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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 10.5. The *Miscellanea musica* and the Pieces for *Kenner und Liebhaber*

The modulating rondos for *Kenner und Liebhaber* were a realization of the obsession with chromatic harmony that is expressed in more concentrated form in the *Miscellanea musica* (W. 121). The latter, in a manuscript of twenty-three pages, were evidently copied by Michel from various jottings of the composer.¹ Some of the latter look like sketches for actual passages in completed works, and a few are canons and related contrapuntal exercises or entertainments; a number of the canons are known from other sources, which allow them to be dated to the period 1774–84.² Other entries include long series of harmonic progressions, some fully notated, some only as figured basses. Among these are illustrations of enharmonic modulations between remotely related keys, as well as several series of changing chords beneath a single sustained or repeated note in the treble. There are also demonstrations of how to modulate from one key to another, as in several pages that contain multiple examples of chord progressions “from C major to G major,” “from C major to F major,” and so forth.³ Bach might have envisioned these as illustrations for the “introduction to composition” that he contemplated writing, according to one of his last surviving letters.⁴ But if Bach ever got beyond writing down these sketches, or drafted a verbal commentary—as Reger would do for another series of examples of modulation, a little over a century later⁵—nothing survives of it. Nor is it easy to find precisely these progressions in Bach's actual music; his imagination for chromatic voice leading and modulation was boundless, and he had no need to create a “harmony book” on which to draw in actual composing, like that used by Elliott Carter.⁶

¹ Preserved in B Bc 5895, whose contents are listed summarily in Leisinger and Wollny, *Die Bach-Quellen*.

² The canons are discussed and edited in Yearsley, “C. P. E. Bach and the Living Traditions of Learned Counterpoint.”

³ Demonstrations of these two modulations appear on page 3 (nos. 6 and 7 in Leisinger and Wollny's list of contents). One model for such sketches might have been the six examples of remote modulations illustrated by Telemann in his *Getreuer Music-Meister* (Hamburg, 1728–29), p. 24; Chapin, “Counterpoint,” 406, draws a parallel between these and the “extended modulations over organ points” illustrated in examples for Bach's *Versuch*, ii.25.8–9.

⁴ Letter of March 8, 1788 to Breitkopf (no. 330 in Clark, *Letters*, 279); Kramer, “The New Modulation of the 1770s,” 592, suggests that this treatise would have been “a kind of last testament” that would “justify” Bach's late works, especially those for keyboard.

⁵ Max Reger, *Beiträge zur Modulationslehre* (Leipzig: C. F. Kahnt Nachfolger, 1903).

⁶ *Elliott Carter: Harmony Book*, edited by Nicholas Hopkins and John F. Link (New York: Carl Fischer, 2002).

Possibly the harmonic progressions in the *Miscellanea musica* represent an effort by Bach to conceptualize the principles underlying modulation. But the entries reveal no clear system, suggesting that Bach's harmonic thinking remained purely intuitive or practical, not the product of any genuine theory such as Rameau's. Although Bach's music is rarely contrapuntal in the usual sense, to the end of his career he conceived harmony in terms of voice leading, as in his father's chorale settings—not in terms of the functional harmony implicit in Rameau's fundamental bass. This made it possible for Emanuel, like Sebastian, to imagine progressions that would not occur to later composers brought up in a system of harmonic thought based on chord roots and inversions. Bach was a composer, not a theorist, and the usefulness of the sketches in the *Miscellanea musica* lay not in their constituting a basis for theory or even pedagogy, but rather as exercises for the type of writing that Bach took up in many of his late compositions.

For instance, the central Andantino section of the Fantasia in C (W. 59/6) includes a passage whose melody is in essence a single note (d-flat²) prolonged over a series of chromatically changing harmonies. This resembles one of the sketches in the *Miscellanea musica*, although the broken chord at the beginning of the latter suggests that it would have been realized as a type of *arpeggiando* sequence more characteristic of the rondos than the fantasias (online example 10.12).⁷ In the Rondo in A Minor (W. 56/5), one of the iterations of the main theme is interrupted by a long series of modulations in which the treble and bass lines diverge chromatically toward the outer ends of the keyboard. This constitutes a chromatic elaboration of the traditional rule of the octave, a conventional type of exercise in figured bass realization that Bach had illustrated in the *Versuch* (online example 10.13).

Thus the *Miscellanea musica*, together with the more chromatic pieces for *Kenner und Liebhaber*, represent a continuation of the consideration of harmony found in volume 2 of the *Versuch*.⁸ Bach's pragmatic approach to voice leading and modulation left him free of the restrictions that a more rigorous theory might have imposed on his imagination. The downside of this was that Emanuel's attention remained focused on the musical surface. This arguably led him to make occasional miscalculations, as when a passage whose progressions are unimpeachable at the local level fails to be entirely convincing within a larger context (see [online supplement 10.6](#)).

⁷ For technical reasons the three-note slide in example 10.12b (m. 13) is shown as small notes instead of the original inverted turn symbol.

⁸ This is made clear by Bach's late additions for the last chapter, published posthumously, which explicitly mention the first rondo in the *Kenner und Liebhaber* series (W. 56/1), discussed by Kramer in “The New Modulation,” 573–4.

Example 10.12. (a) *Miscellanea musica*, W. 121 (from Bc 5894, top of page 9; small notes are editorial); (b) *Fantasia in C*, W. 59/6, mm. 13–19

(a)

(b)

Example 10.13. (a) diatonic and chromatic descending scales in A minor, from *Versuch*, ii.41 (the two sets of figures represent alternatives; the editorial realization in small notes realizes the lower set of figures); (b) *Rondo in A Minor*, W. 56/5, mm. 142–57

(a)

(b)