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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 6.3 The Sketches for the Oboe Concerto W. 164

The sketches are written on a sheet that Bach had used previously for a keyboard piece of ten years earlier.¹ Although the page was already ruled in double systems (for writing solo keyboard music), the sketch employs each staff as a complete system; the bass, where present at all, appears on the same staff as the melody. The sketches begin with what was evidently meant to be a ritornello theme, but this was discarded, and the present opening theme of the first movement appears only toward the end of the sheet.² On the last few staves, however, the triplets of the original idea are taken up again, first in what became the opening theme of the third movement, then in several passages that were incorporated into the ritornello and first solo episode of the first movement. Does this mean that Bach considered using the new theme in the first movement, either within the ritornello or for the first solo entrance?

The ideas are entered in what seems almost random order, possibly jotted down to preserve thoughts that occurred to Bach at various times, or perhaps in some cases while waiting for the ink to dry on a page in a more complete score. That Bach created similar sketches for earlier works cannot be assumed, but the two- or three-part texture of the finished ritornellos in W. 164 is not essentially different from that in works written two decades earlier. Hence the sketches for W. 164 confirm the impression received from finished works that Bach's initial conception for a ritornello, if not for a complete movement, was a single line that could be jotted down on its own, requiring at most a sketchy bass line to characterize it uniquely. Bach evidently started from the premise of a complete melodic phrases, not the individual motive, which was more characteristic at the time of Friedemann's music and later that of Beethoven.

This approach to composition does not, in the present case, yield outstanding results. There is no strong logic to the order of ideas in the opening ritornello of W. 164. One might have expected the initial motive of two half notes rising by a fifth—the idea on which Bach settled for the opening measure—to be repeated, if not given some real development. But this does not happen even later within the finished movement, although Bach had done as much with the similar motive at the beginning of the B-Minor Concerto of 1753 (W. 30). One might conjecture, charitably, that W. 164 was commissioned for an instrument that Bach neither favored nor understood very well; perhaps the oboe was for Bach what the flute is supposed to have been for Mozart. The level of invention or tension in this work seems generally rather low, as in earlier concertos that are also relatively simple in style and technical demands. Yet there is no reason to think that Bach followed a different working method when composing pieces of a more serious or challenging

¹ The sheet is reproduced in facsimile and transcribed in CPEBCW 3/5:84–85. Bach later adapted the work as the keyboard concerto W. 39.

² Staff 10, measure 2, in the transcription in CPEBCW 3/5:85. Two measures at the very beginning of the sheet (staff 7b, mm. 1–2) are probably an insert meant to follow measure 4 of the unused theme that begins on staff 7a (the first two pitches of the insert are better understood as g'-f', not a'-g' as in the published transcription).

nature. If works such as W. 23 of 1748 or W. 30 are more successful than W. 164, it is not because they involved different compositional procedures.