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***The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach***  
**Supplement 5.1. The Berlin Opera**

A study of the Berlin opera argues that a performance there was viewed “primarily as a political event, as an affair of state,”<sup>1</sup> but this cannot have been true generally. The seriousness with which Graun's operas were written about critically, even by non-musicians such as the “war councilor” J. F. Borchmann,<sup>2</sup> suggests that they were taken as more than mere “representation” of monarchy or “exercises in reflecting an ideal of rulership and an ideal of society.” Still, that Frederick himself served in effect as producer of the Berlin opera demonstrated the conflation of his artistic with his political ends, and his view of himself as “first servant of the state” was self-serving even if genuinely held.<sup>3</sup> Yet, although present-day academics may think themselves clever for recognizing the political functions of opera and its music, they may be missing the point if they fail to understand that for Frederick the express purpose of the state was to improve the lives of its inhabitants. One way of doing this was by providing amenities such as opera, which was not merely entertaining but educational—and probably, in Frederick's view, preferable to the church as a means for inculcating the moral values on which he thought his state was founded (duty, modesty, clemency, and the like). Some of the church music that Bach would perform at Hamburg was no less operatic, and was certainly not meant to be any less morally uplifting, than Graun's operas. Of course, whether any of these compositions actually accomplished their supposed political or moral purposes is open to question—all the more reason, however, to focus on their artistic qualities rather than their supposed political functions.

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<sup>1</sup> Mangum, “Apollo and the German Muses, 113, referring to contemporary newspaper coverage of opera performances.

<sup>2</sup> Author of the anonymously published *Briefe zur Erinnerung an merkwürdige Zeiten aus dem wichtigen Zeitlaufe, von 1740 bis 1778* (Berlin: Spener, 1778). Mangum, p. 59, terms it an “epistolary novel,” but it is also a memoir incorporating critical commentary on operas and their performances.

<sup>3</sup> The famous quotation is usually traced to Frederick's Political Testament of 1752, but in the previous year he had written “un Prince est le premier Serviteur & le premier Magistrat de l'Etat” (*Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la maison de Brandenbourg*, nouvelle édition, Berlin: Jean Neaulme, 1751), 250.