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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 10.2. Further on the Keyboard Trios

Only four of these works, all from W. 89, have self-sufficient slow movements. Three of these, however, are quite short by the standards of Bach's earlier music, and in four of the remaining works the second movement is truncated: it opens like a regular through-composed slow movement, but, as in certain solo sonatas, it breaks off shortly after the first or second formal cadence, sometimes without ever restating the opening thematic material. Although Bach felt obliged to apologize for such things, he was, under the pretext of satisfying popular demand, continuing to explore new approaches to the three-movement cycle, as he had done previously in ensemble sonatinas and the Hamburg concertos and sinfonias. Compared to the latter, however, the keyboard trios have limited expressive and compositional aspirations. The first work, W. 90/1, opens the series with a modest sonata-form movement whose keyboard part is written almost entirely in sixteenths—the same type of *moto perpetuo* that would open the *Kenner und Liebhaber* series.¹ The “second set,” W. 91, opens with a similar movement, which perhaps represented something like a prelude or a warm-up exercise.

These movements are not musically trivial, but Bach reveals greater ambition and imagination in the subsequent sonatas within both sets. For instance, the first movement of W. 91/3 begins with two quiet measures of *Andante* for keyboard alone, answered *fortissimo* by the full ensemble in a foreign key and a quicker tempo (online example 10.6).² Yet even the more ambitious pieces in W. 90 and 91 are conservative by comparison with Bach's solo keyboard works from the same period. Their boldest strokes, such as the occasional harmonic third-relations, are relatively tame although certainly effective, as in the juxtaposition of C major and E major near the end of the variations W. 91/4. These variations were themselves a rare product for Bach, who had previously incorporated a substantial set of variations into only one larger work, as the last movement in the Sonata W. 69 of 1747. Here the variations are the entire substance of the final work in a set, following a Baroque tradition exemplified by the famous variations on La Follia in Corelli's opus 5 (Bach's variations on the Follia bass line are discussed in online supplement 10.8).

¹ The sonata in question, W. 55/1, had already been composed in 1773.

² The opening is reminiscent of that of Mozart's Sonata in E-flat, K. 282, published two years earlier in 1775.

Example 10.6. Keyboard Trio in F, W. 91/3, movement 1, mm. 1–6

The musical score is for a Keyboard Trio in F major, BWV 91/3, movement 1, measures 1–6. It is in 3/4 time. The score is divided into two sections: **Andante** (measures 1–3) and **Allegro assai** (measures 4–6). The instruments are Violin (vn.), Keyboard (kb.), and Violoncello (vc.).

- Violin (vn.):** Measures 1–3 are rests. Measures 4–6 play a series of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4. Measure 6 has a trill (tr) on G4.
- Keyboard (kb.):** Measures 1–3 play a piano (*p*) accompaniment of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4. Measure 4 has a fortissimo (*ff*) section with a trill on G4 and a triplet of eighth notes: A4, Bb4, C5. Measures 5–6 play a piano (*p*) accompaniment of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4. Measure 6 has a trill (tr) on G4.
- Violoncello (vc.):** Measures 1–3 are rests. Measures 4–6 play a fortissimo (*ff*) accompaniment of eighth notes: F4, G4, A4, Bb4, C5, Bb4, A4, G4, F4. Measure 6 has a piano (*p*) section with a trill on G4.

Emanuel surely knew not only Corelli's Follia but the variations on “God Save the King” that conclude his brother Christian's opus 1 keyboard concertos of 1763. Characteristically, however, Emanuel avoids a grand, if not bombastic, conclusion for the set, writing his variations on a delicate Andantino of his own composition.³ The first six variations grow progressively more brilliant, but, after a much calmer seventh variation, a little modulating passage, of the type that Bach elsewhere inserts between movements, leads to a quiet variation in E major (online example 10.7). Although the return to C major is marked by a heavily scored final variation, a little coda brings the sonata and the set to a quiet conclusion—an unpretentious ending to an unconventional work.

³ The Andantino was the first of six little keyboard pieces composed two years previously (W. 116/23).

[Example 10.7. Keyboard Trio in C, W. 91/4, transition from variation 7 to variation 8 \(keyboard only\)](#)

The image displays a musical score for the keyboard part of Example 10.7, showing the transition from variation 7 to variation 8. The score is written for a keyboard instrument (kb.) in 2/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the transition from variation 7 to variation 8, with dynamics ranging from *p* to *f*. The second system shows variation 8, with dynamics ranging from *f* to *pp*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Even in these variations, where one might have hoped for substantive participation by the violin and cello, Bach's invention focuses entirely on melodic elaboration of the keyboard part. Because the original *Andantino* was a little binary form, each half of each variation is repeated, and a player such as Bach doubtless graced each repetition with additional improvised decoration. Bach eventually wrote out the repeated passages for the keyboard, producing the *Variations With Varied Reprises* (W. 118/10). A tour de force of variation technique, this is nevertheless a solo keyboard composition. The new variations almost certainly were not meant to be played together with the original string parts, for, already in the repetition of each half of the theme, small clashes and minor breaches of good counterpoint arise between the string parts and the varied reprises. These clashes might have been tolerable if arising in an improvisation, but Bach would not have countenanced them in a written composition; nothing like them occurs in the varied reprises of movements in the ensemble sonatas and the concertos (online example 10.8).⁴

⁴ In addition to the problems illustrated in example 10.8, small clashes between strings and the varied reprises of the keyboard occur in variations 4 (m. 6) and 8 (m. 1).

Example 10.8. Keyboard Trio in C, W. 91/4, mm. 1–8 (all parts), with varied reprise from W. 118/10 on two upper staves (asterisks mark clashes between violin and varied reprise)

kb. (varied reprise)

p *f*

Arioso

vn. *p* *f* *tr*

kb. *p* *f*

vc.

5 *p* *f* *tr*

octaves