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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach

Supplement 10.6. Two Possible Miscalculations in the Sonatas for *Kenner und Liebhaber*

The retransition in the first movement of the F-Minor Sonata (W. 57/6) is not without problems. Despite repeated efforts, starting with the composer, to clarify the reading of accidentals in the passage, it appears wrongly in most editions. The musical problems are distinct from the notational ones, but both involve the modulation from F-flat at the end of the middle section to F minor at the return ten measures later (online example 10.22).¹ The passage begins by plunging even more deeply toward the “flat” side of the tonic, as the chord of F-flat becomes a dominant seventh through the addition of e–double flat' (m. 57). In the next measure, however, f-flat" moves upward to f-natural", forming a diminished-seventh chord; this serves as an enharmonic pivot, becoming redefined in the next three measures as a secondary dominant of F minor.²

The simplicity of the passage is concealed by the unfamiliar notation and by the fact that the diminished-seventh chord, in a characteristic example of Bach's harmonic misdirection, progresses first to the subdominant (B-flat minor, m. 59), not to the dominant, which appears only in m. 62. Bach would have understood the passage in terms of chromatic voice leading, not functional harmony, and this is the source of its weakness. For the dominant, when it does arrive, is only weakly articulated, the repeated c' in m. 63 not being reinforced in the lower octave. Thus the passage is not as strong as it might otherwise be, and low C arrives only as part of the pedal-point passage in mm. 72–77.

This is a subtle point, and not every listener will agree that Bach has miscalculated here. A more blatant case, perhaps, occurs in the sonata W. 58/2, whose first movement is in G, its last in E. The problem here is that the middle movement, having begun in G minor, ends with a half-cadence that apparently prepares the key of C minor. The E major that actually follows therefore seems an utter non sequitur (online example 10.23).

¹ Bach notated the double-flats on B (mm. 53–54) and E (mm. 57–58) as extra-large single flat signs. He drew attention to them in a letter to Breitkopf (April 3, 1781, no. 199 in Clark, *Letters*, 174), who indeed printed them that way, although it is easy to overlook the relatively small distinction between the two sizes of type that Breitkopf used for the accidentals. It has been exasperating to see the error perpetuated in modern editions when the passage was reprinted correctly as early as ca. 1861 in Louise and Aristide Farrenc's *Trésor des pianistes* (vol. 12). I gave the correct reading in my *Instrumental Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, 115, and Schenker also hit upon it in his edition, albeit in a footnote, where he pointed out the equivalence of the chords in measures 58 and 61; evidently he did not notice the larger-than-usual accidentals in the original edition. The introduction to the most recent edition quotes Bach's instructions (CPEBCW 1/4.1:xviii), yet these were disregarded in the musical text, although the correct readings appear in an [online list of selected errata](#).

² The same chord occurs twice, in different spellings, in two crucial cadential passages of the following movement (mm. 20 and 38).

Example 10.22. Sonata in F minor, W. 57/6, movement 1, mm. 53–66

53 *ff*

57 *p* *mf* *f* *p* *f*

62

Example 10.23. Sonata in G, W. 58/2, movement 2, m. 51, through movement 3, m. 4

51 *p* *f* *p*

58 *Allegretto* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Bach surely knew what he was doing. Clearly he intended this to be heard as another of his “new” modulations, and some listeners may be able to hear the progression from G major to E major (over a rest) as something like a deceptive cadence. The *Larghetto* in fact contains a series of surprise modulations; all follow pauses and involve chromatic or enharmonic voice leading,

with root motion by major or minor third.³ Within the last movement, moreover, the modulation from G minor to E major—corresponding to the successive opening tonalities of the Larghetto and the Allegretto—is repeated at the end of the middle section (mm. 39–46). Does repeating a problematical modulation or progression make it more convincing? Within volume 4, the sonata is immediately followed by the Rondo in E (W. 58/3), whose composition immediately preceded that of the sonata during 1781. It cannot be coincidental that the rondo is in the same key as the last movement of the sonata. That the rondo somehow confirms or explains the strange tonal design of the sonata emerges when the rondo modulates, at its precise center, to G minor, restating its main theme in the key of the sonata's second movement (mm. 92ff.). Possibly the following sonata in E minor (W. 58/4) continues the sequence, although it is a much earlier composition, the volume's “large” sonata, composed at Berlin a decade and a half earlier.

³ E-flat–C in measures 20–21; G:V–b:I^{6/4} in measures 34–53; and a:V–f:I^{6/4} in measures 46–47.