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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 9.6. Individual Sonatinas

Bach's ensemble sonatinas would have appealed not only to amateur keyboard players such as the Levys but to amateur string and wind players, who could enjoy listening to the soloist during the extended passages for keyboard alone. Some of these, as in Sonatina 10, had been complete "little pieces," now incorporated into a larger work with written-out embellishments and varied reprises. Others, like the Allegretto section in the second movement of Sonatina 3, are attached to the rest of the composition through modulating bridges in fantasia style, which here negotiate the third-relation between the E major of the Allegretto and the tonic G of the movement as a whole. Remote modulations such as this, alongside variations and simple passagework of the type prevalent in the sonatinas, would become essential to the modulating rondos in Bach's series for *Kenner und Liebhaber*, of which these works are among the forerunners. Yet the modulating bridge in Sonatina 3, indeed the entire Allegretto for solo keyboard, remains merely a charming episode, inorganically attached to a not particularly engaging if nicely scored minuet.

The following work, no. 4, was the first of the three-movement sonatinas and as such seems to have represented a step to a slightly higher level of compositional seriousness. Its opening Larghetto ends with a coda that serves as a bridge to the following Allegro, and the individual movements are also more integrated with one another, not so obviously patched together. The soloist contributes almost from the beginning, not merely in varied reprises or self-contained partial movements. Even more than in the early concertos, however, the score of no. 4 consists of an essential keyboard part joined or accompanied by ripieno orchestral parts. That Bach recognized this as a problem, and that his conception of the structure of these works continued to evolve, is evident from the opening of Sonatina 5, where the right hand of the keyboard is expressly silent as the violins begin, doubled by flutes; this sound would echo in several later concertos (online example 9.9).¹

Both in three movements, Sonatinas 4 and 5 follow the same basic design, yet the last movement of no. 5 is no longer the traditional light dance usually found at the end of a Berlin chamber work. Instead it is a more integrated version of the type of rondo that ended no. 3. In Sonatina 5, as in Sonatina 3, the second *couplet*, for keyboard alone, begins a minor third below the tonic. Again, too, the gap between the two successive passages is unmediated: the orchestral restatement of the main theme (in F) simply breaks off, and after a pause the keyboard enters in the new, seemingly unrelated key (D). But Bach now integrates the new solo passage with the rest of the movement. The very idea of a surprise entry by a soloist is anticipated within the rondo theme, which alternates in an almost Ramellian way between quiet passages for the two flutes and manic ones for the full ensemble (online example 9.10a). The solo *couplet* begins with a restatement of the rondo theme in the new key, returning to it several times in the course of the section (online example 9.10b). As in Sonatina 3, the last return to the rondo theme follows a modulating bridge in fantasy style for the soloist. But in Sonatina 5 the bridge ends, remarkably, on bIII (A-flat); the

¹ Notably W. 41. The word *tasto* over the pedal tone in the bass is short for *tasto solo* ("this key only"); see *Versuch*, ii.intro.29.

Example 9.9. (a) Sonatina no. 4 in G, W. 98, movement 1, mm. 1–8; (b) Sonatina no. 5 in F, W. 99, movement 1, mm. 1–6 (both without flutes)

Larghetto
con sord.

(a)

vn. 1
vn. 2
va.
kb.
bs.

6

p *f* **Largo**

p *f*

tasto

3

7 6 6 5

Example 9.10a. Sonatina no. 5 in F, W. 99, movement 3, mm. 1–6 (without horns)

Andante

fl. 1
fl. 2
vn. 1
vn. 2
va.
kb.
bs.

5
6

p
tr
ff
ff
ff
ff

Example 9.10b–c. Sonatina no. 5 in F, W. 99, movement 3, (b) mm. 115–21, (c) mm. 178–82 (both without horns)

(b) 115

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello/Double Bass

p

unis.

120 (c) 178

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello/Double Bass

mf

p

flutes answer this by restating the theme in the tonic F, echoing the original downward slip of a minor third (F–D) by another (A-flat–F) (online example 9.10c).

One must wonder, however, whether this truly beautiful and ingenious passage compensates for the relatively unimaginative first two movements of Sonatina 5. In other works from the series, the use of two keyboards in no. 6, or the seemingly endless embellishments and varied reprises that Bach added in the opening movements of nos. 9 and 10, hardly make up for what is in each case a simplistic underlying design—an alternating pair of rounded binary movements—devoid of notable harmony or modulations. Even less engaging is Sonatina 7, whose thin substance is drawn almost entirely from the two character pieces on which it was based. Both movements were originally named, it would seem, for philosophical generals, one ancient, one very much in the present—Xenophon and Frederick the Great.² But if the sonatina was intended as a tribute to the latter it did so in a musically unsophisticated way. Bach must have recognized the thinness of these two-movement works, for the last two sonatinas, which are among the three he published, are not only in three movements but are among the longest and most substantial musically of the entire series. In Sonatinas 11 and 12, all three movements are full-fledged sonata forms (with repeats), and the solo part even includes some of the passagework found in the quick movements of Bach's keyboard concertos.

² The original works were the *petites pièces* “La Xenophon,” W. 117/29 (movement 1), and La Frédérique, W. 65/29 (movement 3).