

Thesis abstract of DLA dissertation

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# Interpretation of C. P. E. Bach's Ornamentation

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## I. The precedents of my research

My profound interest in the works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach goes back to the 1980s, at which time I was studying at the Academy of Music. I had already begun playing the works of this master; at least to the extent that they were accessible at the time. In the process of getting acquainted with this music, I was faced with multiple questions regarding the composer's choice of instruments, instrumental technique and, naturally, his choice of ornamentation. I soon found that the literature available at the time was scarce in providing clear answers to all the questions regarding ornamentation. Only a small amount of literature on the topic was available, most of which were part of the introductions to publications of the master's solo keyboard works, discussing their performance practice and ornamentation. The most important and helpful publication on the topic was László Somfai's book about Joseph Haydn's piano sonatas, published in 1979. In this book, the author devotes an entire chapter to the ornamentation of C. P. E. Bach, discussing in detail the ornaments appearing in the *Versuch*, and their relation to the music of Joseph Haydn.

In 1994, I was commissioned by the Swedish company Grammofon AB BIS (now BIS Records), to record all of C. P. E. Bach's keyboard concertos, including his twelve sonatinas for solo keyboard and orchestra. This became a series containing 20 CDs. Simultaneously, I began recording C. P. E. Bach's complete works for solo keyboard in 1997, also for BIS. This set of 42 CDs will soon be completed. Already in the preparatory phase of this project, multiple exiting questions and problems arose. In the 1990s, most of C. P. E. Bach's keyboard concertos had not yet been published, therefore I used manuscript sources and early prints found in libraries for the recordings. At the same time I was also studying the sources of the solo keyboard works preparing an edition of C. P. E. Bach's music for Könemann Music. These four volumes also contain early versions of numerous works, thus offering an easy comparison of differences in the notation, together with an appendix with detailed description of C. P. E. Bach's ornaments. Along with the challenges presented by the evaluation of the different sources of the works and the sorting out of their alternate versions, the

greatest challenge posed by both the recording and the publication was the ornamentation. I soon realised that the notation of ornaments often differed significantly between works surviving in manuscripts and those in early prints. Pondering the reasons behind these differences made re-reading and re-evaluating the *Versuch* inevitable. Over the course of my studies, it became clear to me that the available literature on the subject was insufficient and often one-sided. I did everything I could to shed light on and, if possible, systemize the changes C. P. E. Bach's notation of ornaments underwent during his long lifetime, as well as the differences between the ornaments in the hand-written and the printed publications of his works. During my work I came to realise that it was not so much the ornaments themselves, but their notation which underwent changes. This observation may be considered the conclusion of this thesis. It came to my attention that as C. P. E. Bach had been working on the *Versuch* in the early 1750s, he grew to require a more systematic and unified way of notating his ornaments. This tendency can be observed in his published works already starting from the 1750s. The differences between the notation of ornaments in the printed and hand-written versions of Bach's keyboard concertos only made the question of ornamentation more complex. It also became clear how often Bach corrected or even thoroughly revised his concertos throughout his lifetime. In the revised versions, we can often observe a more modern notation updated in accordance with the composer's new system, however often resulting in a colourful mixture with the older notation style.

## II. Sources

The answers to most of my questions were to be found in the *Versuch*. This book has been basically my only written source for my entire work researching this topic. The music of C. P. E. Bach itself can be regarded as another source. The study of hundreds of works for keyboard or including keyboard part and the examination of their reading against the background of the *Versuch* have brought to fruition a new interpretation of C. P. E. Bach's ornaments. In the process of recording and publishing Bach's works, I found the comparatory study

of his hand-written and printed scores to be an essential step. This process gave me tremendous insight into the understanding of ornaments to be found in the *Versuch* and the works themselves. My thesis offers the documentation of this lengthy work process, and can also be considered a complement to my two sets of integral recordings of C. P. E. Bach's keyboard works.

### III. Method

In my research I explore the position of the *Versuch* both in cultural and music history. In terms of cultural history, Bach's book reflects the enlightened and rational spirit of the court of Frederick the Great. In terms of music history, while C. P. E. Bach shows a thorough understanding of the musical practices of his day, he also demonstrates a strong pursuit of creating and systemizing something new, and modernizing the existing practices. While the book often refers to contemporary notational practices, often with a rather critical demeanour, it also examines the weak points, suggesting improved alternate solutions. Due to this aspiration toward renewal, Bach's book offers a great deal of help regarding the interpretation of music composed around and after its publication. At the same time, the book is also infused by indirect information regarding the notational practices of the prior period. However, the *Versuch* does not attempt to give a detailed description of the performance of earlier styles. Therefore it would be incorrect to apply it to music of earlier times.

In light of this, I have striven to emphasize the relationship between the *Versuch* and C. P. E. Bach's music, as well as the music of his time. I explored the book's instructions regarding ornaments in general as well as in particular in connection with the individual types of ornaments, attempting an objective interpretation in the practice. I aim to systemize and explain C. P. E. Bach's ornaments as clearly as possible and to be equally applicable by musicians and readers with a more theoretical interest. I only quote other contemporary treatises if they are relevant to a better understanding of Bach's views, but I did not attempt a systematical comparison of the *Versuch* with other theoretical writings of the period.

## IV. Results

My intensive study of the *Versuch*, spanning several decades, has naturally had a great impact on my own work in performing, recording and teaching. I am convinced that without the thorough study of the *Versuch*, I would not have reached these results. This is particularly true regarding the practice discussed at the end of my study, which I have named ornament-substitution. No one has, to my knowledge, systematically explored this practice before me, particularly not based on the teachings of the *Versuch*. In my experience, many, even the most historically oriented performers, play C. P. E. Bach's ornaments often incorrectly. I hope that the results given in my study will play a vital part in the re-evaluation of the C. P. E. Bach-interpretation, particularly in regards to ornamentation.

## V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of this study

### Publications

#### 1. Articles

- *C. P. E. Bach's Sonatina in F major* Wq 64/1: Clavichord International, May 1998 & November 1998
- *An Easy Sonata of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and its Less Easy Embellishments*: Clavichord International, May 1999 & November 1999
- *Some Practical Thoughts on the Performance of C. P. E. Bach's Keyboard Music*, series of articles: Clavichord International, November 2010, May 2011, May 2014
- *Kaksoislyönti ja sen 'sukulaiset' C. P. E. Bachin musiikissa*: Klavikordikirja, Sibelius-Akatemian kirkkomusiikki-osaston julkaisu, Nr. 24, Sibelius-Akatemia, Helsinki, 2001

## 2. Music Editions

- C. P. E. Bach: *Complete Piano Music*, vols. 1-4:  
*6 Preussische Sonaten* Wq 48, *6 Württembergische Sonaten* Wq 49, *6 Frühe Sonatinen* Wq 64, *6 Sonaten mit veränderten Reprisen* Wq 50, *6 'Fortsetzung'-Sonaten 1*, Wq 51, *6 'Fortsetzung'-Sonaten 2*, Wq 52, *18 Probestücke* Wq 63, *6 Leichte Sonaten* Wq 53, *6 Damensonaten* Wq 54, Könemann Music 1999. The series was discontinued after volume 4.
- C. P. E. Bach: *6 Sonates á l'usage des Dames* Wq 54, facsimile edition with commentaries, Éditions J. M. Fuzeau, Courlay, 2006
- C. P. E. Bach: *The Complete Works, vol. I/9.4: Keyboard Concertos from Manuscript Sources IV* Packard Humanities Institute, Los Altos, CA, USA, 2012
- C. P. E. Bach: *The Complete Works, vol. I/6.3: Keyboard Sonatas from Manuscript Sources I-II*, Packard Humanities Institute, Los Altos, CA, USA, 2019

## 3. Recordings of C. P. E. Bach's music:

- *The Complete Keyboard Concertos*, BIS Records 1994–2013
  - Vol. 1: Wq 1, 2, 3 BIS 707
  - Vol. 2: Wq 4, 7, 12 BIS 708
  - Vol. 3: Wq 6, 8, 18 BIS 767
  - Vol. 4: Wq 9, 13, 17 BIS 768
  - Vol. 5: Wq 1, 14, 19 BIS 785
  - Vol. 6: Wq 15, 25, 32 BIS 786
  - Vol. 7: Wq 4, 28, 29 BIS 857
  - Vol. 8: Wq 30, 33, 34 BIS 867
  - Vol. 9: Wq 5, 35, 96 (Sonatina), 98 (Sonatina) BIS 868
  - Vol. 10: Wq 16, 36, 99 (Sonatina) BIS 914
  - Vol. 11: Wq 10, 37, 97 (Sonatina), 100 (Sonatina) BIS 1097
  - Vol. 12: Wq 20, 38, 102 (Sonatina) BIS 1127
  - Vol. 13: Wq 22, 103 (Sonatina), 104 (Sonatina) BIS 1307
  - Vol. 14: Wq 26, 40, 101 (Sonatina) BIS 1487
  - Vol. 15: Wq 23, 39, 464 (Sonatina) BIS 1422

Vol. 16: Wq 21, 27, 110 (Sonatina) BIS 1587  
Vol. 17: Wq 31, 41, 42 BIS 1687  
Vol. 18: Wq 43/1-4 BIS 1787  
Vol. 19: Wq 43/5-6, 44, 45 BIS 1957  
Vol. 20: Wq 46, 47, 109 (Sonatina) BIS 1967  
Miklós Spányi, harpsichord, fortepiano, tangent piano  
Menno van Delft, harpsichord (vol. 16)  
Cristiano Holtz, harpsichord (vol. 20)  
Tamás Szekendy, fortepiano (vol. 20)  
Concerto Armonico Budapest (vols. 1-13, 18-20), Péter Szűts,  
leader (vols. 1-13), Márta Ábrahám, leader (vols. 18-20),  
Péter Szűts, conductor (vol. 20)  
Ensemble Opus X, Petri Tapio Mattson, leader (vols. 14-17)

– The Solo Keyboard Music, BIS Records 1997–  
(Beside the works mentioned in the title other compositions are  
included as well)

Vol. 1: The Prussian Sonatas 1 BIS 878  
Vol. 2: The Prussian Sonatas 2 BIS 879  
Vol. 3: Early Sonatas and Sonatinas BIS 882  
Vol. 4: Six Early Sonatas from 1731–1740 BIS 963  
Vol. 5: ‘Leichte Sonaten’ 1 BIS 964  
Vol. 6: ‘Leichte Sonaten’ 2 BIS 978  
Vol. 7: Sonatas from 1748–49 BIS 1086  
Vol. 8: Sonatas and ‘Petites Pièces’ I BIS 1087  
Vol. 9: ‘Damensonaten’ BIS 1088  
Vol. 10: Sonatas and Suite (1749–1752) BIS 1189  
Vol. 11: Sonatas from 1746–47 BIS 1195  
Vol. 12: Sonatas and ‘Petites Pièces’ II BIS 1198  
Vol. 13: Sonatas, Sinfonias & Other Pieces BIS 1328  
Vol. 14: Sonatas from 1763 & Dances BIS 1487  
Vol. 15: Sonatas and ‘Petites Pièces’ III BIS 1422  
Vol. 16: ‘Württemberg’ Sonatas (1) BIS 1423  
Vol. 17: ‘Württemberg’ Sonatas (2) BIS 1424  
Vol. 18: Sonatas, Dances and Other Pieces from 1766 BIS 1492  
Vol. 19: Various Pieces from the 1760s BIS 1493  
Vol. 20: Sonatas from 1760–66 BIS 1623

- Vol. 21: Six Sonatas with Varied Reprises BIS 1624  
 Vol. 22: Probestücke BIS 1762  
 Vol. 23: Sonatas from 1750–58 and other pieces BIS 1763  
 Vol. 24: Sonatas from 1740–44 BIS 1764  
 Vol. 25: Sonatas from 1740–47 BIS 1819  
 Vol. 26: ‘Fortsetzung’ Sonatas Nos. 1-3 BIS 2040  
 Vol. 27: ‘Fortsetzung’ Sonatas Nos. 4-6 BIS 2043  
 Vol. 28: ‘Zweyte Fortsetzung’ Sonatas Nos. 1-3 BIS 2045  
 Vol. 29: ‘Zweyte Fortsetzung’ Sonatas Nos. 4-6 BIS 2046  
 Vol. 30: Kurze und leichte Clavierstücke BIS 2125  
 Vol. 31: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’: Sonatas from Collections  
 1 & 2 BIS 2131  
 Vol. 32: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’: Sonatas and Rondos from  
 Collections 1 & 2 BIS 2205  
 Vol. 33: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’ Collection 3 BIS 2213  
 Vol. 34: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’ Collection 4 BIS 2254  
 Vol. 35: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’ Collection 5 BIS 2260  
 Vol. 36: ‘für Kenner und Liebhaber’ Collection 6 BIS 2263  
 Vol. 37: Sonatas, Variations & Fugues from 1745–55 BIS 2331  
 Vol. 38: The Earliest Works, BIS 2337  
 (Vols. 39-42 in preparation)  
 Miklós Spányi, clavichord, fortepiano, tangent piano,  
 harpsichord, organ

#### 4. Concert performances

C. P. E. Bach’s music has been regularly featuring in most of my concert programs since the 200th anniversary of C. P. E. Bach’s death in 1988. I have been playing concerts on five instruments: clavichord, harpsichord, fortepiano, tangent piano and organ and have performed in most countries of Europe and in the USA.