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The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach
Supplement 9.7. Bach's Later Berlin Concertos

Although Bach wrote no keyboard concertos during 1751 and 1752, those years saw few compositions of any type. When he returned to writing keyboard concertos in 1753–54, after the publication of the *Versuch*, it was with three minor-key works, W. 30–32. Of these at least the first two approach the level of Bach's best achievements of the 1740s and must have been written for his own use.¹ The first of these, in B minor—a key rarely used by Emanuel, unlike his father—introduces a few somewhat superficial innovations. Its solo part includes some novel types of figuration which, although not particularly challenging, must reflect time spent experimenting at the keyboard (online example 9.15). In the third movement, one of the trickier such passages combines with the main motive of the ritornello to yield polyphony in six real voices (online example 9.16). The climax of the movement, indeed of the work as a whole, the passage is particularly surprising because it follows a rare “premature reprise” (m. 150) that turns out to be a bluff; the real return follows only much later (m. 218).

The cadenza in the first movement falls where Mozart and other Classical and Romantic composers usually put it, after a brief interjection by the tutti at the end of the recapitulation. Although Benda and J. C. Bach, even in his early Berlin concertos, prepared cadenzas in this way, it was unusual for Emanuel, here reflecting a more intense confrontation between tutti and soloist than in his other concertos of the period (online example 9.17). Also more dramatic than usual is the connection between the first two movements, a borrowing from the idiom of the operatic *sinfonia*: the upbeat that begins the Adagio is written as part of the last measure of the opening Allegro (online example 9.18b). Yet this is no more or less an elision than that found between the first two movements in the earlier concerto W. 23. There the Adagio begins on a dissonance, continuing a progression that begins with the last chord of the previous movement (online example 9.18a). In the present case, Bach's notation merely makes the same thing explicit.² Again, the slow movement begins out of key, on V/VII of the previous movement, but now each solo episode also elides into the following ritornello, something not heard in the earlier concerto (online example 9.18c).

¹ The C-Minor Concerto W. 31 would become one of his favorite concert pieces, according to his letter to Grave of April 28, 1784 (no. 242 in Clark, *Letters*, 204).

² In Bach's autograph of W. 30 the end of the first movement is notated explicitly, whereas in W. 23 the final ritornello is indicated only by a “dal segno” marking.

Example 9.15. Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 1, (a) mm. 144–46, (b) mm. 205–6, (c) mm. 83–85, (d) mm. 170–71 (keyboard only)

(a) mm. 144–46

(b) mm. 205–6

(c) mm. 83–85

(d) mm. 170–71

Example 9.16. Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 3, mm. 170–73

170

vn. 1

vn. 2

va.

kb.

bs.

p *f* *f* *p*

Example 9.17. Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 1, mm. 267–74

267

vn.

va.

kb.

bs.

271

ff

f

ff

f

tr

7

Example 9.18. (a) Concerto in D Minor, W. 23, connection between movements 1 and 2 (b) same, Concerto in B Minor, W. 30; (c) Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 2, mm. 42–45

(a) **Poco andante**

vn. 1
vn. 2
va.
bs.

Fine

(b) **adagio**

p **f** **p** **f**

(c)

p **f** **p** **f**

Another detail worth noting in the first movement of W. 30 is its unusually simple opening: two unaccompanied half notes rising by a minor sixth (online example ex. 9.19). This sounds like the type of motive that might have been incorporated into a serious contrapuntal movement, and the entry of the viola and bass with moving eighth notes momentarily suggests a double fugue. But there is no imitation, and within a few measures the ritornello falls into a conventional sequence built out of the favorite “sugarloaf” motive of eighteenth-century Berlin composers. More important than any rigorous counterpoint or motivic development is the sheer rhythmic contrast between the violins' spacious half-note motion and the moving eighth and later sixteenth notes of the lower parts. Although the latter prevail in the ritornello—the sequence picks up the “sugarloaves” from the bass of measure 3—the broader rhythm implicit in the opening motive reveals Bach stepping back, if only for a few seconds, from the motoric pulsation in eighths that was still normal in most orchestral allegros. The idea culminates in a dramatic breaking off of the first solo phrase in the recapitulation (online example 9.20).

Example 9.19. Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 1, mm. 1–9 (viola omitted)

Allegro di molto

Example 9.20. Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 1, (a) mm. 35–38; (b) mm. 244–49

The image displays two sections of a musical score for the Concerto in B Minor, W. 30, movement 1. Section (a) covers measures 35 to 38, and section (b) covers measures 244 to 249. The score is arranged for a full orchestra, including Violins 1 and 2 (vn. 1, vn. 2), Viola (va.), Keyboard (kb.), and Bassoon (bs.).

Section (a) features a complex texture with trills (tr) and unison passages (unis.) in the strings. The keyboard part includes a sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line with a sixteenth-note accompaniment. Section (b) shows a more active texture with rapid sixteenth-note passages in the strings and a more melodic line in the keyboard. The keyboard part includes a seven-measure rest (7) and a six-measure rest (6) in the right hand, and a five-measure rest (5) in the left hand. The score is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C).

The G-Minor Concerto W. 32 of 1754, the last of the three minor-key works of 1753–54, must have been planned from the start as a more restrained, more lyrical composition than its predecessors, as was W. 24 of six years previously. Even the opening themes of its two quick movements are constructed in a relatively predictable way from a few repeated motives; perhaps Bach aimed here at something closer to the “Berlin classic” style (online example 9.24).

Example 9.24. Concerto in G Minor, W. 32, movement 1, mm. 1–8 (viola omitted)

That this style could nevertheless produce serious music is demonstrated by the F-Major Concerto W. 33 of 1755. The first movement seems only mildly engaging until a unison passage from the ritornello becomes the basis for a more sophisticated tutti-solo dialog than occurs in most earlier works. At first the unison idea is used in a conventional manner, repeated by the strings between phrases in the first solo episode (online example 9.25). Eight years earlier, in W. 23, solo and ripieno continued to alternate, each with its own material, after such a passage (online example 9.26). Now, however, the soloist picks up the last motive of the ripieno (the rising leap of a sixth), developing it into a little arpeggio figure. A similar exchange takes place in the last movement, where two ideas from the ritornello—a staccato passage in quarters that interrupts the ongoing motion in eighths, and a little chromatic trill figure—become the basis of an accelerating alternation between soloist and tutti (online example 9.27).

The level of expressive intensity is not high; this is a polite, witty conversation, not high drama as in the concertos of the 1740s or even W. 31. But the level of urgency does rise to a climax of sorts in the central solo episode of each quick movement, especially the first. There the unison idea of the strings eventually combines contrapuntally with solo passagework. After the strings drop out—following a dramatic arrival on V of V (m. 175)—the soloist continues to develop the repeated-note idea of the strings, reducing it in a Beethovenian way to isolated figures of just three, then two notes in the bass (online example 9.28). The soloist's passagework in thirty-seconds would be banal if it were the main event, but it is actually secondary, a motoric accompaniment to the main line in the strings—a variety of scoring unthinkable in the late-Baroque arias from which the solo keyboard concerto had emerged in Bach's youth.

That Fritz Oberdörffer, the first modern editor of the work, selected W. 33 to represent the composer's later concertos speaks highly for his discernment at a time when access to this music was not easy.³ To be sure, he might have selected it in part because of the rare presence of a true

³ Oberdörffer's edition (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952) was presumably based on research carried out before his emigration to the U.S. and his appointment at the University of Texas in

Example 9.25. Concerto in F, W. 33, movement 1, mm. 47–55

47

vn.

va.

kb.

bs.

51

unis.

1950; during the war, he had been persecuted by the Nazi regime (see Roeckle, “Oberdoerffer, Fritz”). At the same time as his edition of W. 33, Oberdörffer published W. 6 as an example of Bach's early work, another percipient choice.

Example 9.26. Concerto in D Minor, W. 23, movement 3, mm. 164–75

164

vn.

va.

kb.

bs.

170

f

f

f

tr

tr

tr

tr

f

Example 9.27. Concerto in F, W. 33, movement 3, mm. 178–92

The musical score is divided into three systems, each starting with a measure number: 178, 182, and 188. The instruments are Violin (vn.), Viola (va.), Keyboard (kb.), and Bassoon (bs.).

System 1 (mm. 178-181): The violin and viola parts begin with a trill (*tr*) in the final measure. The keyboard part features a complex, rhythmic pattern. The bassoon part has a trill in the final measure. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) for the strings and keyboard.

System 2 (mm. 182-187): The violin and viola parts have a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) in the final measure. The keyboard part has a dynamic marking of *f* (forte) in the final measure. The bassoon part has a dynamic marking of *f* in the final measure.

System 3 (mm. 188-191): The violin and viola parts have a dynamic marking of *f* in the first measure and *p* in the second measure. The keyboard part has a dynamic marking of *f* in the first measure and *p* in the second measure. The bassoon part has a dynamic marking of *f* in the first measure and *p* in the second measure.

Example 9.28. Concerto in F, W. 33, movement 3, mm. 169–80

169

vn. *f* *pp* *mf*

va. *f* *pp* *mf*

kb. *f* *pp* *mf*

bs. *f* *pp* *mf*

173

pp *mf*

pp *mf*

pp *mf*

177

p

tr

second theme (in the modern sense) within the last movement. Introduced in the dominant (m. 64) and later recapitulated in the tonic (m. 267), this was the sort of formal detail that members of Oberdörffer's generation sought in Bach's music, where it signified for them a trend toward later Classical and even Romantic style. This now seems an anachronistic way of understanding eighteenth-century music, yet even Oberdörffer's cadenza for the slow movement is concise and restrained, like Bach's own cadenzas (none survives for this work).

Of Bach's seven remaining Berlin concertos, only the three of 1762–63 were originally composed for stringed keyboard instruments. These are fairly ambitious works, contrasting in this respect with the ensemble sonatinas of the same years. Yet none breaks significant new ground unless it is in the intentionally square, periodic phrasing of the Poco adagio in W. 38. The movement is close to the classicizing aesthetic of the sonatinas, despite its D-minor tonality. Its nearly unbroken melodic motion in legato sixteenths is in the decorative manner of the sonatinas, and its pizzicato accompaniment is the type of novel color explored in those pieces. The C-Minor Concerto W. 37 is more serious expressively, and Bach must have continued to perform it at Hamburg, where he varied some of the solo passages and added horn parts for the outer movements.⁴ Yet this work too shares some of the compositional laxity of the sonatinas, lacking the ingenuity that Bach applied to his prewar concertos

Bach's four other late Berlin concertos are interesting chiefly for their scoring with solo wind instruments. Of the two that originated as organ concertos—perhaps for Princess Amalia's instrument at Charlottenburg Palace—Bach subsequently arranged the first, W. 34 in G, for flute. In both, the soloist first enters with a *cantabile* “second theme.” As in Bach's organ sonatas of the same period, little if anything in these works is uniquely suited to the organ, although the texture of the solo part in W. 34 is a little thinner, on the whole, than in Bach's other keyboard concertos. It contains fewer chords or inner voices, and despite the grand symphonic ritornellos of the quick movements, the solo passagework in the latter consists more often of a single line divided between the two hands. Such things made sense in an organ concerto, and they also facilitated the adaptation of the solo part for flute, which Bach arranged by entering it into a staff intentionally left blank in a copyist's score of the work. He also later revised the second organ concerto, W. 35 in E-flat, although in that case he merely added optional horn parts rather than arranging the solo part for another instrument.⁵

The symphonic ritornellos in both concertos imply grand concert performances with a professional string ensemble. But if these were commissioned by the princess, W. 34 may have proved too challenging, for W. 35 in E-flat is distinctively shorter and its solo part simpler, largely lacking virtuoso passagework. For the flute version of the G-major concerto (W. 169)—Bach's

⁴ Bach's autograph horn parts are attached to his original autograph score in P 356; his autograph variations for the solo part were inserted into Michel's copy of the latter in St 526. Yet cadenzas in the latter for the last two movements were original entries by the copyist; the cadenza for the Andante is integrated into the main body of the movement, as in the Hamburg concertos.

⁵ Bach's autograph flute part and basso continuo figures for W. 34 are added in P 769, his horn parts for W. 35 in P 356.

only woodwind concerto to be arranged *from* its keyboard counterpart—Bach rewrote the most obviously unidiomatic solo passages, especially those that descended too low or called for passagework divided between the hands. Another problem, which Bach addressed only after writing out his initial adaptation, was the lack of breathing spaces for the soloist during some of the lengthy passagework episodes. The longest of these originally comprised sixteen measures of unbroken sixteenth notes (movement 1, measures 74–89 and the even longer parallel passage in measures 278–94). Bach broke these up, re-assigning two measures in each passage to the ripieni (measures 77 and 81, then 283 and 287); these provide relief for the soloist while developing the opening motive of the movement in imitation.⁶ One wonders whether the changes were made in response to an objection from the flutist who presumably commissioned the arrangement. Bach's alterations appear, however, to have been made soon after his initial entry of the part, and in the last movement he seems to have inserted resting points for the soloist during his initial draft of the flute part.

If Bach did compose the organ concertos for Princess Amalia, she could not have insisted on their exclusive use, for both works circulated fairly widely in manuscript copies, and the first eventually appeared in an unauthorized London printed edition.⁷ More cadenzas survive for W. 34 than for any other Bach concerto,⁸ and as late as 1831 Johann Christian Kittel, one of J. S. Bach's last pupils, used the theme of the last movement as the basis for a discussion of melodic improvisation.⁹ It is most unlikely that Bach prepared the flute version of W. 34 for Amalia's brother the king, for Bach seems to have tossed it off rather quickly. He did begin writing the new solo part rather carefully, also revising the bass line (with new continuo figures) in the partial score that his copyist had prepared for him. He even changed the precise ornament signs of the original keyboard part to plain “tr” markings, since, as he mentioned in the *Versuch*, non-keyboard players knew only the latter. By the third movement, however, Bach was merely adding figures to the lower staff of the original solo part, and many pages pass without a single altered reading for the flute. Bach did have to rewrite a substantial portion of the figuration in the second solo episode of this movement, but when two measures of the latter passed beneath the bottom note of the flute, he simply deleted them.¹⁰ A more inventive strategy, used to break up a long stretch of solo passagework during the final solo section, was the insertion of three measures from

⁶ The earlier reading of all these measures, with the flute playing a minimally altered version of the original keyboard part, remains visible in the autograph beneath Bach's cross-outs.

⁷ *A Second Set of Three Concertos for the Organ or Harpsicord* (London: Longman, Lukey, ca. 1769–75), containing also W. 18 and 24 (the “first set,” published by Walsh in 1765, was a pirated reissue of Bach's own first editions of W. 11, 14, and 25; see CPEBCW 3/7:155).

⁸ In addition to the eight by Bach himself in Bc 5871 (four for movement 2, two for each of the others), SA 2659 contains an additional group in the hand of Johann Samuel Carl Possin (see Enßlin, *Die Bach-Quellen*, 274).

⁹ *Der angehende praktische Organist*, vol. 3 (Erfurt, 1831), 20ff.

¹⁰ The deleted passage corresponds to mm. 146–47 of the keyboard version.

the ritornello (following measure 288 of the keyboard version). That Bach had not entirely lost interest in the project as he adapted the third movement is suggested by a few instances of so-called “decoloration” (*Dekolierung*), where he simplified the original keyboard figuration to legato eighths (online example 9.29). Nevertheless, Bach's summary treatment of the arrangement contrasts with the care that he took to enter variations for solo keyboard parts in other concertos during the same period.¹¹

Example 9.29. [Concerto in G, W. 34, movement 3, mm. 158–61](#), with [flute version of solo part \(= W. 169\)](#) on top staff, as in the autograph P 354

The image displays a musical score for measures 158-161 of the Concerto in G, BWV 34, movement 3. The score is arranged in five systems, each representing a different instrument: flute (fl.), violin 1 (vn. 1), violin 2 (vn. 2), keyboard (kb.), and basso continuo (bs.). The flute part is written in treble clef and features a melodic line with slurs and a 'p' dynamic marking. The violin parts are also in treble clef, with the first violin (vn. 1) playing a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes and the second violin (vn. 2) playing a similar pattern. The keyboard part is written in treble clef and features a complex figuration of eighth notes. The basso continuo part is written in bass clef and features a simple rhythmic accompaniment. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

¹¹ E.g., in W. 4, where the handwriting of Bach's meticulously notated revisions in St 618 appears to date from the 1750s (see CPEBCW 3/9.2:171).