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*The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*  
**Supplement 7.9. Other Character Pieces and Their Relationship to Couperin**

Bach's readiness to juggle pieces into or out of larger works raises the possibility that some of the character pieces gained their titles only some time after they were composed. Several titles, like that of "L'Ernestine," seem to have been altered, and a few might be merely dedications, particularly to Bach's daughter ("La Carolina" and "La Philippine"). "La Philippine" (W. 117/34) is furnished with fingerings throughout, like the *Probestücke*, as are a little Allegretto and Allegro (W. 116/19–20) belonging to the same set of five *petites pièces* from 1755. Why do the latter two pieces lack titles? Both are distinctly more rudimentary in style, especially W. 116/20; with its scale motive opening each half, it appears to be modeled on the *Applicatio* (BWV 994) in the Little Keyboard Book for W. F. Bach (online example 7.31). "La Philippine" is more substantial, although delicate and unassuming, as we might imagine Bach's daughter to have been (she was described as "unbeautiful" and "unfeeling," however).<sup>1</sup> But must it have originated as a portrait?

[Example 7.31. \(a\) Allegro in D, W. 116/20, mm. 1–8; \(b\) \*Applicatio\*, BWV 994, mm. 1–4; \(c\) "La Philippine," W. 117/34, mm. 1–4](#)

(a) *Allegro* in D, W. 116/20, mm. 1–8. The piece is in 2/4 time. The treble clef part begins with a scale-like figure: D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5, followed by a descending scale: B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4. The bass clef part provides a simple accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

(b) *Applicatio*, BWV 994, mm. 1–4. The piece is in common time (C). The treble clef part features a scale-like figure: C4-D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5, followed by a descending scale: B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4. The bass clef part provides a simple accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

(c) *Andante* "La Philippine," W. 117/34, mm. 1–4. The piece is in 6/8 time. The treble clef part begins with a scale-like figure: D4-E4-F4-G4-A4-B4-C5, followed by a descending scale: B4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4. The bass clef part provides a simple accompaniment. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above or below notes.

<sup>1</sup> "unschöne, doch wohl conditionirte," letter of Johann Heinrich Voß to Johann Martin Miller, April 4, 1774, no. 160 in Suchalla, p. 383. Voß adds in parentheses "sie ist nicht empfindsam, Cramer" apparently citing the opinion of the writer Carl Friedrich Cramer, who also knew the Bach family.

Whether or not “La Phillipine” depicts Bach's daughter, there is no reason to question that some of the more striking character pieces, such as “La Stahl” (W. 117/25), really were meant to represent actual personalities. Its juxtapositions of solemn and impulsive passages recall the alternating tempos in the first two movements of the Program Trio. A French inspiration is evident as well, not only in the sarabande rhythm but perhaps in the fundamental idea of juxtaposing radically different types of music; Couperin's sarabande “L'Unique” had alternated unexpectedly between “gravement” and “vivement” passages.

Yet Bach keeps his distance from the French composer. Couperin grouped pieces of the same key into suites (called *ordres*), but although Bach also collected his character pieces into sets, these are not unified or ordered in any obvious way. “Les langueurs tendres” (W. 117/30) borrows its opening motive from Couperin's piece of the same title, but otherwise the two have little in common (online example 7.32).<sup>2</sup> Couperin's piece remains simple and transparent in texture while unfolding in the freely discursive manner typical of actual French music. Bach, in a rarity for him, develops practically his entire piece from Couperin's motive, reaching for a climax in a middle section that grows increasingly dissonant and chromatic, as the texture expands from two to three and even four voices; it even incorporates a transposed statement of the B-A-C-H motive (online example 7.33).<sup>3</sup> Bach's work, incidentally, is notated in what looks like da capo form, with the A section returning after the middle section. The arrangements of some of these pieces in Bach's ensemble sonatinas, however, suggest that they were meant to be played as simple rondos, with a repetition of both the middle and second A sections, yielding the form AABABA.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Voice crossings in Bach's piece (mm. 12, 14–15) suggest performance on a two-manual harpsichord, although it is hardly a full-fledged French *pièce croisée*. An earlier title, “Memoire raisonné,” is reported in two sources; its meaning is unexplained. Couperin's piece appeared in his *Second livre de pièces de clavecin* (1716–17).

<sup>3</sup> No one seems to have noticed that a measure must be missing from the phrase in measures 17–23 of Bach's “Langueurs.” Wollny, whose principal source is a copy in a partially autograph manuscript, reports no variants (CPEBCW 1/8.2:197). Yet the manuscript shows no trace of Bach's hand in this piece, and measures 19–20 may be a garbled version of what were meant to be three measures:

[“Les langueurs tendres,” W. 117/30, tentative reconstruction for mm. 19–20](#)



<sup>4</sup> As in movement 1 from Sonatina 9 (W. 102), arranged from “La Complaisante” (W. 117/28); this simple rondo form and its notation go back to movements in J. S. Bach's suites. Couperin's “Les langueurs tendres” is in simple binary form.

The musical style of “La Stahl” is outwardly even farther from Couperin. Yet at a deeper level its aesthetic has something in common with his, for it draws its sharply characterized ideas with just a few notes, and when they recur their restatements are allusive rather than exact. Also close to Couperin at some background level is the underlying phrasing, which, despite irregularities at the surface, is close to that of a simple dance. Each section comprises a single period, avoiding the sequential passagework found in so many of Bach's sonata movements after the initial statement of the theme.

[Example 7.32. \(a\) “Les langueurs tendres,” W. 117/30, mm. 1–8; \(b\) Couperin, “Les langueurs tendres,” mm. 1–2](#)

(a) **Poco allegro**

Musical score for Example 7.32(a), showing measures 1–8 of “Les langueurs tendres” by W. 117/30. The score is in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major, and marked **Poco allegro**. It features a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note bass line and a treble line with eighth-note figures.

Musical score for Example 7.32(b), showing measures 1–2 of Couperin’s “Les langueurs tendres”. The score is in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major, and features a treble line with eighth-note figures and a bass line with a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

[Example 7.33. “Les langueurs tendres,” W. 117/30, mm. 32–39 \(\\*asterisks mark B-A-C-H motive\)](#)

Musical score for Example 7.33, showing measures 32–39 of “Les langueurs tendres” by W. 117/30. The score is in 2/4 time, key of B-flat major, and starts at measure 32. Asterisks mark the B-A-C-H motive in the treble line.