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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 9.10. Sara Levy and the Double Concerto W. 47

The four works for Levy were Bach's most important project during his last year. Bach had been preceded by Jean-François Tapray in composing pieces specifically for harpsichord and fortepiano, with accompanying strings and winds. Possibly Levy had heard or played them, but even if Bach knew Tapray's pieces, his concerto shows no trace of influence by them.¹ He appears to have been in vigorous good health until shortly before his death on Dec. 14, 1788; nothing in the music shows any decline of energy or imagination. One might complain of a lack of distinctive melodic writing, but the reliance on arpeggiation and formulaic "variation" for both themes and passagework had been Bach's manner for some time. String players then as now might have regretted the unidiomatic arpeggios in the first movement, which sustain mild interest only through their surprising harmonies and irregular bass line, as well as a rhythmic pattern that runs against the meter in a manner that calls to mind modern scores by Philip Glass (online example 9.44).

[Example 9.44. Double Concerto in E-flat, W. 47, movement 1, mm. 7–10 \(first violin and bass only\)](#)

As in the sonatinas, the flutes are effectively a second pair of soloists. Indeed, in writing the concerto Bach must have recalled his two ensemble sonatinas with double keyboard (W. 109–10)—more so than his first double concerto (W. 46), composed almost half a century earlier although subsequently revised. To be sure, in all four works Bach treats the two keyboards much as his father did in *his* double concertos, balancing a solo by one with a solo for the other. Thus, in the first movement of W. 47, substantial portions of the second and third solo episodes consist of complementary passages for the two keyboards. Each of these solo episodes is essentially a

¹ Tapray's four *symphonies concertantes* were published at Paris from 1778 to 1783 (edition by Bruce Gustafson, Madison: A-R Editions, 1995). All are with strings, two including horns as well, and one has an additional solo part for violin. Two duos for harpsichord and piano by Henri-Josef Rigel, op. 14 (Paris, ca. 1777) are equally remote stylistically from Bach.

large sequence, the entry by the second soloist constituting a transposed repetition of the first, much like the complementary solos in vocal duets and in Bach's instrumental trios from earlier in the century.²

Levy is not known to have possessed a copy of Bach's earlier double concerto, but she did own at least five of the ensemble sonatinas, including the grand one in D for two keyboards (W. 109).³ Apart from its instrumentation, however, the concerto has little in common with Bach's sonatinas. Levy also owned only a few of Bach's solo concertos, and apparently none of the late ones; therefore she would not have noticed that her double concerto opens rather like Bach's previous concerto (W. 45), with its *piano* opening and repeated triadic motive. Nor, unless she was familiar with the six works of W. 43, would she have realized that the three movements of W. 47 are in the same tonalities as those of the concerto in the same key from the earlier set (E-flat, C, E-flat). In fact W. 43/3 is less conventional than the Double Concerto, but this could be because Levy's commission required a work in three full-size movements. Although the second movement is joined to the third, the modulating bridge between them is an extension of the final ritornello; it develops the idea of a loud B-flat that had disturbed the tranquility of the newly established C major at the beginning of the movement. That B-flat now points the music back to the tonic E-flat of the work as a whole (online example 9.45). The idea actually goes back to the first movement, where similar surprise “flat” notes in the orchestra—(E-flat in measure 102, A-flat in measure 117)—kick off the long complementary solos for the two keyboard instruments.

The bridge to the third movement, however, lacks anything for the soloists and is free of fantasy style. Bach had written something like it to join the two movements of the G-major flute sonata of 1786 (W. 133). There the bridge leads to a modulating rondo, whereas the present finale is a fairly regular ritornello-sonata form. Yet the two Presto movements are similar in character, down to the repeated-note figures in their principal themes (online example 9.46). The flute sonata, thought to have been composed for the virtuoso Christian Carl Hartmann,⁴ ends with particularly brilliant and extended passagework in concerto style. The actual concerto movement, although not without a short final flourish for the two soloists (mm. 298–301), makes its climactic points through a means hardly used elsewhere in Bach's late works: counterpoint.

² The first of these sequential solo episodes (mm. 103–30) passes—remarkably—from A-flat to G minor, then (a fifth lower) from D-flat to C minor. The somewhat shorter version of the passage in the final section (mm. 173–90) is less precisely sequential, modulating between F minor and B-flat, then D minor and B-flat again—not, perhaps, the most elegant solution to a difficult formal problem.

³ Levy also owned W. 96, 107, 108, and 110; the last of these is the second sonatina for two keyboards, but Levy's copy (SA 4835) is of a short early version without horns or the second solo part.

⁴ See Miller, “C. P. E. Bach's Sonatas for Solo Flute,” 216–17.

[Example 9.45. Double Concerto in E-flat, W. 47, movement 2, \(a\) mm. 1–8, \(b\) mm. 108–20, both without flutes \(which largely double the violins\)](#)

(a) **Larghetto**

(b)

[Example 9.46. \(a\) Double Concerto in E-flat, W. 47, movement 3, mm. 8 \(violins only\); \(b\) Sonata in G for flute and continuo, W. 133, last movement, mm. 1–8 \(flute only\)](#)

(a) **Presto**

(b) **Rondo presto**

Brief imitative treatments of the main ritornello motive, a type of writing that Friedemann Bach particularly favored, appear at several points in the last movement. In general, however, Emanuel had always avoided the hard-to-follow little canons that his brother enjoyed inserting into his concertos and other works. Each time Emanuel tries out such imitative writing here, he seems to break it off in favor of something simpler (online example 9.47). Until the final ritornello, the most meaningful counterpoint in the movement involves not canon but the combination of the main theme in one of the solo parts with running figuration in the other. The result, hardly profound, is a closing passage signaling that the solo episode is heading for a final cadence (as in measures 111–18). Thus it is a pleasant surprise that the recapitulation of this almost pat, formulaic passage, at the end of the final solo episode, leads not to a refrain of the opening ritornello but to a new contrapuntal development of its main theme. The movement, and with it what was possibly Bach's final work as a composer of instrumental music, culminates in a six-part canon that incorporates two levels of augmentation in the winds (online example 9.48). The result is hardly an *Art of Fugue*, and like the late flute sonata the concerto actually ends with a unison cadential formula. Yet the counterpoint is just sufficiently intricate to serve Bach as a way of acknowledging his legacy, within a composition that is entirely his own.

[Example 9.47. Double Concerto in E-flat, W. 47, movement 3, mm. 145–53 \(without flutes and horns\)](#)

145

The musical score for measures 145–53 is written for five instruments: violin (vn.), viola (va.), harpsichord (hpd.), flute (fp.), and bassoon (bs.). The key signature is E-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 2/4. The score begins at measure 145. The violin and viola parts are mostly silent, with some activity in the final measures. The harpsichord part features a melodic line with trills (tr) and a dynamic marking of *p*. The flute and bassoon parts play a rhythmic accompaniment, with trills (tr) and a dynamic marking of *ff* unis. in the final measures. The overall texture is complex and contrapuntal.

Example 9.48. Double Concerto in E-flat, W. 47, movement 3, mm. 302–13

302

fl.

hm.

vn. 1

vn. 2

va.

bs.

f

ftr

ftr

f

ftr

ftr

f *tastato*

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

308

5 5 2 7 6 7 6