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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 11.7. Other Vocal Works for Hamburg

Spiega, Ammonia fortunata

During his Hamburg years Bach wrote a few special compositions of a civic nature that are best considered in relation to his passions and church pieces, even though they are not strictly liturgical or even sacred. One of the first of these was *Spiega, Ammonia fortunata* (Show, happy Hamburg, W. 216), a single large choral aria whose performance Bach directed from the keyboard on Christmas Day 1770 at the recently opened Handlungsakademie; the performance honored the visiting Swedish Crown Prince Gustav and his brother.¹ One recent commentator finds it “curious” that the text celebrates only Hamburg, not the visiting royalty,² but the occasion must have reflected the recent diplomatic success of the republic. Hamburg had been declared a free imperial city in 1618, yet this had never been recognized by Denmark, whose king controlled neighboring Holstein (including the city of Altona). Only in 1768 did Denmark, under pressure from Sweden and its ally Russia, relent; the resulting Gottorp Agreement was recognized by the emperor in May 1769, and only then was Hamburg's autonomy unchallenged.

Bach's work was therefore a celebration of the city's freedom as well as of an alliance with Sweden, and NV makes a point of describing it as a commission from the city. The work may have had additional personal significance as well, for the treaty had been negotiated during the period in which Bach was seeking his release from Prussian service. Although Prussia was not a party to the agreement, Frederick was loosely allied with Russia and Sweden (where his sister was queen) against Denmark; the king's release of Bach from service could therefore have been viewed as a favor to a friendly state. The original performance must have been memorable, if only for the fact that Bach had had to compose the work in twelve hours.³

Why the anonymous text is in Italian (one of only two such poems assuredly set by Bach) is unknown; perhaps it was a diplomatic choice to avoid using either the local German or the visitor's Swedish. The work is among Bach's most amply scored, with three trumpets as well as two horns, two flutes as well as two oboes accompanying what was for his Hamburg

¹ Born in 1746, he became king as Gustavus III in 1771 and ruled as a reactionary if ostensibly enlightened autocrat until his assassination in 1792. Gugger, “C. Ph. E. Bachs Konzerttätigkeit,” 178, associates the work with a visit the preceding May by Gustav's youngest brother and eventual successor Carl. For the December performance, see the reports reproduced in Wiermann, *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, 441–43; one of these describes Bach's instrument as a *Flügel* (harpsichord), another as a *Forte Piano*.

² CPEBCW 5/5.2:xix.

³ So noted on the autograph wrapper for the parts (SA 1239). Bach adds that the work was performed twice. Unexplained is when the many needed performing parts would have been copied out.

performances a full complement of eight voices.⁴ In form it is a grand da capo aria, with soloists singing the B section as in “Gott Israels” from the *Israelites* of the previous year.⁵ It is in the fairly generic Italianate style of other such choruses from Bach's early Hamburg works. A bit of rhetorical scoring at the center of the A section briefly has the chorus singing the two most important words (“Lucky Hamburg”) practically without accompaniment (online example11.31).

[Example 11.31. *Spiega, Ammonia fortunata*, W. 216, mm. 69–73 \(without brass, winds, and viola\)](#)

69

vn.

S
A

Am - mo - nia for - tu na - ta,

T
B

b.c.

6 unis.

⁴ The original parts (SA 1239) are divided SSSAATTB. Most of Bach's Hamburg church performances seem to have involved only six or seven singers, although the frequently performed *Heilig* also required eight; on this point see Rifkin, “. . . Wobey aber die Singstimmen hinlänglich besetzt seyn müssen . . .” as well as the critical commentaries for the passions and other church works published in CPEBCW.

⁵ Bertil von Boer draws a parallel to the chorus “Nettuno s'onori” at the end of Act 1 in Mozart's *Idomeneo* (CPEBCW 5/5.2:xix–xx), but that is a chaconne, not a da capo aria.

Dank-Hymne der Freundschaft

Fifteen years later, Bach composed a much longer work in a similar vein. The “Hymn of Thanks for Friendship” (H. 824e) appears to have been composed hastily in January 1785 on a text by Hanna Agatha Hartung for the birthday of her husband Moritz Nicolaus Hartung, a Hamburg merchant.⁶ The work was only partly new, its most prominent portion, the double-chorus *Heilig*, having been inserted into the first part. The concluding chorus of Part 1, a unique sort of rondo finale, was likewise taken from an earlier work (the militia music of 1780). Even without these, however, The Hymn of Thanks is a substantial score, occupying some seventy-five pages in the modern edition.

As Ulrich Leisinger points out, the relationship to Bach's militia music extends to the work's overall “structure, orchestration, and mood.”⁷ The work's two parts comprise, as in the militia pieces, a one-act oratorio in the manner of Telemann followed by a shorter serenata, although the present work lacks the oratorio's allegorical characters. At first glance the scoring looks similar to that of earlier festive compositions, and the aria and chorus that close the first half include the same type of heterophonic figuration in the violins that Bach had been using in grand Italianate works since the Magnificat. But now arias as well as choruses are generally syllabic, lacking the long melismas of “Spiega, Ammonia” and the early Hamburg church works; opening ritornellos are short, if present at all.

A surprising peculiarity of the work is the frequency of naive text painting, to a degree that one would suspect the device was being used parodistically were it not for the evident seriousness of the text. The B section of the first aria (“Wie soll dir Erd und Asche danken”) is a good example, setting four lines whose music in turn represents trembling (*Zittern*), sinking into dust (*Staub*), a “troubled mind” (*betrübtter Sinn*), and seraphim singing “Amen.” The musical devices that represent these are traditional: bow vibrato in the lower strings, a descending chromatic line, an enharmonic modulation, and an extended melisma (the one example in the aria; see online example 11.32). Although the modulation from C major to B minor is carried out skillfully, the passage remains an inorganic concatenation of disjunct phrases. The only musical idea heard more than once is the chromatic motive for “dust,” which recurs in the bass beneath the melisma on *amen*.⁸

More disconcerting is the musical imagery in the following aria (“Der Vogel singt's”), in which various animals are said to proclaim the wisdom and mildness of their “lord.” An alarmingly naive expression of Sturm's nature theology, this is set in pastoral style, using 6/8 time and a ritornello

⁶ Neubacher, “Der Hamburger Kaufmann Moritz Nicolaus Hartung, refuting the supposition (CPEBCW 5/5.1:xi–xii) that the work was written for Peter von Biron, duke of Curland, dedicatee of the concertos W. 43.

⁷ CPEBCW 5/5.1:xiii.

⁸ Bow vibrato, or “slurred tremlo,” is presumably signified by the repeated sixteenths bearing both dots and slurs in measures 18–19. Sebastian Bach had notated this device using slurs alone, but see the discussion in CPEBCW 3/9.2:xvi.

Example 11.33a. Aria “Der Vogel singt's,” no. 5 from Hymn of Thanks, H. 824e, mm. 11–18
(without strings)

11 *tr* *tr* *tr*

f. fl.

S. S.

b.c. b.c.

pp

7 8 6
4 3 4

14 *tr* *tr*

er! Die Herde sagt's den Triften: Wie mild ist unser Herr!

5 7 6 5 7 8 9 8 7 7 7 8
3 5 4 3 4 3 8 7 7 4 3
2 2

Example 11.33b. Aria “Der Vogel singt's,” no. 5 from Hymn of Thanks, H. 824e, mm. 53–62
without flute (doubling voice)

53 *f* *mf* *p*

vn. vn.

va. va.

ve. ve.

S. S.

bn. bn.

ve. ve.

f *mf* *p*

Ihm halt in Wüste reißen Des Löwen Dank vom Fels zurück,

57 *pp* *ff* *p* *tr*

pp *ff* *p*

p *pp* *ff* *p*

Fagotto solo Und junge Raben schreien

Two further numbers demonstrate the imaginative way in which Bach's late style could merge song and aria. The tenor aria “Schon schimmern,” which replaced the usual “arietta” for soprano as introduction to the *Heilig* (see chap. 12), has a strophic text comprising four stanzas of three lines each.⁹ Bach sets it in the style of a lied, apart from some loud dotted rhythms in the strings at the end to represent thunder. The form, however, is that of a sonata-allegro, the music for the last stanza recapitulating that of the first one. Also in four strophes is the text of the next aria (“Ich weiche nicht”), but Bach sets this in bipartite form, essentially repeating the music of the first two stanzas for the last two. For stanza 3, however, this music is “de-ornamented” (*decoliert*), losing its busy violin accompaniment as the anonymous poet's thoughts turn to the grave. The refrain “ich weiche nicht” (I yield not) is nevertheless repeated at the end of every stanza, including the third one (online example 11.34). The aria requires a strong bass voice with a range of nearly two octaves (G–f’), negotiating leaps as great as a twelfth. Herr Hoffmann, for whom Bach wrote it, sang a similar aria (“Erde, höre!”) in the Tower Festival Music (see below), showing that, while avoiding coloratura display, Bach's late arias could still make substantial demands on singers.

[Example 11.34. Aria “Ich weiche nicht,” no. 12 from Hymn of Thanks, H. 824e, \(a\) mm. 1–3; \(b\) mm. 47–49](#)

(a) **Mutig, aber nicht geschwind** (b) 47

hn.

vn.

va.

B.

b.c.

Ich wei-che nicht von dei - ner Rech-ten, Soll mei - ne Gru-be mich ver - schlin-gen,

p *p* *p* *p*

6/4 5/3

⁹ The text is laid out wrongly in CPEBCW 5/5.1:xviii, where three of the four stanzas are broken up into four lines; in fact the rhyme scheme aab is maintained in all four strophes.

Equally imaginative formal invention occurs in the choruses that close each part of the work. The first “Schluss-Chor” is an unusually elaborate rondo or “vaudeville” finale built around choral settings of the six verses of Psalm 150. These alternate with seven settings (mostly for soloists) of verses from the chorale “Lobt Gott, ihr Christen allegleich.” Four of the latter, from the oratorio in the militia music of 1780 (H. 822a), were originally in E-flat; in this version, Bach changes their keys and scoring to produce a unique sort of double-variation movement.¹⁰ The underlying design, combining variation with a complex modulating scheme, is reminiscent of the modulating rondos and the last two fantasias in the *Kenner und Liebhaber* series, although the range of keys is somewhat narrower and the expressive character completely different.

The work ends with a rather different sort of variation form, a strophic setting of a poem in no fewer than nine stanzas. The underlying composition is almost distressingly simple, a song in four short phrases whose folk-like melody is neither elaborated nor transposed for successive stanzas. These merely vary the scoring: the full ensemble participates in the first, fifth, and last stanzas, the others being set for various smaller groups of voices and instruments. (One variation includes obbligato keyboard, the only instance in Emanuel’s vocal works of such scoring, well known from his father’s church works and occasionally used in Friedemann’s as well.) The absence of sophistication could only have been deliberate, presumably reflecting the influence of the folksongs that Bach was imitating in some of his lieder of the time. One wonders whether this exercise in vernacular style reflected things Bach had been hearing from Vienna or Paris. Did any who heard it sense a disjuncture between the simple underlying style and the grand orchestration? As with the zoological text painting, did the naiveté of Bach’s setting reflect his own evolved taste or his patron’s lack of it?

Musik am Dankfeste wegen des fertigen Michaelisturms

Bach re-used the opening chorus of the Hymn of Thanks the following year, when a new tower on the Hamburg’s Church of St. Michael (known as the Michel) was dedicated on Reformation Day 1786, that is, Oct. 31. The original church building, consecrated in 1661, had burned in 1750, and its replacement was dedicated in 1762 in a ceremony that included a work by Telemann (TWV 2:12). Despite its full scoring and lengthy text in twelve movements, what we may call Bach’s “Tower Festival Music” (H. 823) is, like some of his other late church works, composed on a relatively small scale. Only the incorporation of the double-chorus *Heilig* into the first part, this time preceded by the usual arietta, makes it comparable in scope to some of the earlier inaugural and seasonal pieces. The arias are all short, despite their relatively lengthy texts; one of these (“Wenn Gott zu strafen schwöret”) is a parody of “Wenn einst vor deinem Schelten” from the inaugural music for Pastor Schäffer, heard the previous year at the church of St. Nicholas. Here the energetic aria (“If God must punish”) served conveniently as an answer to the preceding recitative, which recounted the destruction of the previous church building with vivid if predictable writing for the strings.

¹⁰ Bach uses modern instruments to symbolize those named in the original Hebrew text; pizzicato strings stand for what Luther translated as *Psalter* and *Harfen* (verse 3), harpsichord for *Cymbeln* (verse 5). Table 3 in CPEBCW 5/5.1:137 shows the relationships between the two versions.

The second half of the work began, after the sermon, with a parody of the initial chorus from the Hymn of Thanks. The new text (Rev. 21:3) was clumsily substituted for the original psalm verse (Ps. 106:1). Most of the remaining music may have been new; only movement 10c has been traced to an earlier work, the Inauguration Piece for Pastor Jänisch, H. 821k. But Bach came close to repeating himself in the soprano aria “Auch bei der Schöpfer Güte,” which is not very far in style from the song-like “Schon schimmern” of the earlier work. Bach could not be accused of shirking his duties, however, even in these late works. The opening chorus as well as the last aria are both ambitious through-composed da capo forms; whether or not that design carried special meaning within the Bach family, Emanuel preserved a small portion of his father's legacy through his special cultivation of it in his late vocal works.