

C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788) - The organ works

Background

Carl Phillip Emanuel was born on March 8th, 1714, the second surviving son of Johann Sebastian and Maria Barbara Bach. His middle name was in honour of his godfather, the composer Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) but he was invariably known as Emanuel.

He is probably best known by generations of pianists for his *Solfeggietto* in C minor but, in much the same way as knowing only *Für Elise* would give a very lopsided appreciation of Beethoven, there is a great deal more to the music of C P E Bach. Taught by his father, Emanuel was a pupil at St. Thomas School, Leipzig from the age of ten before studying law at Leipzig University. Although he successfully graduated, he never actually practised the law.

Emanuel's mother died suddenly in 1720 when he was six and he appears to have had a somewhat troubled relationship with his father's second wife, Anna Magdalena. Whether he resented her appearance on the scene so soon after his mother's death we shall probably never know. Schweitzer (*J. S. Bach - English edition, 1911*) points out that while his father was immensely proud of Emanuel ('Emanuel caused his father nothing but joy'), the latter's treatment of his widowed stepmother was less than honourable: 'He did not take his stepmother in her hour of poverty, and allowed her, two years after the death of husband (1752) to beg for alms from the Council . . . and finally let her die in receipt of poor relief, on 27th February 1760'.

For thirty years (1738-68) Emanuel lived and worked in Berlin in the service of the Crown Prince of Prussia, the future Frederick the Great. Here he both composed a large quantity of keyboard music and also compiled his *Essay on the true art of playing keyboard instruments* which was widely acclaimed and used by, amongst many others, Haydn, Beethoven, Cramer and Clementi. It was during this period that his organ works were written.

The last twenty years of his life were spent in Hamburg where he succeeded his godfather, Telemann, as Kapellmeister, having responsibility for the music at St. Michael's Church and several other Protestant churches in the city. From this period came most of his choral works including no fewer than twenty-one Passion settings and more than seventy cantatas and other liturgical works.

During his lifetime, Emanuel was considerably more well-known and esteemed than his father had ever been: in 1788, for example, his oratorio *The Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus* was conducted on three occasions by none other than Mozart in Vienna. After a period of comparative neglect, his achievements as a major figure in the evolution of music are now more fully recognized.

The organ works

It might seem a little strange that the son of the great organist and organ composer Johann Sebastian should leave so little music for the instrument. It seems that in his early years he was actually a more than competent organist and actually applied (unsuccessfully) for two organist posts: in 1734 at Naumburg and, later in 1753, at Zittau. By the time he arrived in Hamburg in 1768 he had more or less lost the ability to play the organ. As Charles Burney says, referring to his visit to Hamburg in 1772 [Bach] 'has so long neglected organ-playing that he says he has lost all use of the feet'. With just one exception, all of Emanuel's organ music is set out on two staves with no independent pedal part. Although he played a wide variety of keyboard instruments, his personal preference was for the delicate and subtle tones of the clavichord. The catalyst for the organ works appears to have been Anna Amalia, the younger sister of Frederick II. In 1755 a new organ was commissioned from the Berlin organ builder Migendt for the princess's private apartment. It was completed in 1756 and was actually built by Ernst

Marx (who worked for Migendt) and still exists in the Kirche zur frohen Botschaft in Karlshorst on the outskirts of Berlin.

Princess Amalia didn't care much for playing the pedals (which partly explains why the only pedal parts in Emanuel's organ works are in long, sustained notes. The other reason is, presumably, his own rusty pedal technique!) Despite this, the organ had a well-developed pedal department:

<u>1. Manual</u>		<u>2. Ober Werck</u>		<u>3. Pedal</u>	
Bordun	16	Gedact	8	SubBass	16
Principal	8	Quinda Töne	8	Violon	8
Viola di Gamba	8	Salicinat	8	Bass Flöt	8
Rohrflöt	8	Rohrflöt	4	Quinta	6
Flauto dolce	8	Nasat	3	Octave	4
Octave	4	Octave	2	Posaun	16
Viola di Gamba	4	Sifflöt	1	Glock.	
Quinta	3	Tremolant		Manual coupler	
Octave	2				
Quinte	1				
Mixtur	V				

The manual compass of C - f''' was unusual for the time. It was normally just four octaves (C - c'') which explains why Johann Carl Friedrich Rellstab's unauthorised posthumous publication of the organ sonatas in 1790 transposes two of the works into lower keys. (A recording of the sonatas on the *Amalia* organ by Jörg-Hannes Hahn is available on the Cantate label, C 58016).

Disregarding those organ works of disputed authenticity, there are:

Five sonatas:

<u>Catalogue no.</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Date</u>
H.87	G minor	Berlin 1755
H.86	D major	Berlin 1755
H.84	F major	Berlin 1755
H.85	A minor	Berlin 1755
H.134	Bb Major	Berlin 1758

Praeludium:

H.107	D major	Berlin 1756
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Six Fugues:

H.75.5	C minor	1754 (with Fantasia in C minor)
H.101	A major	1757 (revised 1762)
H.99	D minor	1758
H.102	Eb Major	1762
H.100	F major	1762
H.101.5	G minor	1765

Chorales:

H.336.1	O Gott, du frommer Gott
H.336.2	Ich bin ja, Herr, in deiner Macht
H.336.3	Jesus, meine Zuversicht

H.336.4
H.336.5

Wer nur den lieben Gott Lässt walten
Komm, heiliger Geist, Herre Gott

(There are two catalogues of C P E Bach's music: that of Alfred Wotquenne, in 1905, in which works are designated Wq. numbers and that of E. Eugene Helm in 1989, where H. numbers are used.)

Only the sonata in Bb (H.134) was published in Bach's lifetime. In his 1790 edition of the sonatas Rellstab includes H.53, a keyboard work which features as its third movement a theme and nine variations, as the fifth sonata. In order to cater for the limited manual compass he transposes it from the original D minor into C minor. He also changes the order of the sonatas and precedes them with the Praeludium, H.107:

Rellstab - Prelude and Six Sonatas (1790):

H.107	Praeludium in D major
H.86	Sonata No. 1 in D major
H.87	Sonata No. 2 in G minor
H.134	Sonata No. 3 in Bb major
H.84	Sonata No. 4 in F major
H.53	Sonata No. 5 in C minor (original in D minor)
H.85	Sonata No. 6 in G minor (original in A minor)

Some recordings of the organ sonatas also feature the keyboard sonata in A major H.133, so the situation is quite complicated! Publishers and composers of the time would obviously have been keen to attract as wide a market of potential customers as possible and denoting keyboard works as suitable for harpsichord, clavichord, organ and even pianoforte would be likely to increase potential sales.

Characteristics of the sonatas

It's sobering to realize that less than a decade after his father was wrestling with the labyrinthine contrapuntal complexities of the *Art of Fugue* and the Six-Part Ricercar from the *Musical Offering*, Emanuel was working on the C minor Fantasia and Fugue and the first four organ sonatas. As far as the sonatas are concerned, the contrast could scarcely be greater.

One of the first things anyone unfamiliar with these sonatas might notice is that there are frequent rests and silences, sometimes even whole bars of complete silence. Sometimes the music just comes to a sudden halt and the composer indicates a complete bar's rest.

Dynamic markings are few and restricted to *forte* or *piano*, denoting either a change of registration or, more likely, a change of keyboard. Articulation marks are frequent and indicate a detached style of performance. Likewise, there are many ornaments (turns, trills and mordents) in evidence, particularly in the slow middle movements.

There is little by way of the kind of 'voice-leading' beloved of his father and even less to suggest a vocal origin to the part-writing. This is music clearly intended for the keyboard, with much use of scalar passages and arpeggio-based writing. In several sonata movements there are often lengthy unison passages in which the hands play an octave apart.

The emotional 'heart' is found in the *affettuoso* middle movements which are generally highly ornamented and richly decorated in the manner of a solo arioso with simple accompaniment.

Emanuel's sonatas inhabit a world far from that of his father. As with the many keyboard works they represent a departure from the intense counterpoint of previous generations and which was brought to a kind of transcendental perfection with the *The Art of Fugue*, the *Canonic Variations* and the *Musical Offering*. They are, of course, technically less demanding in many respects but none the worse for that.

I first encountered the D major sonata at a recital in the mid 'eighties given by Thomas Trotter on the organ of Tetbury Parish Church. I can no longer remember any of the other pieces played in what would have been an outstanding recital, but the C P E Bach sonata was a revelation: it was so unlike anything else. Here was wit, charm, pathos and humour presented with not a note too many. I determined to get hold of the music immediately and was astonished to discover that the composer achieved his effects with ease and economy. This, and the other sonatas, are a delight to play and a joy to hear.

It would be wrong to give the impression that Emanuel's organ works are just a pale shadow of those of his father: they are not better or worse, simply different. There is a vibrancy and freshness about every movement which is immediately appealing. Likewise, it would be a mistake to assume that the composer lacks the contrapuntal rigour of his father: the Six Fugues are highly enjoyable and beautifully crafted, ranging from the simple two-part texture of the D minor (H.99) to the more complex C minor (H.75.5) with its dramatic introductory Fantasia. All of the fugues are characterised by strong subjects.

The little *Chorales* clearly show the teaching of his father although the harmonies are bold and, perhaps, more geared towards keyboard, rather than vocal, performance (as evidenced by notes outside normal vocal range).

The one slight disappointment is the *Praeludium* (H.107) - the only organ work to indicate (and require) a pedal part. The remorseless sequences and the lengthy octave passages come across as unduly formulaic. On the other hand, as a showpiece for a player of limited pedal technique, it could be effective and has the benefit of sounding a good deal more difficult than it actually is.

The *Sonatas* and the *Fugues* are worthy of anyone's attention and stand out as some of the best instances of the eighteenth century *style galant*. They are not unduly demanding, will work on virtually any organ (although two manuals are a definite asset) and will be enjoyed by audiences and congregations alike.

Contemporaries of C.P.E. Bach who composed for the organ include:

Michel Corrette (1707-95) a well-known organist in Paris, left three volumes of organ works, collections of *Noëls*, a set of twelve *Offertoires* and, in 1787, a collection of *Pièces pour l'Orgue dans un genre nouveau* which feature the first use of the 'thunder' pedal or keyboard note-cluster.

Wilhelm Fridemann Bach (1710-84). Sebastian's eldest son was an organist at the Liebfrauenkirche in Halle and then at the Sopiankirche in Dresden. He left little organ music, mostly simple chorale preludes.

John Stanley (1712-86) was organist of the Temple Church in London, who composed three sets of Ten Voluntaries, op.5-7 and six Concertos, op.10. Stanley's organ-playing was held in the highest esteem by Handel and the quality of Stanley's invention and craftsmanship has ensured his continued popularity.

Johan Ludwig Krebs (1713-80) was not only a chorister under J.S. Bach, but also his most gifted and favourite pupil. Despite his obvious talent, he found it difficult to secure a suitable court or cathedral position until he was appointed court organist of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg under Prince Friedrich. Unlike most of the other composers mentioned here, his compositional style tends to look backwards to the complex counterpoint of his teacher. His output for the organ is rich and varied, including preludes, toccatas, fantasias, fugues, trios and choral preludes.

Claude Balbastre (1727-99) was organist of St. Roch in Paris and also on a rota for Notre-Dame Cathedral. His *Noëls* have kept his name in the repertoire, although they were so popular that in 1762 he was forbidden to play by the archbishop of Paris for fear of riots.

Antonio Soler (1729-83) was a composer, organist and priest who spent most of his life in the monastery of El Escorial. His pupil, Prince Gabriel, had a palace built in the grounds of the monastery containing two organs, for which Soler composed six concertos.

Frantisek Xaver Brixi (1732-71) was a prolific composer and organist of Prague Cathedral. He is probably best remembered for his five Organ Concertos.

Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809) is too well known to need any introduction. Sadly, he wrote virtually nothing for the organ although his many pieces for mechanical clock are often performed on the instrument. His younger brother, **Michael** (1737-1806), composed very little for the organ despite being cathedral organist at Salzburg.

Johann Christian Kittel (1732-1809) was J S Bach's last pupil and organist of the Church of the Holy Sermon in Erfurt. His many organ works represent a transition from the contrapuntal rigour of his teacher and the emerging 'galant' style.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91) was, by all accounts, a fine organist and held the instrument in high regard but, sadly, wrote little for it. There are seventeen *Epistle Sonatas* for organ and orchestra, but, praise be, at the end of his tragically short life he composed three towering masterpieces for a mechanical clock organ: The *Fantasia in F minor and major* K.594, the *Fantasia in F minor* K.608 and the *Andante in F* K.616. There have been countless transcriptions of these three works and they are now regularly played on the organ.

Adrian Self - January 2022