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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 9.11. The Later Berlin Sinfonias

Although many sinfonias probably served to open concerts, the minor mode of W. 177 might have made it unsuitable for that purpose; perhaps it would have been reserved for opening the second half of a program.¹ Hasse's high opinion of the work probably reflected not only its expressive intensity but its simplicity; its gestures are direct and uncomplicated, like those in Hasse's own music. Bach's later sinfonias incorporate more of the dramatic pauses and modulations that here are limited to the transition between the first two movements (online example 9.51). Even that progression is chromatic rather than enharmonic or otherwise indirect, and elsewhere the rhythm throughout the work has the straightforward character typical of early sinfonias. Only the last two or three of Bach's Berlin sinfonias employ with any frequency the same expressive irregularities of phrasing and harmony that characterize his other compositions. Such things would have puzzled listeners accustomed to the bland if entertaining sinfonias that not only open the operas of Hasse and Graun but were composed in large numbers by the latter's brother Gottlieb.

Example 9.51. Sinfonia in E Minor, W. 177, movement 1, mm. 135–41

The musical score for Example 9.51 consists of two systems of staves. The first system (mm. 135-137) includes staves for Violin 1 (vn. 1), Violin 2 (vn. 2), Viola (va.), and Bassoon (bs.). The second system (mm. 138-141) includes staves for Violin 1 (vn. 1), Violin 2 (vn. 2), Viola (va.), and Bassoon (bs.). The score is in E minor and common time. Dynamics include *pp* and *pp p*. The score includes trills (*tr*) and a *pp* *tasto* marking.

¹ Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany*, 2:44–48, describes a concert heard in Dresden in which each half opened with a different symphony.

The E-Minor Sinfonia opens with some of the conventional fingerprints of a “rage” aria: unison (or octave) writing for the strings; short, accelerating phrases separated by rests (online example 9.52). Thanks to Beethoven, we think of such intense expression as normal in a symphony, but it took real creative vision to imagine the possibility of incorporating it into an orchestral work of this type. Although the thematic material of the two following movements is also distinctive, only with the following three sinfonias of 1757–58 and 1762, Bach's last such works for Berlin, did he incorporate his signature devices into the genre with something like the frequency used in other works. These sinfonias anticipate features of the Hamburg examples, including the close juxtaposition of ever more varied textures and rhythms, frequent full stops or fermatas (especially in first movements), and increasing reliance on harmonically inspired writing rather than melodies as such. As in earlier sinfonias, however, and as in the ensemble sonatinas with which the last of these Berlin works overlaps chronologically, the connections between movements remain a superficial way of integrating them into a cycle. Modulating codas often seem tacked on, added inorganically after, or in place of, the final cadence of the first or second movement. Rarely do the later movements, typically touching and witty, respectively, achieve much depth, although that is true generally of Bach's music of the period, in which he seems to have taken a rather narrow view of what could be conveyed in music for public performance.

[Example 9.52. Sinfonia in E Minor, W. 177, movement 1, mm. 1–7](#)

Allegro assai

vn.
va.
bs.
unis.
tr
tr
tr
5

7
6
4

One detail that nevertheless reflects the increasing subtlety that Bach applied to the genre is the unconventional preparation for the middle movement in the G-Major Sinfonia of 1758 (W. 180). The Largo is in B minor, and we might expect that key to be prepared by its dominant. Yet Bach ends the transition with a cadence on the new tonic—albeit a cadence that ends inconclusively, the upper voice resting on the third of the chord (online example 9.53). Paradoxically, this “tonic preparation” seems less direct or obvious than the common dominant preparation heard at the corresponding point in the F-Major Sinfonia of 1762 (W. 181; see online example 9.54). There may be no strong reason for Bach's use of one type of link as opposed to the other, but in W. 180 it is probably related to the third-relation (G–b) between the first two movements, and to the quiet opening of the Largo without continuo.

Despite such modest challenges to convention in Bach's last Berlin sinfonias, they continue to rely heavily on textures that the composer evidently regarded as especially appropriate for such works. Unison or octave writing is common—both verbatim doubling, as in the opening of the E-Minor Sinfonia, and a sort of embellished doubling in which the bass instruments play a simplified version of the violin line (or, rather, the lower instruments extract the bass from a polyphonic melody, as in online example 9.55). The tradition of unison themes in concertos and arias went back at least to Vivaldi and would have been well known to Emanuel through his father's D-minor concerto, which he copied in its early form BWV 1052a. Quantz, describing the *concerto grosso*, mentioned not only the use of “unison passages” but of ritornellos that are “more harmonic than melodic.”² This remark applies as well to Bach's sinfonias, whose use of arpeggiated opening themes recalls the original function of the sinfonia as a call to attention, a sort of elaborate fanfare, at the beginning of an opera. The idea of the sinfonia as a noisy way to begin an evening of music persisted at least to the end of the Berlin years; Bach's G-Major Sinfonia of 1758 ends with almost exactly the same emphatic cadence used in his first one (online example 9.56).

The two works also share another idea that Bach evidently associated with the genre: a type of syncopated pedal tone, typically placed in the upper voice. Such a pedal tone could be developed in a step sequence, as in the middle section of the early G-Major Sinfonia (online example 9.57). The idea achieves a sort of apotheosis in the first of the Orchestral Sinfonias, whose opening movement begins with an archetypal example (see online example 8.23). In the latter, incidentally, the ascending triad formed by the three pedal tones (d^b–f-sharp^b–b^b) is also articulated in eighths as the principal motive in the lower voice.

² Quantz, *Versuch*, xviii.31, defining the *concerto grosso* as in modern usage (as a work with multiple soloists). Oleskiewicz, “Quantz and the Flute at Dresden,” 268, cites the example of Quantz's early group concerto QV 6:6, which Bach likely knew in a version in the Prussian royal collection (ibid, 273–75).

Example 9.53. Sinfonia in B minor, W. 180, movement 1, m. 131, through movement 2, m. 2 (winds omitted)

Musical score for Example 9.53, Sinfonia in B minor, W. 180, movement 1, m. 131, through movement 2, m. 2 (winds omitted). The score is in B minor and common time. It features four staves for winds (vn. 1, vn. 2, va., bs.) and a grand staff for piano. The first system (m. 131) shows the winds with dynamics *p* and *ff*. The piano part begins in m. 134 with a *tasto* marking. The tempo changes to *Largo* in 6/4 time, with dynamics *p* and *ff*.

Example 9.54. Sinfonia in F, W. 181, movement 1, m. 65, through movement 2, m. 4 (winds omitted)

Musical score for Example 9.54, Sinfonia in F, W. 181, movement 1, m. 65, through movement 2, m. 4 (winds omitted). The score is in F major and common time. It features four staves for winds (vn. 1, vn. 2, va., bs.) and a grand staff for piano. The first system (m. 65) shows the winds with dynamics *ff*, *p*, *f*, and *p*. The piano part begins in m. 66 with a *tasto* marking. The tempo changes to *Andante* in 6/8 time, with dynamics *p* and *ff*.

[Example 9.55. Sinfonia in F, W. 175, movement 1, mm. 1–8 \(as arranged for keyboard in W. 122/2\)](#)

Allegro assai

staccato

5

tr

p

[Example 9.56. \(a\) Sinfonia in G, W. 173, movement 1, mm. 86–90; \(b\) Sinfonia in G, W. 180, movement 3, mm. 65–68 \(without winds\)](#)

86 (a)

vn.

va.

bs.

ff

ff

ff unis.

6

6 5

4 3

6 6 7

5

6 5

f

f

f

f

6

5

4

2

6

5

Example 9.57. Sinfonia in G, W. 173, movement 1, mm. 49–54

49

vn.

va.

bs.

6 6

6

6 6/5

6 6

6 6/5