

David Schulenberg
The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 3.2: Three Arias W. 211

Bach's widow believed that the three tenor arias listed as W. 211 (edited in CPEBCW 6/4) were “composed in early years.”¹ Their somewhat generic style, closer to that of a lied than an aria, is difficult to place. The song-like syllabic writing of the vocal part, as well as brief opening and closing passages for strings—hardly ritornellos in the usual sense—superficially recalls the little arias that were still being sung in German operas during Sebastian's youth and perhaps later.² Emanuel, however, used these three arias at Hamburg as interludes during public *Trauerspiele*—plays based on ancient history put on by the students of the Johanneum. Could they really have gone back to his own academic years at Leipzig or Frankfurt? If so, then some of the arias in his Hamburg works, with their simplified musical rhetoric and lied-like manner, represented a turning back to a style he had cultivated in his youth. That, however, seems unlikely. Their earliest known use was as interludes in a play based on the life and death of Julius Caesar, performed on four successive days in March 1776. The texts, otherwise puzzling, make sense as reflections on Caesar's career, although they were parodied two years later to comment on the death of Seneca and again after the death of Empress Maria Theresa in February 1781.³ All three texts presumably had special meaning at Hamburg, which took seriously its status as an autonomous republic within an empire founded, in theory, by Caesar himself. Most likely, then, these are compositions from Bach's first few years at Hamburg.

¹ Johanna Maria's letter of Sept. 5, 1789, to Sara Levy describes the three arias using the same phrase found in NV, p. 64 (“in jungen Jahren verfertigt”); see CPEBCW 6/4:xiv.

² See, e.g., the arias, at least some of them from lost operas, in Philipp Heinrich Erlebach's *Harmonische Freude musicalischer Freunde* (Nuremberg, 1710); modern edition by Otto Kinkeldey in *Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst*, vol. 47 (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1913).

³ Both parodies are mentioned by Bitter (*Carl Philipp Emanuel und Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*, 1:191–93), who indicates that the arias followed acts 1, 3, and 4 of the five-act drama. At least the 1781 parody texts (not given in CPEBCW 6/4) were evidently sung under Bach's direction, as shown by the title of the original libretto, quoted by Leisinger and Wollny (*Die Bach-Quellen*, 136–37). Leisinger and Wollny also reproduce the parody text used in 1781 for the second aria—which came first in that performance.