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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 11.3. Bach's Parody Technique

An aria by Benda, taken over in one of Bach's inaugural pieces, had large stretches of its vocal line rewritten.¹ This parody was, then, the product of “variation” similar to that which Bach habitually applied to the solo parts of his concertos. More frequently, however, Bach's parodies vary the original in other ways. In his last St. Matthew Passion, performed in 1789 after his death (W. 235), all five arias are shortened parodies taken ultimately from passions by Homilius, although Bach had previously incorporated them in other forms within his passions of 1770 and 1776. One of these arias became a rare instance of a genuine “modified” da capo, to use the traditional term for what is here called a through-composed ternary aria.² Homilius had composed “Wer kann den Rat der Liebe fassen” as a large conventional da capo aria; Bach had already abbreviated it as a so-called dal segno aria in the St. John Passion of 1776. His parody in the 1789 St. Matthew Passion, “Du trägst die Fesseln,” is further shortened.³ This transformation did not take place without some effort, and Bach's parody includes new transitional and closing passages.

Bach's changes in this case probably improved a long and diffuse aria. Bach likewise shortened Homilius's aria “Vor dir, dem Vater, der verzeiht” almost by half, yet the last fourteen measures in the parody, “Im Staub gebückt,” are mostly his own.⁴ These incorporate the novel idea of having the voice cadence alone; then, in place of a closing ritornello, the violins play a quiet chromatic scale, echoing some modest chromaticism that Homilius's original version of the aria had not further developed (online example 11.1). Bach also eliminated a melisma sung in the original on the word *bewein* (mourn). In another aria, “Erfrecht euch nur,” he substituted a single simple melisma on *verklagen* (“bewail”) for several more athletic melismas originally sung on *verdammmt*

¹ Enßlin and Wolf, “Die Prediger-Einführungsmusiken,” 142–43, on the aria “Ruhe sanft, verklärten Lehrter” (no. 7 in W. 251), which they trace to Benda's cantata *Der Herr lebet* (L. 548).

² See my “Modifying the Da Capo?.” The same type of aria is called a “transformed” (*umgestaltet*) da capo by Smither, “Arienstruktur und Arienstil,” 346–47. Smither lists nine arias of this type by Bach, including four of the six arias in the Resurrection Cantata (appendix, p. 368). Bach did not regularly use the other types of shortened da capo arias discussed by Smither in *A History of the Oratorio*, 3:71–74.

³ The aria was originally no. 9 in Homilius's St. John Passion (see CPEBCW 4/7.2:xii). In Bach's parody for 1789, the second half of the A section is, in essence, transferred to the end of the aria, becoming the A' section. See my “Modifying the Da Capo?,” 25–26, for an instance of the same procedure by Handel.

⁴ The aria, originally no. 16 in Homilius's St. John Passion, became no. 15 in Bach's St. Mark Passion of 1774 prior to its re-use with a new text in the 1789 St. Matthew Passion (see CPEBCW 4/5.2:xii).

[Example 11.1a. Aria “Vor dir, dem Vater, der verzeiht,” no. 15 in the 1774 St. Mark Passion, H. 787, mm. 90–96](#)

Musical score for Example 11.1a, measures 90–96. The score is in G minor, 3/8 time, and features five staves: Violin 1 (vn. 1), Violin 2 (vn. 2), Viola (va.), Tenor (T), and Bass (b.c.). The vocal line includes the lyrics: "Va - ter der Barm - her - zig - keit, Gott, sei mir gnä - dig." The instrumental parts include dynamic markings such as *ten.* and *p*. The bottom of the page shows figured bass notation: 6 6, 5, 7 5 # 4+, 6, 5 5 7, 7.

[Example 11.1b. Aria “Im Staub gebückt,” no. 21 in the 1789 St. Matthew Passion, W. 235, mm. 55–68](#)

Musical score for Example 11.1b, measures 55–68. The score is in G minor, 3/8 time, and features five staves: Violin 1 (vn. 1), Violin 2 (vn. 2), Viola (va.), Tenor (T), and Bass (b.c.). The vocal line includes the lyrics: "ich wei - ne vor dir, o Va - ter, laß mich gnä - dig vor die fin - den, o Va - ter barm - her - zi - ger." The instrumental parts include dynamic markings such as *p*, *pp*, and *tasto*. The bottom of the page shows figured bass notation: 6, 7, 6 4 5.

(condemned); he also greatly shortened the aria as a whole (online example 11.2).⁵ Hence Bach's parody reduced the level of virtuosity, facilitating its performance and, in “Erfrecht euch nur,” muting the impression that is an old-fashioned rage aria. That type had been more clearly represented not only by the parody model “Verdammt ihn nur” used in 1770, but also by the aria at the corresponding point in Bach's 1769 St. Matthew Passion, “Donnre nur ein Wort.” The latter—Bach's own composition—is an enormous virtuoso aria in through-composed da capo form (with *two* B sections). It must have taken its toll on both singer and listeners, and although Friedrich Martin Illert, who sang it in 1769, was still working for Bach in 1788, he might no longer have been prepared to sing such a demanding number.⁶

[Example 11.2. \(a\) Homilius, aria “Verdammt ihn nur,” no. 13 in the 1770 St. Mark Passion, H. 783, mm. 41–49; \(b\) Aria “Erfrecht euch nur,” no. 30 in the 1789 St. Matthew Passion, W. 235, mm. 17–24 \(both without strings\)](#)

The image displays a musical score for two arias, (a) and (b), arranged in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (labeled 'T' for Tenor) and a basso continuo line (labeled 'b.c.').

- System 1:** Labeled (a) 41. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "ihr un-ge-rech-ten Rich-ter, ver-dammt". The basso continuo line features figured bass notation: 7b, 6 4+, 6, 6, 6b 4+, 6, 6.
- System 2:** Labeled (b) 17. The vocal line continues with "ihn nur! er-frecht euch nur die". The basso continuo line features figured bass notation: 6 4+, 6, 7 4, 6 4, 7 4, 8 3, b7 6 5, 6 4 4.
- System 3:** Labeled 19. The vocal line continues with "Un-schuld zu ver-kla- - - - - - - - - - gen,". The basso continuo line features figured bass notation: 6, 7 4, 6, 5 4, 4, 7 4, 6 4, 6 4 5 4, unis.

⁵ “Erfrecht euch nur,” no. 30 in Bach's 1789 St. Matthew Passion, is a parody of “Verdammt ihn nur,” no. 13 in Bach's St. Mark Passion of 1770 (originally no. 23 in Homilius's St. Mark Passion). Enßlin, *Die Bach-Quellen*, 478, identifies the model of Bach's “Erfrecht euch nur” as “Verlasst ihn nicht,” but the latter is an aria in pastorale style (6/8) in G, sung just after Peter's second denial of Jesus in Homilius's passion oratorio *Nun, ihr, meinem Augen Lieder* and in Bach's 1773 St. Matthew Passion (H. 786). The present aria (“Erfrecht euch nur”) is an Allegro (2/4) in B-flat, sung after the high priests have determined to have Jesus condemned.

⁶ According to Sanders, “Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Liturgical Music,” Illert's career as a singer in the Hamburg churches lasted from 1754 to 1792.

Bach's autograph scores survive for many of his substitute recitatives, arias, and choruses. Among the choruses are adaptations of sacred songs from the Gellert, Cramer, and Sturm sets, inserted into passions and other larger works as settings for four voices with orchestral accompaniment. Thus the chorus "Hallelujah! Auf Golgatha," based on the "Lobgesang auf den Tod Jesu" in the second Sturm volume (W. 198/23), is accompanied in Bach's autograph score (P 340) by directions for its insertion into the St. John Passion for 1784. Bach specifies where the new choral arrangement goes (after the words *und verschied*) and which stanzas are to be sung. Bach's score looks like a fair copy, but small alterations show that he was probably arranging it as he transcribed the soprano and bass parts from the original keyboard score.⁷

Bach's score for his final St. Matthew Passion similarly includes his orchestration of a passage derived from his own settings of the "Old" and "New" Litanies, published in 1786 (W. 204). This too was probably scored directly from the original version, but the parody arias in the same work required preliminary sketches. At least one of these survives, written in Bach's late hand into the part for the tenor ("Evangelist") in the St. Matthew Passion for 1773.⁸ Like the sketch for Bach's late song "Nonnelied," it consists of the melody only, with occasional words underlaid; presumably Bach had the complete text in front of him as he wrote the sketch, or had memorized it. In neither of these cases did he make significant changes to the melody in the finished work, raising the question of why a sketch was necessary at all. In the passion aria ("Erfrecht euch nur"), the sketch begins only at the point where the melody of the parody departs from its model; presumably, then, Bach was planning, or trying out, the parody by writing the new portions of its vocal part prior to creating a new full score.

⁷ For instance, in measure 5 of the arrangement, Bach erased eighth notes in the soprano part that corresponded to the original rhythm of the song, here replaced by a half note.

⁸ The sketch is for the aria "Erfrecht euch nur," mentioned earlier; it is in SA 5136 (see CPEBCW 4/4.2:139).