

C.P.E. Bach: “*Kenner und Liebhaber*” Collections I and II. 2 Volumes, Christopher Hogwood, ed. [*Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works, Series I, Volumes 4.1 and 4.2.* Darrell M. Berg, General Editor. Packard Humanities Institute, 2009]

It's in the nature of the work done by charitable foundations that money is no object, at least in theory, and so promotional considerations tend to be secondary. The Packard Humanities Institute has already just completed its magnificent set of facsimile editions of the seven mature Mozart operas, which it is offering at incredibly reasonable prices given the quality and importance of the release (\$175 per volume in the United States). Granted, C.P.E. Bach (1714-88) is a composer substantially less popular than Mozart, but if the latter edition represents a good deal, then the Bach series is such a bargain that it almost seems ridiculous. It's a shame that so few people know about it, and a particular pleasure to be able to recommend it to your attention now.

Individual volumes sell for about \$20-25 on average, and given that fact that these are all cloth-bound, scholarly critical editions produced according to the highest modern standards, then you probably owe it to yourself to acquire a few whether you like C.P.E. Bach or not. Furthermore, performance materials for many of the chamber, orchestral, and choral works are offered for download free of charge on the Institute's Bach website. Check it out here: <http://www.cpebach.org/cpeb/>. The website also lists volumes currently available and soon-to-be released, and provides many useful links to external resources. Projected for completion in 2014, the 300th anniversary year of Bach's birth, the edition will include not just all of the musical works, but also his most famous pedagogical treatise, the *Essay on the True Art of Keyboard Playing*.

C.P.E. Bach was the most famous of all of the “Bachs” during the 18th century. Indeed, his renown exceeded that of his father. It's surprising, then, that it has taken so long for a complete edition of his works to appear, but the simple fact is that many of them just recently have become available. It was only in 1999 that the archives of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin were located in Eastern Europe. These contained a large number of vocal works, principally Passion settings and Cantatas, that had been thought lost since the Second World War, as well as much other material belonging to the Bach family. The recovery of these musical treasures has made a complete edition possible at last.

Known primarily for his keyboard works, Bach also composed some eighteen symphonies, and about sixty keyboard concertos, works which built on his father's discovery of the medium and led directly to the glorious flowing of the Classical piano concerto in the hands of Mozart and Beethoven. As a composer, Bach is most often categorized as a transitional figure, hovering somewhere between the high Baroque and the newer, lighter, simpler style of the Classical period. While this is true as far as it goes, it does his originality and artistic maturity something of a disservice. Bach was an enormously influential figure, and a huge influence on Classical composers such as Joseph Haydn (by his own admission).

Donald Francis Tovey, in his celebrated essay on Haydn's Symphony No. 102, limits Bach's importance to his increasing tendency to write out ornamentation in his celebrated series of "Reprise" Sonatas. But there is more to the story than this. The violent emotional contrasts typical of Bach's music have long been acknowledged, particularly by keyboard players, and these often have been seen as evidence of his lack of artistic poise and balance--at least as compared to the later productions of the Classical period. David P. Schroeder, however, perhaps best summarizes the importance of these expressive extremes in his thought-provoking study *Haydn and the Enlightenment* (Clarendon Press, 1990):

"Beginning in the early 1770s, some fundamental changes occurred in Haydn's symphonic language. The apparent insistence on the thematic unity of the earlier works is now replaced by a strong duality in a number of works. There are different possible explanations for the change occurring at this time. On the theoretical side, Haydn gradually came to discover that there was another body of opinion which not only condoned contrast but actively advocated it. Contrary to those who would not tolerate more than a single affect [per movement], Quantz recommended the use of striking dissonances to bring out 'the excitement of alternating passions.' C.P.E. Bach, whose influence Haydn so freely acknowledged, stated in his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* that the musician 'has barely quieted down one [affect before] he arouses another, so that he constantly alternates the passions.'" (p. 78)

From this opposition of contrasting emotions within a single movement the sonata style was born, and if the eponymous formal procedures remain largely embryonic in Bach's music, the range of feeling is as large, or larger, as we find in any composer of the period. It was the importance of expressive immediacy that led to Bach's preference for the clavichord among all keyboard instruments, though he also became quite fond of the piano. Only the clavichord had the sensitivity to touch that so much of his music demands, and the critical ability to sound two kinds of pitch vibrato: *Bebung*, and *Tragen der Töne* (or portato). These were produced by repeated pressure on the key after striking a note (thus tightening the string and sharpening the pitch).

Bach's notational conventions for these two techniques varied somewhat over the course of his career. In his *Essay* (this extract from the Norton Edition), Bach states that, "A long, affettuoso tone is performed with a vibrato. The finger that depresses and holds the key is gently shaken." Bach then goes on to give examples of both portato and vibrato notation, in that order:

Figure 169



Later German keyboard pedagogues, such as Daniel Gottlob Türk in his *Clavierschule* (1789), expanded on Bach's repertoire of notational signs, and of course we know from accounts of Bach's own playing that the printed scores hardly encompass the sum total of expressive accents that he improvised on the spot. Charles Burney famously described C.P.E Bach's playing in these terms: "In the pathetic and slow movements, whenever he had a long note to express, he absolutely contrived to produce, from his instrument a cry of sorrow and complaint, such as can only be effected upon the clavichord, and perhaps by himself."

During the last decade of his life, Bach published six sets of sonatas, rondos, and fantasias that he grouped under the general heading of works for "*Kenner und Liebhaber*," that is, for "professionals and amateurs." It was his largest publishing project, and as editor Christopher Hogwood points out in his excellent prefaces to the two volumes, one that enjoyed steadily declining commercial success. It wasn't just musical styles that were changing, but also the instruments themselves. Bach, always very much a musician's musician despite the numerous pieces he composed in simpler style, designed the first set unambiguously as clavichord music, which is identifiable from the extensive use of notated vibrato in the opening movement of the Sonata in F major, Wq 55 No. 2:



This particular example is interesting for several reasons. In the first place, the music is generally cheerful in tone, suggesting that the reason Bach notates the vibrato is because he wants to give the movement a special timbre despite the fact that the music does not obviously demand "a cry of sorrow and complaint." The above episode in fact is not an isolated event, but a frequently recurring musical idea. Furthermore, you will note that although vibrato is written into the melody, most of it occurs as accompaniment. This purely timbral, non-ornamental use of the technique closely tracks what we find in much orchestral music of the Baroque and Classical periods, including Bach's own.

Witness, for example, the following tritonal shriek at the start of the Adagio of his String Symphony No. 3 in C major, Wq182 No. 3 (from the Packard Humanities Institute edition of those works):

Adagio

ff p pp ff p pp p

tasto
ff p pp ff p pp p

This musical score is for an Adagio movement. It consists of four staves. The top two staves are for the right hand, and the bottom two are for the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The score features dynamic markings: 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'p' (piano) are used at the beginning of phrases, while 'pp' (pianissimo) is used for softer passages. Portato notation, indicated by a 'y' symbol above notes, is used throughout. A 'tasto' marking is present in the left hand. The overall texture is delicate and expressive.

Obviously string instruments have a different technique for producing vibrato than does the clavichord, and so Bach here uses the portato notation that keyboard and melody instruments share (other composers, such as Hasse, Boccherini, or Gluck, also use wavy lines over or below the notes). Indeed, in later sets of the *Kenner und Liebhaber* series, which Bach designates specifically for the piano as an alternative to the clavichord, he uses portato exclusively for both *Bebung* and *Tragen der Töne*, leaving its specific realization up to the performer depending on the instrument being used. Here is a typical example from the Sonata in E minor, Wq 59 No. 1 (note also the extremely detailed dynamic markings).

9b p p f

9c p ff mf p f

This musical score is for the Sonata in E minor, Wq 59 No. 1. It consists of two systems, each with two staves. The first system (9b) features a complex texture with many triplets and dynamic markings of 'p' (piano) and 'f' (forte). The second system (9c) continues with similar complexity, including 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte) markings. The score is highly detailed and expressive, showcasing Bach's mastery of dynamic control and portato notation.

Although his pedagogical work has always been recognized because of its usefulness in understanding the art of ornamental embellishment in music of the period, Bach's notated use of *Bebung* and other vibrato techniques in his keyboard and orchestral works often is not ornamental at all, if by this we mean an improvised or optional addition to the principal melody. It is intrinsic to his timbral and expressive designs, often occurs as accompanying texture, and thus serves as a useful corrective to the fad current in "historically informed" musical circles for witlessly repeating the mantra that vibrato was considered an "ornament" during this period. This is usually the excuse given to justify the notion that vibrato should not be employed as extensively as the music plainly requires.

Bach's own attitude toward this matter can be gleaned from a number of sources. In his *Essay*, he does not class vibrato among the ornaments at all, but rather places his discussion of it in the chapter headed "Performance," which is dedicated to the expressive nuances of dynamics, timbre, and articulation that bring any musical performance to life. This in itself suggests a much more friendly view of vibrato than much of today's current thinking would allow, but as Mozart scholar Neil Zaslaw has pointed out, Bach's close friend and colleague the magazine publisher Carl Friedrich Cramer also made a special point of its necessity:

"The application of [vibrato] to instrumental execution is easy to do. Because however much vocal performance (also the model and ideal for the instrumental) and passionate expression permit it, so much more does the indefiniteness of the naked, wordless tone [of instrumental music]. Thus it follows irrefutably that, in such passages where the singer would apply vibrato, the instrumentalist not only may make use of it, but must." Cited in *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practice, Reception* (p. 480)

Here, in this statement, resides the essence of Bach's importance as a major figure in 18th century music. Like his exact contemporary Gluck, Bach's primary goal lay in expressing human passion in music. You might argue that this is what all composers do, or claim to do, but of course the devil is in the details. For Gluck, this meant stripping away what he regarded as the abuses of singers and the stale conventions of Baroque *opera seria*. For Bach, engaged in the much trickier task of giving the same expressive immediacy to instrumental music (primarily), this meant a daring use of dissonant harmony, extreme contrasts of timbre, texture, and dynamics, extensive use of affective devices such as vibrato, and an attempt to rationalize the practice of improvised embellishment that he had learned from that greatest of all masters of keyboard improvisation, his father Johann Sebastian.

Thanks to Packard Humanities Institute's ongoing edition of the Complete Works, music lovers will have the opportunity to follow Bach's creative life through reliable modern texts accompanied by helpful explanatory material. This project is a model of what a good Critical Edition should be, and as already pointed out, the asking price per volume is insanely modest. Anyone with an interest in the period, and in particular students of the piano, will need to investigate this series forthwith. C.P.E. Bach was much more than just an important figure historically; he was a wonderful composer by any standard. There's a world of fine music here waiting to be discovered, savored, and enjoyed.

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January, 2010