

When Did the Clavichord Become C.P.E. Bach's Favorite Instrument?  
Some Questions About Keyboard Practice in the Bach Circle  
—David Schulenberg

The question posed in my title presupposes that the clavichord was indeed the favorite instrument of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the second son of Johann Sebastian. I do not intend to dispute this; I do, however, wish to inquire what exactly it means to say that Emanuel Bach favored the clavichord; on what evidence this view is founded; and at what point in his life he indeed adopted it as his preferred instrument.

In saying that the clavichord was Bach's favorite instrument, I imagine that most of us have in the backs of our minds Charles Burney's account of a private performance by Bach on what Burney described as “his *Silbermann clavichord*, and favourite instrument.”<sup>1</sup> Several other documents support the view that this particular instrument was indeed Bach's favorite and one on which many of his most distinctive compositions had been written (see appendix). But does that mean that he wrote those pieces specifically for performance on this clavichord (or on clavichords like it), to the exclusion of other instruments? Had he always favored this type of instrument, and if so for what types of music and for what performance situations: only for solo practice, or also for private chamber music and even for informal concerts and musical “academies”? The famous Silbermann clavichord was probably a double-strung unfretted instrument with a relatively wide dynamic range and compass, a type of instrument that came into widespread use only in the course of Bach's long career; when and how would Bach have acquired his mastery of its distinctive performance technique, and at what point did this come to be reflected in his writing for keyboard instruments? Another way of formulating the question is to ask when Bach began to participate in what Derek Adlam has described as “the development of a new clavichord aesthetic.”<sup>2</sup>

First let us consider the verbal documents that testify to Bach's use of the clavichord for any purpose. These are listed in the appendix. As is immediately apparent, the documents are few in number and mostly quite late, from Bach's last two decades at Hamburg, and they provide no clues as to when Bach might have adopted the clavichord as his favorite—not even a suggestion that he might have been brought up on or once preferred another keyboard instrument. Fortunately, we already have clear indications of Bach's predilection for the clavichord in volume 1 of his *Essay on the True Manner of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, first published in 1753.<sup>3</sup> The *Essay* is curiously reticent on certain basic issues, such as the precise nature of keyboard

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces, or: The Journal of a Tour through those Countries, undertaken to collect Materials for a General History of Music*, 2d ed. (London, 1775; facs., New York: Broude, 1969), pp. 269–70.

<sup>2</sup> “The Importance of the Clavichord in the Evolution of the New Musical Aesthetic in Eighteenth-Century Germany and in the Development of the Fortepiano and Its Repertoire,” Magnano Proceedings I, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1753–62); English translation in one volume by William J. Mitchell as *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (New York: Norton, 1949). References to this work will be through volume, chapter, and paragraph numbers of the original German edition (the chapters are renumbered in part 2 of the English translation).

touch, the exact manner of temperament, and above all the choice of instrument for specific compositions. But in it the clavichord is clearly Bach's favored instrument for solo practice and instruction; it is, moreover, the most demanding instrument, the one “on which a keyboard player can most conveniently be judged”<sup>4</sup> and on which one learns a sensitive touch. Even so, the harpsichord remains his instrument of choice for accompanying and directing large ensembles, and players are urged to own both harpsichord and clavichord and to play “on both instruments all sorts of pieces interchangeably.”<sup>5</sup>

The fortepiano, although often the focus of modern studies of Bach's *Essay*, plays a comparatively minor role in it, especially the first volume. But the oft-encountered claim that Bach criticized the fortepiano does not withstand a careful reading. He merely notes that its “touch [*Tractierung*] must be carefully worked out” and that on it it is difficult to play certain ornaments.<sup>6</sup> In the second volume, published in 1762, Bach praises the instrument's “undamped register” and expresses a preference for fortepiano and even clavichord when a particularly refined accompaniment is desired.<sup>7</sup> The two instruments differ chiefly in the fortepiano's incapability for *Bebung* and the *Tragen der Töne*, for reasons that Daniel Gottlob Türk later explained more fully: in both techniques the key is given additional pressure after being struck.<sup>8</sup> Like *Bebung*, the *Tragen der Töne* was thought to produce an intensification of the sound while avoiding what Türk calls the “odious raising of the pitch”;<sup>9</sup> John Barnes has offered an explanation for why this technique produces an audible effect on the clavichord.<sup>10</sup>

Although the *Essay* leaves little doubt that Bach preferred the clavichord for teaching and study, the work leaves it unclear whether, on the one hand, Bach considered the clavichord the proper instrument for particular pieces of music or, on the other, simply considered it a useful

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<sup>4</sup> *Versuch*, i.introduction.11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, i.introduction.15.

<sup>6</sup> *Versuch*, i.introduction.11, i.2.3.36. Donald H. Boalch, *The Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord 1440–1840*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974)], p. 46, translates the related word *Tractament* as “workmanship” in Bach's letter of Nov. 10, 1773, to Forkel. He is followed in this translation by Stephen L. Clark, ed., *The Letters of C. P. E. Bach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) in his translation of letter 46 (p. 43). But Ernst Suchalla, ed., *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Briefe und Dokumente: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 1:354, understands *Tractament* here as “die Art der Übertragung des Tastenanschlages auf die Saite zur Erzielung einer besonderen Tongebung.”

<sup>7</sup> *Versuch*, ii.41.4 and ii.introduction.6. The word *Register* probably refers to something like a hand-stop that lifted all the dampers, not a permanently undamped portion of the keyboard compass as on the upper strings of a modern piano.

<sup>8</sup> *Versuch*, i.3.20; Türk, *Clavierschule oder Anweisung zum Clavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende* (Leipzig and Halle, 1789; facs., ed. Siegbert Rampe, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997), p. 20fn.

<sup>9</sup> *häßliches Uebertreiben des Tones*, *Clavierschule*, p. 293fn.

<sup>10</sup> “Coupling Between Clavichord Unisons and Its Effect on Tuning,” *Het Clavichord* 2/3 (December 1989): 4–5, cited by Peter Bavington, “Keylever, Tangent, and String: A Preliminary Analysis of Clavichord Touch and Action,” *Magnano Proceedings III*, p. 82.

tool for private practice and study. Prior to the date of the *Essay* we have only indirect witnesses to his use of the clavichord. Thus in seeking the origin of Bach's preference for the clavichord it is necessary to examine the music itself and its sources.

Joel Speerstra has enumerated the bases on which arguments can be made for the use of a particular instrument in a particular piece.<sup>11</sup> The presence of *Bebung* markings is an unambiguous indication for the use of clavichord, but these occur in only a few of Bach's compositions.<sup>12</sup> Hence scholars have had to rely on the presence or absence of dynamic markings, keyboard compass, and any verbal titles or inscriptions accompanying the music, as well as the more subjective analytical criteria also mentioned by Speerstra. But the very difficulty that we have in determining the intended or optimal medium of a given work suggests that such enterprises may be somewhat misdirected. In undertaking them we may be operating on the basis of peculiarly twentieth-century assumptions about music and composition—in particular, that composers have always shaped pieces for specific instruments, and that the harpsichord and the clavichord are therefore each uniquely suited to particular compositions.

In fact, pieces that we might regard as variously appropriate to the organ, the harpsichord, and the clavichord often mingle in no particular order within eighteenth-century anthologies. Both manuscripts and printed editions often employ generic designations for keyboard parts that leave the intended instrumental medium uncertain. In other cases, different sources often employ differing instrumental designations for the same composition.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, players throughout the century used whatever instrument was available, for all manner of music. This seems to have been as true for Emanuel Bach as for his father, among the older generation, and of Haydn and Mozart, among later ones. Needless to say, this poses an added difficulty in determining when Bach adopted the clavichord as his favorite instrument.

The great majority of Bach's keyboard works preserved in manuscript bear the inscription *per cembalo solo* or the like. This is true for both autograph and apograph manuscripts, including the authoritative copies made by Johann Heinrich Michel for the composer and his family around the end of Bach's life. In modern Italian the word *cembalo* is generally understood to mean specifically the harpsichord, but, as Darrell Berg and others have noted, for eighteenth-century

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<sup>11</sup> “Towards an Identification of the Clavichord Repertoire Among C.P.E. Bach's Solo Keyboard Music: Some Preliminary Conclusions,” *Magnano Proceedings II*, pp. 43–4; the article is followed by a table listing the proposed instrumental assignment of each of Bach's keyboard sonatas (pp. 62–81).

<sup>12</sup> Notably in the sonata in F, W. 55/2 (H. 130), written expressly for Bach's Silbermann clavichord according to the review of 1779; and the *Abschied* rondo W. 66 (H. 272). Erich Herbert Beurmann, *Die Klaviersonaten Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs* (Ph.D. diss., Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, 1952), p. 92, lists thirteen sonatas as containing *Bebung*: nos. 48, 61, 64, 77, 79, 85, 92, 121, 133, 136, 140–1, 145 = W. 52/1, 63/1, 63/4, 62/20, 70/1, 55/2, 52/2, 54/4, 55/3, 56/6, 59/1, 61/5, and 65/49 (H. 50, 70, 73, 120, 135, 130, 142, 206, 270, 281, 287, and 298). In all but two cases, however (W. 55/2 and 63/4), the sources for these works available to me show repeated notes or *Tragen der Töne*, not Bach's distinctive *Bebung* marking. I have consulted the facsimiles of eighteenth-century sources reproduced in Darrell Berg, ed., *The Collected Works for Solo Keyboard by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788)*, 6 vols. (New York: Garland, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> For example, what were published as organ works appear elsewhere as sonatas or concertos for “clavier” or “cembalo”; see Darrell M. Berg, “C. P. E. Bach's Organ Sonatas: A Musical Offering for Princess Amalia,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 (1999): 484–7.

German-speakers it often have had a more generic significance, referring to any stringed keyboard instrument.<sup>14</sup> For example, the title page of Bach's first significant publication, the six "Prussian" sonatas issued in 1742 with a dedication to the newly crowned King Frederick (W. 48), designates them as being *per Cembalo*.<sup>15</sup> Yet, many movements from the set employ three levels of dynamic markings as well as musical gestures which I will describe as being particularly suitable for the clavichord.<sup>16</sup> By the 1760s, Bach was regularly indicating diminuendos and crescendos, as well as accents, through the use of closely spaced fortes, pianos, and even mezzofortes, in works that still bore the heading *per il Cembalo solo*.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the German word *Clavier*, although often used by Türk and other younger writers with the specific meaning of "clavichord," does not usually have that significance for Bach. At least from the time of the *Essay* onward, when Bach wishes to specify the harpsichord he usually employs the word *Flügel*; for the clavichord he uses the term *Clavichord*. Similar distinctions occur in the writings of Johann Nicolaus Forkel,<sup>18</sup> as well as in the German translation of Burney's *Musical Tours*,<sup>19</sup> Hence the titles of Bach's publications that include the word *Clavier*, from the *Essay* and the so-called *Reprises-Sonaten* of the 1750s and 1760s to the late collections of pieces *für Kenner und Liebhaber*, do not necessarily refer specifically to the clavichord.

Even where eighteenth-century documents make a clear distinction between the various keyboard instruments, this is rarely in the context of specific pieces or individual musical scores. When this is the case, it may be because the instrument in question is something rather exotic, such as the bowed clavier invented by the Berlin maker Johann Hohlfeld in the early 1750s, for which Bach wrote the sonata in G, W. 65/48 (H. 280).<sup>20</sup> But there is little in the sonata that seems distinctive to such an instrument, and possessors of the music were obviously expected to play it

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<sup>14</sup> See Berg, "C. P. E. Bach's Organ Sonatas," p. 479 n.7.

<sup>15</sup> Facsimile in Berg, *Collected Works*, 1: 1.

<sup>16</sup> Speerstra, table, p. 62, overlooks the presence of *pp* alongside *p* and *f* in this collection.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the autograph of the sonata in E-flat, W. 65/42 (H. 189); the autograph, although probably not a first draft or composing score, appears to be close in date to the original composition (fac. in Berg, *Collected Works*, 4: 162–7).

<sup>18</sup> *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig, 1802); contemporaneous English translation in *The New Bach Reader*, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, rev. Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton, 1988) pp. 419–82.

<sup>19</sup> *Carl Burney's der Musik Doctors Tagebuch seiner Musikalischen Reisen*, trans. Christoph Daniel Ebeling and Johann Joachim Christoph Bode, 3 vols. (Hamburg, 1773; facs., Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1959).

<sup>20</sup> The *Bogen Clavier* is specified in the title of Michel's manuscript copy (fac. in Berg, *Collected Works*, 4: 223, and in the entry for the work in Bach's estate catalogue (see below).

on whatever instrument they happened to own.<sup>21</sup> As Berg has shown, the same is true of most of Bach's pieces disseminated as organ works. These occasionally employ musical tropes that might have been identified with older organ music, such as a moderately contrapuntal style with chains of suspensions in the upper voices.<sup>22</sup> But they rarely demand anything specific to the organ, such as long sustained tones or pedal notes.

The title pages of the last five of the collections *für Kenner und Liebhaber* indicate that the rondos, contained therein alongside sonatas and fantasias are “fürs Fortepiano.”<sup>23</sup> These pieces were evidently a novelty, introduced after the first volume, which contained only sonatas. The rondos incorporate lengthy sections comprised of arpeggiated passagework; Bach might have thought the latter particularly appropriate to the fortepiano (especially, perhaps, when played without its dampers). Another novelty, probably intended for performance in a public concert, was Bach's double concerto for harpsichord and fortepiano, W. 47 (H. 479).<sup>24</sup> Its autograph calls explicitly for *Fortepiano* alongside the harpsichord (*Flügel*). Yet even this work, one of Bach's last, makes only a minimal stylistic differentiation between the two instruments (in the last movement, where each has distinct thematic material).

In short, titles, dynamic indications, and other seemingly objective indices are of limited value for our investigation, even when coupled with stylistic analysis of the music itself. A further difficulty arises when we attempt to establish a chronology for Bach's adoption or development of a “clavichord aesthetic.” An authoritative list of Bach's compositions was published after his death in the catalogue of his estate, known to scholars as his

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<sup>21</sup> Bach reportedly played Hohlfeld's instrument in a court concert in 1753 (Berg, *Collected Works*, 4: xxi). The sonata was composed thirty years later (thirteen years after Hohlfeld's death), suggesting that at least one example of the instrument still survived at that time (none is now extant). A few passages, such as an implied crescendo and diminuendo on sustained quarter notes (second movement, left hand, bars 14–15), might have been particularly effective on a bowed clavier.

<sup>22</sup> As Berg notes, “C. P. E. Bach's Organ Sonatas,” pp. 506–7.

<sup>23</sup> This is the usual reading of the title, as also assumed by, e.g., Adlam in “The Importance of the Clavichord,” p. 247. Taken out of context, the syntax of the full title may appear ambiguous to a modern reader: *Clavier-Sonaten* [or *Clavier-Sonaten und Freyen Fantasien*] *nebst einigen Rondos fürs Forte-Piano*. Indeed, Beurmann understood it as referring solely to the fortepiano (*Die Klaviersonaten*, p. 88. But in other titles the word *Claviersonaten* is self-sufficient, not requiring a qualifier (“for the fortepiano”). It is true that the phrases *einigen Rondos* and *fürs Forte-Piano* were printed on different lines and in different type sizes on the title pages of the first two of the volumes in question (W. 56 and 57; see Berg, *Collected Works*, 2:291, 2:327). But in the last three volumes the two phrases appear on one line and in the same type, clearly set off from the remainder of the title (*Collected Works*, 1:123, 2:369, 2:411).

<sup>24</sup> Public performances of Bach's keyboard concertos using both harpsichord and fortepiano are included in the list of concerts provided by Christoph Guggen, “C. Ph. E. Bachs Konzerttätigkeit in Hamburg,” in *Der Hamburger Bach und die neue Musik des 18. Jahrhunderts: Eine Veranstaltungsreihe anlässlich des 200. Todesjahres von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach 1714–1788*, ed. Hans Joachim Marx (Hamburg, 1988), pp. 176–85; see also the corresponding entries in Suchalla, ed., *Briefe und Dokumente*.

*Nachlassverzeichnis*.<sup>25</sup> This document provides dates and places of composition for most Bach's surviving works, including early ones from Bach's student days at Leipzig and at Frankfurt an der Oder. Exceptionally, it describes most of these early works as having been *erneuert*, that is, “renewed” or “revived” at Berlin during the mid-1740s. But surviving sources of these pieces rarely indicate which version they transmit: the original Leipzig and Frankfurt versions or the “renewed” ones from Berlin. Moreover, it has become clear that after the 1740s Bach continued to revise these pieces, as he also did many other works for which the *Nachlassverzeichnis* provides no indication of the existence of alternate versions.<sup>26</sup> It would seem, then, that the use of the expression *erneuert* implied something more than a routine revision—that the early works underwent some sort of profound transformation when Bach revised them at Berlin.

Scholars have held differing views as to the survival rate of the very earliest versions of these works. I suggested in 1987 that what were thought to be early versions were in some cases Bach's “renewed” versions of the 1740s; my reasoning was that in most cases the supposed early versions differed from the later ones only in small details, such as the addition of a few ornament signs in the revised version.<sup>27</sup> This view was supported by Wolfgang Horn's argument, based on the provenance of the sources, that almost none of the original versions remained extant. Horn concluded that “in most cases the original versions of the early sonatas listed in the *Nachlassverzeichnis* are lost; the only certain exception to this is the sonata W. 65/7 (H. 16).”<sup>28</sup> Horn's pessimistic findings have been somewhat modified by the subsequent identification of early versions for a number of works; in each case the style of the newly identified pieces supports the idea that Bach indeed transformed them when he “renewed” them at Berlin. As an example of one of these, let us consider the Largo in E minor that occurs in late manuscript copies as the second movement of the sonatina in G, W. 64/2 (H. 8). The sonatina is one of six early works of that title that Bach revised at least twice, at one point exchanging each of the slow middle movements from one work in the set to another.<sup>29</sup> Thus a slightly different, presumably earlier version of this Largo occurs as the slow movement of the sonatina in E minor, W. 64/4 (H. 10), where it is again the second movement. Berg included both sonatinas in her facsimile edition of Bach's keyboard works, designating one as the “later” and one as the “early” version.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Verzeichniß des musikalischen Nachlasses des verstorbenen Capellmeisters Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Hamburg, 1790); facs., ed. Rachel Wade, as *The Catalog of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Estate: A Facsimile of the Edition by Schniebes, Hamburg, 1790* (New York: Garland, 1981).

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the critical commentaries for the seven sonatas in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Keyboard Sonatas, 1744–1747*, ed. David Schulenberg, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach Edition, I/18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Review of Berg, *Collected Works*, in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40 (1987): 110–1.

<sup>28</sup> *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Frühe Klaviersonaten: Eine Studie zur “Form” der ersten Sätze nebst einer kritischen Untersuchung der Quellen* (Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1988), p. 271.

<sup>29</sup> According to the *Nachlassverzeichnis*, all six sonatinas were composed at Leipzig in 1734 and *erneuert* at Berlin ten years later.

<sup>30</sup> Berg, *Collected Works*, 3:144–7 and 3:153–9.

But an even earlier version of the movement was identified in 1993 by Peter Wollny and Ulrich Leisinger; it occurs as the second-movement Andante of a previously unknown sonata in E minor (ex. 1).<sup>31</sup>



1. C. P. E. Bach, Andante in E minor (second movement of Sonata in E minor), from Hamburg, Staat- und Universitätsbibliothek ND VI 3191; facsimile in Leisinger and Wollny, “Altes Zeug von mir,” p. 145)

Like several other very early compositions by Bach, this one seems simple, almost rudimentary, in its polyphonic texture of two voices, like an instrumental sonata or aria with continuo accompaniment. This aspect was eliminated in the renewed version, which also discarded the double bar at the center. Most striking, however, is the transformation of both melody and accompaniment through a process of variation and embellishment, to the point that one can hardly recognize the two versions as the same piece of music (ex. 2).<sup>32</sup> The “renewed” version retains the harmonic and melodic skeleton of the original; hence the revisions are

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<sup>31</sup> “Altes Zeug von mir: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs kompositorisches Schaffen vor 1740,” *Bach-Jahrbuch* 79 (1993): 144–5 and 156–63. The first movement of this sonata is an early version of the first movement of W. 65/5 (H. 13); the third movement corresponds with that of W. 64/4 (H. 10).

<sup>32</sup> Example 2 is from the “later” version in Berg, *Collected Works*. This differs only in the presence of a few additional embellishments and ornament signs from the “early” version in the same edition. Berg has analyzed Bach's revisions in a number of other early sonata movements; see Darrell M. Berg, “Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Umarbeitungen seiner Claviersonaten,” *Bach-Jahrbuch* 74 (1988): 123–61.

*Largo.*

The image displays a handwritten musical score for a Clavichord, consisting of six systems of music. Each system is written on two staves, with the upper staff in treble clef and the lower staff in bass clef. The music is in E minor, indicated by one sharp (F#) in the key signature. The tempo is marked 'Largo.' at the beginning. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as 'p.' (piano) and 'f.' (forte). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of the sixth system.

2. C. P. E. Bach, Largo in E minor (second movement of Sonata in G, W. 64/2 [H. 8]), from Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 775; facsimile in Berg, *Collected Works*, 3:146



superficial in a technical, analytical sense. They are nevertheless crucial for performance, especially in regard to the instrument on which one might prefer to play the piece. Even the earliest version is, of course, playable on the clavichord, which makes possible not only expressive dynamics but such refinements as the use of *Bebung* on one or two “long affettuoso notes,” as Bach prescribed.<sup>33</sup> But only in the later versions does one find certain musical gestures and textures that, as I will explain shortly, I take to be clearly and relatively exclusively idiomatic to the clavichord. The same types of gestures and textures introduced into the “renewed” version of this movement occur as well in works whose first composition dates from the early and mid-1740s. Indeed, at almost the same time as the “renewal” of this sonata, Bach was also composing some of his most distinctive original works. Among these are several sonatas which, in a 1775 letter to Forkel, Bach described as having been written in the spa town of Töplitz on a clavichord with a short octave (see appendix). This does not mean that Bach intended them expressly for such an instrument; indeed, an instrument with a short octave would probably be inadequate for most of Bach's surviving works. Rather, Bach seems to have been indicating to Forkel that despite the limitations of this small instrument, probably intended for travel, he was still able to compose some exceptional pieces on it. Indeed, the six pieces described in the letter may have included the extraordinary sonata in G minor, W. 65/17 (H. 47), and its somewhat comparable companion in C, W. 65/16 (H. 46).

Among the three pieces that can be securely identified as having been composed at Töplitz is the B-minor sonata W. 65/13 (H. 32.5).<sup>34</sup> It also happens to be one of just three sonatas composed in the 1740s that survive in autograph.<sup>35</sup> If, then, we can identify features in any of these sonatas as specifically idiomatic to the clavichord, we can tentatively date Bach's serious involvement with, if not preference for, the instrument at least as far back as his early years in Berlin. Indeed, the B-minor sonata contains a number of such features; these are in addition to its use of what Speerstra has termed “melodic dynamics”—markings within a phrase that require an instrument capable of flexible dynamics, such as the clavichord.<sup>36</sup> At several points, the first movement employs slurred figures of diatonic and chromatic quarter notes extending over two measures. Particularly notable is the passage in bars 5–6, where both hands have such figures in

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<sup>33</sup> Such as the the c" in bar 10; see *Versuch*, i.3.20. Staccato notes under slurs, possibly indicating the *Tragen der Töne*, appear in bars 11 and 25, but as in several later pieces—e.g., W. 52/1 and 52/2 (H. 50 and 142)—the note values in question seem too small for the *Tragen der Töne* to be effective, and it is unclear to me what the written articulation means. Possibly the slurs are merely the copyist's way of collecting the notes into groups of six).

<sup>34</sup> This is one of three works listed in the *Nachlassverzeichnis* as having been composed at Töplitz; a partially autograph manuscript score (in Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 359) is dated “Töplitz, 26. Junij 1743.” The identification of the other sonatas mentioned in Bach's letter to Forkel has been debated; see Schulenberg, ed., *Keyboard Sonatas*, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup> The others are W. 65/16 in C (H. 46) and W. 65/24 in D minor (H. 60). A fourth sonata, W. 65/19 (H. 49), must be discounted; although the *Nachlassverzeichnis* dates it to 1746, its autograph was written in the 1780s and in its extant form the sonata must date from late in Bach's life (see Schulenberg, ed., *Keyboard Sonatas*, pp. 127–8). Autographs of three earlier sonatas can also be dated to the 1740s: W. 65/2 and 65/7–8 (H. 4, 16–17).

<sup>36</sup> “Towards an Identification,” p. 47.

contrary motion; the right hand, moreover, contains the same figure in parallel sixths (ex. 3). Similar gestures appear in other works from the same decade.<sup>37</sup> A true legato is difficult enough to achieve on a keyboard instrument lacking a damper pedal; harpsichordists today often employ over-legato to this effect, but the presence of parallel thirds or sixths within one hand makes it difficult to apply this technique to both voices. Such gestures are more practicable on the clavichord, where the absence of a sharp plectrum attack and the possibility of voicing individual notes of a chord through dynamics makes it possible to disguise non-legato attacks. This strengthens the impression of legato in such passages, especially when the instrument has good sustaining powers.

*Poco allegro.*

3. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata in B minor, W. 65/13 (H. 32.5), first movement, from Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 775; facsimile in Berg, *Collected Works*, 3:260

<sup>37</sup> For example, the E-major Prussian sonata, W. 48/3 (H. 26), first movement; the sonata in B-flat, W. 65/20 (H. 52), third movement.

Another telling gesture is the use of sustained melodic tones against accompaniments comprised of moving or repeated notes and chords, as in bars 13–14, 41–5, or 76–7. No conventional stringed keyboard instrument can effectively sustain a long melodic note against shorter ones of the same dynamic level, particularly in slow or moderate tempos. On the harpsichord (or organ), if the accompaniment contains chords it can be difficult to avoid producing accents in what are supposed to be subsidiary voices, on weak beats within the measure. Such textures, on the other hand, can be negotiated on the clavichord through the dynamic shading of each note in the texture and, in addition, the application of *Bebung* on the sustained melodic notes.<sup>38</sup>

Both types of gestures might have been suggested by the homophonic textures of early eighteenth-century opera seria, which furnished an obvious model for the singing style of galant instrumental music, including Bach's. Opera seria was introduced to Prussia on a large scale with the inauguration of the royal opera at Berlin in 1742, one year prior to Bach's composition of the B-minor sonata. But it would have been familiar previously to members of Frederick's court, including Bach, through visits to Dresden and the participation of Italian singers and other virtuosos in the concerts that Frederick sponsored at Ruppin and Rheinsberg prior to his succession. Moreover, the music of Johann Adolph Hasse and other Dresden composers is found in the 1725 *Clavierbüchlein* of Anna Magdalena Bach, where it evidently formed part of the pedagogic material used for Sebastian's children.<sup>39</sup> The early Andante in E minor already contains apparent echoes of the Hasse style, such as the descending slides in bar 3 and the falling sixth in bar 5. But although this movement and others like it—including much of the pedagogic repertory in the 1725 *Clavierbüchlein*—already sounds plausible on the clavichord, it does not contain anything that can be said to demand the instrument in the way that the revised versions do. To be sure, its thin two-part texture, which is found in many of Emanuel's early sonata movements—and in Sebastian's inventions—is arguably less effective on harpsichord than clavichord. But it lacks the types of gestures described above in the B-minor sonata, which reflect not just the style of Hasse's melodies but the varied orchestration and dynamic flexibility that are increasingly typical of opera seria from the 1730s onward.<sup>40</sup>

If indeed Bach's development of a “clavichord aesthetic” took place around the start of his Berlin period, then it coincided with other important developments in his compositional style. In the period beginning around 1740 Bach not only produced such innovative sonatas as those of the Prussian and Württemberg sets but was also making astonishing developments in the area of the keyboard concerto. Indeed, the twenty concertos of the 1740s must be considered his most

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<sup>38</sup> A modern pianist would likely use the damper pedal as well, not only to help sustain the melodic tones but to prevent a repeated-note accompaniment from sounding dry or cold—a danger unlikely to arise on quieter eighteenth-century instruments.

<sup>39</sup> The 1725 *Clavierbüchlein*, now Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Mus. ms. Bach P 225, was later owned by Emanuel Bach. In it the polonaise in G, BWV Anh. 130 (no. 28 in the manuscript), is from a sonata by Hasse.

<sup>40</sup> Not only does the early Andante lack all dynamic indications, but it contains few harmonic or rhythmic events that might imply some sort of dynamic contrast.

important works of the period, constituting perhaps the most profound contribution to the genre before Mozart. Like Bach's solo keyboard music, his concertos of the 1740s show an increasing flexibility of dynamics and texture, often using melodic, rhythmic, and accompanimental patterns present as well in contemporary opera seria.

Presumably the solo parts of the concertos continued to be played on the harpsichord, at least through the 1740s. But in these works the orchestra provides dynamic effects which therefore need not be projected by a keyboard instrument playing alone. Moreover, alternation between soloist and ripieno provides an element of dramatic dialogue that also need not be present within the solo keyboard part. Apparent imitations of such effects are already present in harpsichord and organ pieces by J. S. Bach, and they continue in those of Emanuel. Indeed, the “renewed” version of the E-minor Andante contains several *forte* interjections (bars 12, 18, 20, 22) reminiscent of ripieno outbursts in Bach's concertos.<sup>41</sup> But these intrusions of a “terraced” approach to dynamics are less expressive of a true clavichord aesthetic than are the subtler effects described previously. The trend toward greater flexibility of texture and dynamics in composition is reflected in the apparent movement in Bach's environment toward the use of what John Koster has termed “expressive claviers.”<sup>42</sup> Some three years after his use of a small clavichord at Töplitz in 1743, Bach acquired his famous Silbermann instrument.<sup>43</sup> King Frederick was acquiring fortepianos as well as a “Clavier” from Silbermann at precisely the same time,<sup>44</sup> and Sebastian Bach, who visited the court in 1747, apparently acted as an agent for Silbermann during the same period.<sup>45</sup> Thus it is no surprise that by the early the 1740s Emanuel was writing in a keyboard idiom very different from that of his father, one that can be effectively employed on the clavichord.<sup>46</sup> This keyboard idiom already included many of the expressively quirky rhythmic and melodic gestures that give Bach's later and better-known solo keyboard music its distinctive flavor. More than anything else, it is this sort of keyboard writing, such as is already strongly hinted at in examples 2 and 3, that today defines Bach's personal style and the mid-eighteenth-century “clavichord aesthetic.” But Bach's solo keyboard music contains far greater variety of affect and musical style than is found in my first three examples. The last

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<sup>41</sup> I described Bach's insertion of similar orchestral passages into the solo passages of his concertos in “C. P. E. Bach Through the 1740s: The Growth of a Style,” in *C. P. E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen L. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 222–3.

<sup>42</sup> “Pianos and Other 'Expressive' Claviers in J. S. Bach's Circle, Part One,” *Early Keyboard Studies Newsletter* 7/4 (October 1993): 1–11.

<sup>43</sup> According to Baron Grotthuß's letter of 1781, Bach had then owned the instrument for thirty-five years; see appendix.

<sup>44</sup> See Mary Oleskiewicz, “The Trio in Bach's Musical Offering: A Salute to Frederick's Tastes and Quantz's Flutes?,” in *Bach Perspectives, Volume Four: The Music of J. S. Bach: Analysis and Interpretation*, ed. David Schulenberg (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), pp. 98–9.

<sup>45</sup> As documented by a sale receipt from 1749; see *New Bach Reader*, p. 239 (no. 262).

<sup>46</sup> Or the fortepiano—but the latter can be ruled out as a usual choice for contemporary performers, probably including Bach, for reasons summarized by Adlam, “The Importance,” pp. 247–8.

movement of the B-minor Töplitz sonata is a fiery Allegro di molto reminiscent in character of some of Bach's most impassioned keyboard concertos of the same period, alternating between a slashing arpeggio in its *Hauptmotiv*, chromatic drum basses, and dotted rhythms. Other sonatas, such as the G-minor one of 1747 (W. 65/17), conclude with equally dramatic virtuoso movements. If the lyrical opening and middle sonata movements shown in examples 1–3 indeed represent aspects of a “clavichord aesthetic,” then the same must be equally true of these final movements.

When Bach played for Burney in 1773, the latter of course noted Bach's mastery “in point of *expression*.” But Burney added the important comment that “he [Bach] possesses every style,” illustrating this with the fact that Bach played for him from his recently published set of six keyboard concertos (W. 43, Hamburg, 1771).<sup>47</sup> Burney does not say explicitly that Bach played the latter on the clavichord. But another accounts from the same period make it clear that Bach was accustomed to playing virtuoso music of a highly extroverted nature on the clavichord, if not in public concert halls then at least before small gatherings in his own home.

In the mid-1770s Bach published three collections of keyboard trios (W. 89–91). These are described on the title pages of their German editions as *Claviersonaten* with the accompaniment of violin and cello—“piano trios” in modern parlance, but evidently as flexible in their scoring as solo “clavier” music of the same period.<sup>48</sup> An anonymous review, published in 1777 at Hamburg, describes Bach's performance of pieces from one of the collections on his “clavier” by Christian Ernst Friederici, accompanied by a muted violin and a cello “played with discretion.”<sup>49</sup> As in other so-called accompanied keyboard sonatas of the period, the two string parts are indeed subsidiary to the keyboard and can be omitted. Indeed, the last sonata of the set (W. 91/4 = H. 534) survives in an alternate version for solo keyboard as the Variations with Varied Reprises, W. 118/10 (H. 259).<sup>50</sup> In its predominantly lyrical, expressive style it conforms with what many would regard as an idiomatic “clavichord aesthetic.” But the quick movements from all three sets of keyboard trios tend to be in a lively virtuoso style comparable to that found in the opening movements of Bach's concertos, symphonies, and other works of his Hamburg period composed for public consumption (ex. 4). The same is true of the *Sechs leichte Claviersonaten* (W. 53) published in 1766, one of which Bach played for the writers Gotthold

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<sup>47</sup> Burney, *Present State of Music in Germany*, pp. 271–2. The keyboard part of W. 43 includes cues to the violin lines in the ritornellos, thus facilitating its use for performance on unaccompanied keyboard.

<sup>48</sup> In the English edition of W. 89 (London, 1776), the keyboard instrument is specified as harpsichord or pianoforte.

<sup>49</sup> *ein mit Discretion gespielter Violoncell*. The reviewer was clearly on close terms with the composer; he may have been Joachim Friedrich Leister, identified by Richard Kramer as the likely author of other reviews of Bach's works. See “The New Modulation of the 1770s: C.P.E. Bach in Theory, Criticism, and Practice,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38 (1985): 580.

<sup>50</sup> The sonata consists of a single movement, a set of variations on an Andantino in C, W. 116/23 (H. 249). The latter was the first of a set of *Sechs leichte Clavier-Stückgen* composed at Hamburg in 1775, two years prior to the keyboard trio.

*Sonata III.*

Allegro di molto.

4. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata in C, W. 90/3 (H. 524), first movement, from *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Claviersonaten mit einer Violine und einem Violoncell zur Begleitung, Erste Sammlung* (Leipzig, 1776)

Ephraim Lessing and Matthias Claudius two years later on his Silbermann clavichord (see appendix). Alongside stereotypical “sensitive” (*empfindsamer*) movements, the volume contains symphonic opening allegros (W. 53/6 = H. 183) and concluding prestos resembling those in his Hamburg concertos (W. 53/4 = H. 182).<sup>51</sup>

Evidently, then, Bach and his admirers found nothing in this music that was unidiomatic to the clavichord. To be sure, this is not a type of music that seems to *demand* the clavichord—no more so than does the early Andante in E minor. But the fact that this type of music could be played adequately—no doubt more than adequately in the hands of a Bach—demonstrates an important point about the mid-eighteenth-century clavichord and its repertory. Although we tend

<sup>51</sup> Like “easy” sonatas by some other eighteenth-century composers—such as Mozart—the set in fact makes significant demands on both player and listener.

to emphasize the “expressive,” that is to say the lyrical and quiet aspects of the mid-eighteenth-century clavichord, these qualities were already present in much older instruments. The larger, unfretted ones that came into widespread use during Bach's lifetime were distinguished in part by their capacity for greater volume and ease in the playing of rapid passagework and ornaments in all keys—in short, dramatic virtuoso playing of a type that might previously have been thought appropriate only to the harpsichord and the organ. Hence, although writers such as Burney, Türk, and Bach himself tended to extol the clavichord and its music for their lyrical or “expressive” qualities, it may in fact have been the “inexpressive” features of the new instruments that made it possible for them to become favorites of musicians such as Bach. Such instruments could now be used for “every style,” as Burney put it—symphonic and concerto-like display passages in the latest fashion, as well as music whose singing or rhetorical qualities placed them in a clavichord tradition extending back at least to the suites of seventeenth-century German composers such as Froberger and Buxtehude. What is more, the same piece could now not only alternate suddenly between very different styles; it could modulate smoothly. Both possibilities had to be available to keyboard players if they were to achieve dramatic effects equal to those of accompanied recitative and aria in the latest *opere serie*. The case of Emanuel Bach and the clavichord presents many of the classic issues in the relationship of organology to performance practice. Did the composer write his music for specific instruments? Does the music contain concrete, identifiable elements that are clearly and incontrovertibly suited to one instrument over another? Whether Bach's innovations in his keyboard sonatas of the 1740s were product or cause of his adopting a new type of instrument is one of those chicken-and-the-egg questions that cannot be readily answered. But during that period Bach was certainly gaining an intimate familiarity with new types of “expressive claviers,” especially clavichords, by Silbermann and no doubt other makers. At the same time, his compositional style was undergoing a substantial change, at least at the surface of the music. We might surmise that the new types of instruments were becoming available to Bach at a critical time in his development as a musician. In them he found a medium that overcame the disadvantages of such instruments as the clavichord with a short octave that he disparaged in his letter to Forkel. It was now possible for solo keyboard music to combine all of the dramatic, expressive, and virtuoso effects that harpsichord and strings together could create in his concertos of the same period.

Still, like his predecessors, Bach continued to compose most of his keyboard music without directing it exclusively to any one type of instrument. This may have been due in part to commercial considerations; music that was flexible in respect of instrumental medium could enjoy a broader market than that which was not. But it may also have reflected an aesthetic of variety—one that transcended any “clavichord aesthetic” that also may have influenced Bach's development at one time or another. Bach well have had a “favorite” instrument, but, as with his father, his musical nature was far too broad-spirited to permit its confinement to any single medium or style.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This essay contains material originally written for an article commissioned by Igor Kipnis. Although the work in which that article was to have been published never appeared, I am grateful to Mr. Kipnis for having sparked my interest in the subject.

Appendix: Documents Relating To Emanuel Bach's Use of the Clavichord

Documents are listed in chronological order. “D” refers to the numbering of documents in Suchalla, ed., *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Briefe und Dokumente: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, which gives full bibliographic citations.

1743. Trip to Töplitz; composes six (?) sonatas on a clavichord equipped with a short octave (see under 1775 below).

1746. Bach acquires his Silbermann clavichord? See under 1781 below.

1752. Part 1 of Bach's *Versuch* published; implies preference for clavichord, at least for instruction and solo practice.

1767, September 28. Bach, letter to Breitkopf (D 47), mentions the latter's packing an unspecified instrument to send to Bach in Berlin (?).

1768, Oct. Letter, Matthias Claudius to Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (D 68), reports Claudius's having listened alongside Lessing to Bach playing the Silbermann clavichord; he describes the instrument as “the famous little Silbermann clavichord” (*das kleine berühmte Silbermannsche Klavier*) with a compass up to e' and its tone as “bright, ringing, and sweet” (*ein helle, durchdringende, süße Ton*), but without exceptional strength in the bass and or an unusually soft, “flattering” upper register (*keine außerordentliche Stärke im Baß, keinen außerordentlich sanften schmeichelnden Diskant*). Bach twice played three movements “expressly written for this clavichord,” adding embellishments the second time, as well as one of the sonatas from W. 53 (*Sechs leichte Clavier-Sonaten*, Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1766).

1773. Burney's *Present State of Music in Germany* published, including an account of Bach's performance on “his Silbermann clavichord, and favourite instrument” at home, before a few guests (identified in Bode's translation; see below). Before dinner Bach “played three or four of his choicest and most difficult compositions,” afterwards “many other things,” including “his last six concertos,” i.e., W. 43 (*Sei Concerti per il Cembalo concertato*, Hamburg, 1772).

— . Volume 3 of the German translation of Burney published, containing additional details about Burney's visit as well as Bach's autobiography.

— , November 10. Bach, letter to Forkel (D 142), mentions his preference for Friederici's over Barthold Fritz's and Johann Adolph Hass's clavichords, on account of their *Tractament* and octave stringing in the bass.

1774, April 2–3. Johann Heinrich Voss, letter to Ernst Theodor Johann Brückner (D 159), mentions Bach's promise to improvise (*vorspielen*) on his Silbermann clavichord for a whole evening after the upcoming Easter holiday.

1775, February 2. Bach, letter to Forkel, mentions having composed six sonatas in 1743 while at the spa in Töplitz, using a clavichord with a short octave.

1777, October 10. Review in *Hamburger Correspondent* (Suchalla, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 1: 632–3) reports Bach's playing the accompanied sonatas of W. 91 on clavichord with muted violin and cello “played with discretion” (*ein mit Discretion gespieltes Violoncell*).

1779, July 31. Review in *Hamburger Correspondent* of W. 55 (Suchalla, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 1: 763) states that Bach wrote the second sonata of the set (= H. 130, composed at Berlin, 1758) expressly for his Silbermann clavichord. On the latter, the “Schwebungen” (i.e., *Bebung*) indicated in the first movement sounds with astonishing strength (*Kraft*).



1781, September 30. Letter, Baron Dietrich Ewald von Grotthuß, allegedly to C.P.E. Bach (D 411), reports buying Bach's Silbermann clavichord and that Bach had owned it for 35 years. Also claims to have wished to see the instrument for fifteen years, i.e., since he was a boy of 14—confirming that the instrument was “famous” (see Claudius's letter of 1768).

1789. Bach's estate catalogue (*Nachlassverzeichnis*) published. Includes five-octave clavichords by Heinrich Wilhelm Jungcurt and Friederici; nearly all his Hamburg works were composed on the latter.