

Doctoral Thesis
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Wilhelm Friedemann Bach:
Sonatas, Polonaises, Fantasies
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1. Case history to the research

The life and work of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, who plays only a minor role in the documentation of music history was treated for the first time by Martin Falck in his monography published in 1913 in Leipzig (Martin Falck: *Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. Sein Leben und seine Werke mit thematischem Verzeichnis seiner Kompositionen und zwei Bildern*. Leipzig 1913, unaltered new edition Lindau: C. F. Kahnt, 1956). With his work Martin Falck broke new ground, gathering most precise information available at the time concerning this topic. He was also mainly responsible for cataloguing the musical legacy of Wilhelm Friedemann. As a basis for the historical background of his book he made use of research and works of his predecessors covering the life path and music of Johann Sebastian Bach. The most outstanding among these was Johann Nikolaus Forkel's *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig 1802 modern release by Walther Vetter, Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1974) and the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg titled *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik* (Berlin, 1754-1778). Disregarding the part dealing mostly with the childhood of Wilhelm Friedemann in the manner of adventurous narrative, the relayed information is still relevant today. As to the history of genesis of the works – held against the backdrop of recent research – their credibility may be questionable. His work does not go beyond organization of the pieces and some basic comments of aesthetic nature, thus not taking on the analysis of Wilhelm Friedemann's entire accomplishments as a composer. Nevertheless, next to the

organization of pieces many details of the artistic records are of greatest value for musicology today. The manuscripts of Wilhelm Friedemann and most copies of his works perished during World War II. A reconstruction of these is only possible based on depiction by Martin Falck.

The Wilhelm Friedemann researchers of later years, whose works were exclusively published in the volumes of *Bach-Jahrbuch* between 1920 and 1950, treated merely sporadic chapters of the composer's life with exhausting thoroughness. Friedrich Chrysander outlines in his essay „Johann Sebastian Bach und sein Sohn Friedemann Bach in Halle, 1713-1768" (In: *Jahrbuch für musikalische Wissenschaften*, 1867, 235-248.) the events of the time in Halle. Following such pioneering efforts Conrad Freyse deals with the school exercise books of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach in his study „Die Schulhefte Wilhelm Friedemann Bachs" (In: *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1951-1952, 103-119.), Peter Epstein in his article „W. Fr. Bachs Bewerbung in Frankfurt" (In: *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1925, 138-139.) reveals details about the candidacy of the composer in Frankfurt, whereas the two studies of Heinrich Miesner („Beziehungen zwischen den Familien Stahl und Bach." In: *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1933, 71-76. and „Graf v. Keyserlingk und Minister v. Happe: zwei Gönner der Familie Bach." In: *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1934, 101-115) follow up on contemporary social relationships of the Bach family. A minor part of Wilhelm Friedemann's activity as a composer was first treated in a critical way by Peter Schleuning. His book, which retraces the evolution and development of fantasia genre over the centuries until the end of the 18th century is also a structural and stylistic analysis of Wilhelm

Friedemann's pieces of related genre (Peter Schleuning: *Die freie Fantasie. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der klassischen Klaviermusik*. Göttingen: Verlag Alfred Kümmerle, 1973).

The most extensive work which compiles the current research on Wilhelm Friedemann was written by Peter Wollny. The result of his ramified basic collection is his doctoral thesis (*Studies in the Music of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: Sources and Style*. Michigan: UMI, 1995) in which he not only tries to define the circumstances of evolution of the works in a most precise way, but he also examines them from a stylistic point of view. The interesting fact of this analysis is the comparison between the compositions of Wilhelm Friedemann and Carl Philipp Emanuel. Unfortunately, due to the narrow framework of his writings his reasoning focuses only on the most major aspects of the pieces.

Next to the works of the two major pillars of research, Martin Falck and Peter Wollny, the English and the German great encyclopedias, in their summarizing manner, are also without doubt an indispensable source of information (Stanley Sadie (ed.): *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Second edition*, London: Macmillan, 2001 and Ludwig Finscher (ed.): *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Zweite, neubearbeitete Ausgabe*. Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1999).

In addition to the articles of the above mentioned volumes of *Bach-Jahrbuch*, among others Carl Zehler also published the results of his research in the same compilation („W. F. Bach und seine hallische Wirksamkeit." In: *Bach-Jahrbuch*, 1910, 103-132). His work was

primarily helpful in the mapping of Wilhelm Friedemann's biography. Further information was obtained from writings about the genealogy of the Bach family, whereas as most efficient proved the volumes of Martin Geck (*Die Bach-Söhne*. Rowohlt's Monographien. Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 2003), Carl Hermann Bitter (*Carl Philipp Emanuel und Wilhelm Friedemann Bach und deren Brüder*. Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Müller, 1868), Karl Geiringer (*Die Musikerfamilie Bach. Musiktradition in sieben Generationen* unter Mitarbeit von Irene Geiringer. Second edition, München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1983) and a volume issued in the edition of Christoph Wolff: *The New Grove Bach Family* (hungarian translation: *A Bach-család*, Grove monográfiák, Budapest: Zeneműkiadó Vállalat, 1989).

As the events in the life of Wilhelm Friedemann are strongly tied to his father, one cannot lose sight of the literature dealing with the biography of Johann Sebastian Bach. The most information to this subject was drawn from Christoph Wolff's monography: *Johann Sebastian Bach, The Learned Musician* (hungarian translation: *Johann Sebastian Bach, a tudós zeneszerző*. (trans.): Széky János, Budapest: Park Könyvkiadó, 2004).

In order to examine the various types of music special literature was favoured accordingly – concerning the polonaise, Barbara Siemens (*The Piano Genre of the Nineteenth-Century Polonaise*, The University of British Columbia, 2002), by my discussion regarding the fantasies I was supported by the summarising work of Peter Schleuning. The personal perspective which aroused during the examination of the pieces induced

the use of non-musical sources as well. To approach the polonaise from a rhetorical aspect made the consultance of material about classical rhetoric necessary. In this respect I have been aided, among others, by István Szathmári, author of *Alakzatlexikon* (Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó, 2008).

Writing the chapter on dealing with the difficulty of instruments I was assisted by two professional works: a volume written by Eszter Gát for technical school students (*Hangszerész (zongora, cimbalom) szakmai ismeret a szakmunkásképző iskolák számára*. Budapest: Műszaki Könyvkiadó, 1994), which gave me an insight in basic mechanism of instruments and the book of Katalin Komlós (*Fortepianók és zenéjük. Németország, Ausztria és Anglia, 1760-1800*. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2005) with its clear directions about the historical background to development of pianofortes.

II. Sources

The primary source to the analysis of musical works were the scores as such. In the absence of an entire complete edition, I obtained assistance from the most trustworthy publication, the Urtext edition; in the case concerning the polonaise it was the Urtext release of publisher Henle (*Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: Zwölf Polonaisen* ed.: Andreas Böhnert, G. Henle Verlag, München, 1993), by the sonatas from the complete edition of Wilhelm Friedemann, released by Carus (*Wilhelm Friedemann Bach Gesammelte Werke* ed.: Peter Wollny, Volume 1., Carus-Verlag, Stuttgart – Bach-Archiv, Leipzig, 2009), whereas by covering the fantasies the

release by Schott Universal (*Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: Klavierfantasien* ed.: Peter Schleuning, B. Schott's Söhne, Mainz, 1972) was instrumental.

III. Method

The method of working on the designated subject had a dual character. I treated as principal duty the gathering of all pertaining audited information based upon the contemporary musical research and its compilation in Hungarian. Equally important was my intention of analysing the pieces according to self established criteria based on personal privilege, nevertheless, not consistent through all genre. The guiding motif of the chapter on polonaise was highlighting the pieces of the series from a rhetorical aspect. In dissecting the sonatas and fantasies the two major perspectives to be analysed were the circumstances of origination and the formal construction. In dealing with the sonatas, I compared the different variations in their significant diversity, whereas by the fantasies I tried to define the separate types as well as to show their close connection to sonatas. In the chapter *Wilhelm Friedemann Bach korának hangszerei* (*Musical Instruments in the Time of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach*), my goal was to present the significance of sound rendering of instruments in the work out process of interpretation by showing the mechanics of the three cord-and-keys basic type instruments: clavichord, harpsichord and pianoforte in 18th century Germany.

IV. Results

My dissertation is a first time discussion in Hungarian language on the composer's life and artistic activity. The bulk of information presented in my work is otherwise only available in English and German. In the critical treatment of the collected data from different sources in foreign languages, often contradictory and incomplete, I was guided by my intention to synchronise the information in such way as to enable an interpretation in a scientific-musical manner. The evaluation of the works from the aspects of structure and style also overcomes scarcity. In case of the polonaise, for example, not even an attempt of such analysis had been made before. Aside from its novelty, the utilisation of rhetorical and instrument-historical aspects constitutes an impetus to debate and offers the possibility to analyse the pieces in an unusual, up to the present unattended way.

V. Documentation of pursuits pertaining to the doctoral thesis

Due to their special musical spirit, the works of Wilhelm Friedemann encounter many obstacles on their way to popularity and are therefore not part of standard repertoire. In my concert performance of Johann Sebastian's and the Bach-Sons' music I play the fantasies of Wilhelm Friedemann, while his smaller pieces prove helpful in my work as a tutor. In the past fifteen years my harpsichord solo recital, *The Music of the Bach Family*, was on schedule in Budapest, Szeged, Miskolc, Berlin, Montisi as well as at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt in Weimar, on the occasion of my debut recital on 8 June 2009.