVIII. [EX. 1:119] und, weil er die Natur eines Trillers ohne Nachschlag hat, welcher sich herunter neigt, so ist er, wie dieser, in Fällen anzutreffen, wo auf lange Noten kurze hinterher folgen, wie wir Tab. V. Fig. XLIX. [EX. 1:120] sehen.



EX. 1:119 [TAB. IV, FIG. XLVIII]

99 VON DEM DOPPELSCHLAGE



EX. 1:120 [TAB. V, FIG. XLIX]

§. 36. Bey Gelegenheit des Vortrags dieses Trillers merken wir noch an, daß sich auf dem Forte piano, wenn diese Manier leise gemacht werden soll, eine beynahe unübersteigliche Schwierigkeit findet. Man weiß, daß alles Schnellen durch einen gewissen Grad der Gewalt geschehen muß; diese Gewalt macht allezeit den Anschlag auf diesem Instrumente stark; unser Triller kann ganz und gar nicht ohne Schnellen hervorgebracht werden; also leidet ein Clavier-Spieler allezeit hierin, um so viel mehr, da dieser Triller gar sehr oft theils allein, theils in Gesellschaft des Doppel-Schlags nach einem Vorschlag, und folglich nach den Regeln des Vortrags aller Vorschläge, piano vorkommt. Diese Unbequemlichkeit ereignet sich bey allem Schnellen, besonders aber hier bey der schärfsten Art von Schnellen. Ich zweifle, ob man auch durch die größte Uebung, die Stärke des Anschlage bey diesem Triller auf benanntem Instrumente allezeit in seiner Gewalt wird haben können.

Vierte Abtheilung,
Von dem Doppelschlage.

§. 1. Der Doppelschlag ist eine leichte Manier, welche den Gesang zugleich angenehm und glänzend macht. Seine Andeutung und Ausübung finden wir Tab. V. Fig. L. [EX. 1:121] abgebildet. Wir sehen hierbey die Nothwendigkeit, bey drauf folgenden Octaven oder anderen weiten Sprüngen diesen Doppelschlag mit vier Fingern zu machen. Man pflegt in diesem Falle zwey Ziffern nebeneinander über die Note zu setzen.

α. "eine grosse": the edition retains the 1753/59 reading because the 1787 reading "einer großen" is grammatically incorrect.

β. "Tab. V. Fig. XLIX": 1753/59 read "Tab. V. bey Fig. XLIX."

α. "Doppelschlag": not emphasized in 1753; emphasis added in 1759/87.

β. "Tab. V. Fig. L": 1753 reads "Tab. V. bey Fig. L"; 1759 reads "Tab. V. bey Fig. L."

The music examples were incorporated into the main text for both parts, and appear there as in the originals (updated according to CPEB:CW notational guidelines). This did not, however, alleviate the density issue created by Bach's decision to cram everything—including multi-voice examples with full continuo realizations—onto a single staff. For the more convoluted examples the commentary provides solutions where the material is unpacked onto two or three staves, as shown in the following figures.

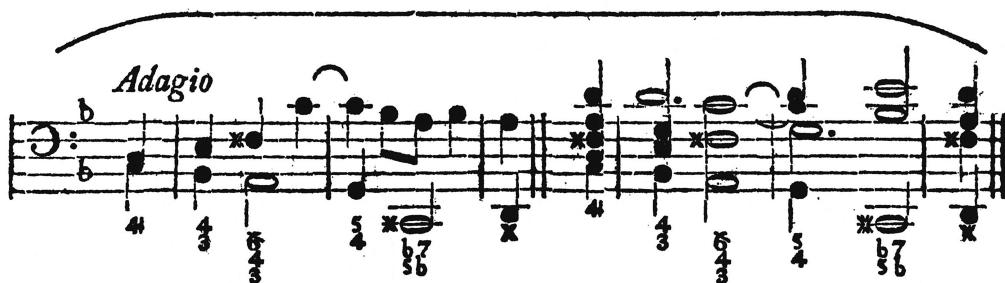


Figure 1. A music example from the 1762 edition of *Versuch* II with solo voice, bass, and continuo realization reduced to a single staff. The material before the double bar in the middle of the example consists of the melody and the bass line, while the material after the double bar consists of the same bass line with the continuo figures realized above it. The two halves are intended to be heard simultaneously.

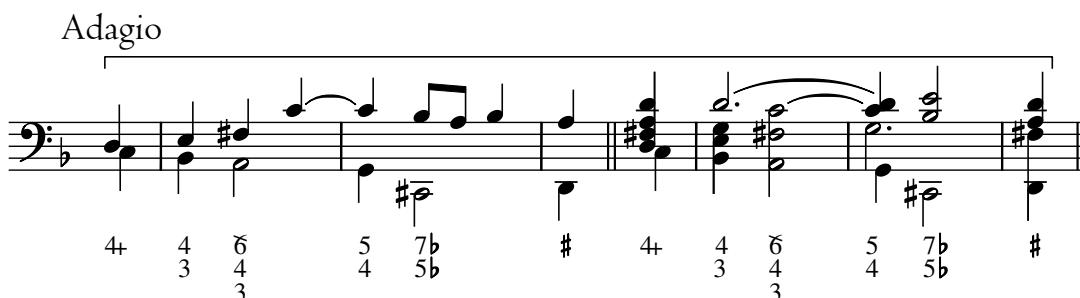


Figure 2. The same example rendered in modern notation in CPEB:CW, VII/2.



Figure 3. The “unpacked” example as given in the commentary volume, CPEB:CW, VII/3, with the transposition of voices chosen to best clarify the concepts being discussed.

The commentary volume of the CPEB:CW *Versuch* edition also includes a glossary of outdated German terms that could cause difficulty even for native German readers, as well as an index of Bach’s works mentioned in the text or cited in the music examples, and a general index.

The “Probestücke” and the “Neue Sonatinen” that Bach included in the supplement to part I have been published in CPEB:CW, I/3, edited by David Schulenberg. These same pieces, along with the engraved music examples for part I, have also been published in facsimile as a supplement to CPEB:CW, Series VII.

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