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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 10.3. More on the Quartets

All three quartets are light in overall tone, the first, despite its minor mode, ending with something like the *scherzando* allegrettos that had been common at Berlin in the 1750s and 1760s. The slow movements nevertheless achieve a seriousness rare in Bach's late instrumental works; none is shortened or directly attached to the outer movements. In general these quartets avoid the more extreme types of modulation and fragmentation found in the late pieces for solo keyboard. Still, the rondo of the A-Minor Quartet modulates as remotely as F-sharp minor, and its slow movement, in C, makes a characteristic early move toward the subdominant, then touches on E minor in a chromatic passage (online example 10.9). Because the movement is a rounded binary form, the entire opening phrase is never heard again in the tonic. Yet the chromatic phrase returns as a little coda; the unexpected reminiscence helps account for the softly affecting quality of the movement.

[Example 10.9. Quartet in A Minor, W. 93, movement 2, mm. 1–8 \(keyboard only, without doublings in flute and viola\)](#)

Largo e sostenuto

kb.

Bach's restraint in the use of clever modulations means that where they do occur they mean more here than in some of his solo rondos and fantasias. In the second movement of W. 94, a surprise Neapolitan harmony, just after a restatement of the theme in E minor, is immensely touching; its upper note (c²) afterward becomes part of a step sequence that climbs ultimately to the tonic g² (online example 10.10). The slow movement of W. 95, in G minor, reaches an equally striking F minor (iv of iv) just four measures before the final cadence. This is by no means the movement's deepest plunge into “flat” keys, which extend to A-flat minor and E-flat minor a few bars previously. The little F-minor gesture, however, makes a special impression as it is interpolated into a long dominant pedal (online example 10.11). The almost Chopinesque filligree of the keyboard, which is heard in almost every measure of this movement, achieves its greatest intensity in these last few measures, leaping between registers as it moves sequentially from c³ upward to d³ and then e-flat³, the highest note used in the movement. This is not earth-shaking music, but with these gestures Bach puts to good expressive use the “research” into chromatic modulation that occurs almost obsessively in some of his other late compositions.

Example 10.10. Quartet in D, W. 94, movement 2, mm. 32–43

fl. *p* *f*

va. *p*

kb. *p* *f*

32 39

Example 10.11. Quartet in G, W. 95, movement 2, mm. 21b–24

fl. *p* *f* *p*

va. *p* *f* *p*

kb. *f* *p*

21 23