



(LEMS 8078)

C. P. E. BACH: THE SIX ESSAY SONATAS

(Die Sechs Probesonaten)

Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen

Broadwood & Sons square fortepiano (1796)

“On The True Art of Playing the Keyboard Instruments”

This set of six Sonatas represents some of the finest examples of that rare category of music which was brought into being by pedagogical motives, but with musical inspiration of a very high order that is in no way inhibited by the instructive intent of its composer. They were written by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach as illustrative examples for his *Essay on the True Art of Playing the Keyboard Instruments*, a treatise which enjoyed a fabulous reputation in the second half of the Eighteenth Century. Haydn, for example, called it *“the school of all schools.”* Mozart is quoted as having said of its author: *“He is the*

father, we are the children: those of us who do anything right learned it from him," and Czerny wrote that his teacher, Beethoven, followed the *Essay* and the *Probestücke* Sonatas (as Bach called these pieces) closely in his instruction.

These compositions represent a task C.P.E. Bach set for himself of writing a graded set of pieces which range from comparatively easy works to those that are technically and emotionally very demanding of the performer. The eighteen separate pieces that comprise the set are grouped into Six Sonatas of three movements each, following the usual sonata pattern of two fast movements enclosing a slow one. Certain of the usual characteristics of sonata form are not present in them, however, notably the use of key unity between the outer movements. This is explained by Carl Philipp Bach's announced purpose of employing all the commonly used keys of his time in this collection, but it is significant that he has kept the movements of each Sonata within closely related keys, and has given unity to each Sonata through the use of related figuration and rhythmical character in each of its three movements.

Bach was aware that he was writing music of a new and highly original style in these works, and he makes frequent references to them in his *Essay* that bear on this. He points out, for instance, that he has used "*a few unusual terms, which, however, fitted the meaning that I wanted to express.*" Some of these "*unusual terms*" (unprecedented in his time) appear in the tempo markings in the list of movements of the *Probestücke* Sonatas, some of which are further characterized in the printed score by such terms as "*innocentemente,*" "*con tenerezza,*" "*arioso ed amoroso,*" and "*mesto e sostenuto.*" To point up the expressiveness with which he has imbued these compositions, Bach has, as he says, "*attended to signs and, marks with lavish care, for I know that they are as much needed by keyboardists as by other executants.*" The abundance of expression marks is also unprecedented, as well as the meticulousness with which the works are notated. An example of this occurs in the second movement of Sonata Six where broken chord passages in the left hand are so written that "*each tone of a chord stands for a separate voice.*"

A feature of Bach's style that is manifest in more than one of these Sonatas is the use of a declamatory style, in which free cadenzas are employed. In discussing these, he indicates with great charm the intimate manner in which the cadenzas should be treated: "*Imagine two or three persons in conversation, each of whom waits for the other to complete his statement before rejoining with his own.*" In a similar vein he discusses the free *parlando* style that he employs eloquently and dramatically in the last movement of Sonata Six, which is for the most part barless, and in which, he says, the meter sign "*is more a convention that a binding factor in performance,*" and that "*tempo and meter must be frequently changed in order to rouse and still the rapidly alternating effects.*"

ORNAMENTS

Another striking feature is the composer's profuse employment of ornaments. He introduces his exhaustive chapter on "*Embellishments*" in the *Essay* with the following remarks:

"No one disputes the need for *embellishments*. They are, in fact, indispensable. Consider

their many uses: They connect and enliven tones and impart stress and accent; they make music pleasing and awaken our close attention. Expression is heightened by them; let a piece be sad, joyful, or otherwise, and they will lend fitting assistance.... They improve mediocre compositions. Without them the best melody is empty and ineffective, the clearest content clouded." He cites the last movement of Sonata Five as "an illustration of the present practice of varying extemporaneously the two reprises of an allegro." He warns against varying everything, "for if it is, the reprise will become a new piece." This composition is invaluable in exemplifying the manner in which ornamentation was improvised in Bach's own day.

Carl Philipp Bach was himself widely renowned as a keyboard executant, and a vivid first-hand account of his highly expressive performance has come down to us in the well-known description by Dr. Burney. Bach's keen awareness of all the technical possibilities of the keyboard is reflected in many passages of the *Essay*. He did not avoid the use of special effects but avoided undue use of them. For example, he refers to one piece (the first movement of Sonata Six) in which the device of crossed hands is employed, and says: "*I thought it wise to illustrate a natural use of this kind of jugglery, though it has not been very much employed of late.*" He introduces the problem of leaps early in the sonatas, very sensibly using them in a manner in which they can be readily managed at first, as he indicates in a reference to the second movement of Sonata Two: "*I have stressed leaps and stretches in a slow movement, the B-flat adagio, in order to make them easier.*"

C.P.E. Bach's consummate virtuosity and musicianship, coupled with his penetrating study of the possibilities of the keyboard stringed instruments of his day (which included clavichord, harpsichord, and piano), resulted in a style of keyboard writing that greatly influenced the Viennese classicists. This style, with its free and bold treatment of the tonal system, its expressive use of dissonance and the chromaticism, and its surprising modulations is very characteristically represented in the *Probestücke* Sonatas. It is a style that has a very close affinity to the very nature of the keyboard itself.

THE BROADWOOD HAMMERKLAVIER

The compositions of this collection were intended for their creator's favorite instrument, the clavichord, as the presence of *Bebung* (vibrato) marks in the printed music indicate. However, because of the difficulty of recording the sound of this instrument, a piano was chosen for the performances on this record- not a modern piano, but a Broadwood square piano made in 1796, less than a decade after C.P.E. Bach's death, and of a type with which the composer was well acquainted. This instrument has a transparency of sound, a differentiation of tone quality between treble and bass, and a subtle string vibration that make it particularly appropriate for conveying the highly personal character of this music.

Notes by CARL PARRISH

The music of the *Probestücke* sonatas is available in a modern edition by Erich Doflein (Schott), Mainz: 1935.

THE INSTRUMENT: Broadwood & Sons Square Piano (1796)

Built in 1796 by the leading London firm of John Broadwood & Sons this five-and-one-half-octave piano bears labels giving maintenance instructions in English and French. Many pianos like this were exported to France after the Revolution, as well as to America

where possession of a fashionable Broadwood signified one's elevated status and good taste. Broadwood was responsible for important innovations including the damper mechanism incorporated here, probably the subject of the patent claimed in the nameboard inscription. Though no damper pedal was provided, a pedal (now missing) lifted the small lid flap over the front of the soundboard, allowing some dynamic control after a note or chord was struck. This piano is said to have belonged to the Hon. Edmund Livingston of New York, who bought it in 1799 from John Jacob Astor, then an instrument importer. The piano has been much restored, and the iron hitchpin plate inside is not original.

Description provided with the permission of The Historical Musical Instrument Collection of the Vassar College Department of Music, The George Sherman Dickinson Music Library. <http://musiclibrary.vassar.edu/>

A REMINISCENCE ABOUT THE ARTIST BY SCOTT FOGLESONG

I brought Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen the Tchaikovsky B-flat Concerto for our first lesson in the fall of 1972 at Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory. That just goes to show how little I knew about her; not only did she decline to hear the Tchaikovsky, but she instructed me to put it away. I left that first lesson with a set of simple (so I thought) five-finger exercises, the Bach C minor Invention, an early Haydn sonata, and a feeling of impending doom.

After I finished sulking I began to realize that Mrs. K (as we all called her, including herself) was giving me a desperately-needed bedrock foundation in piano playing. Her methods were those of a boot-camp drill sergeant, albeit expressed in sweetly pleading tones which almost, but not quite, masked the steeliness of purpose with which she went about the business of rebuilding damaged piano students. Mrs. K was the 'hard-case' teacher at Peabody who took on the youngsters who needed complete overhauls, not only physically but musically as well.

"Ah, Scott, Scott!" she would coo in her lilting Swiss accent, "you must not make this *noiiiiiiiise* on the piano, you must make *mee-ou-sic*, you must *caressssss the keeeeeeeeeeeys!*" all the while shaking me vigorously by the shoulder.

Mrs. K seasoned her determination with precision and clarity. Severe injuries in an auto accident had obliged her to undergo exhaustive physical therapy; she then applied that experience to a thoroughgoing study of the bodily mechanisms of piano-playing. She wound up a consummate expert on piano technique and developed rigorous methods for imparting that knowledge experientially. A Mrs. K student was sure to spend part of the day on physical drills, some at the piano but many performed on a tabletop or even while lying on the floor. There was nothing slipshod about her technical teaching; she insisted on precise applications of muscular strength, carefully considered hand and arm weight, and specific angles at the elbow, wrist, and various finger joints. Nothing was too trivial to escape her scrupulous attention, from the position of one's feet on the floor, the amount of curvature in one's lower spine, or the exact parts of one's anatomy making contact with the piano bench.

Her technical vigor was matched by her insistence that we play only the most august of composers: Bach (*père*, not C.P.E.), Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Schubert, Brahms, Bartók. She was an advocate of scholarly performance practice, teaching us the latest thinking about ornamentation, tempi, and instrumentation, as well as steering us to the best scholarly editions available.

Her message, ultimately, was to make music with a heart full of love and a head full of smarts. I still have my yellowing score of Schubert's late B-flat major Sonata with Mrs. K's copious comments scribbled throughout. In the midst of everyday admonitions such as *don't rush* or *are you counting here?* one finds vintage Katzenellenbogen: *pp doesn't mean you aren't cantabile*, or *do not run it is a drama!* Best of all is her heartfelt pleasure regarding a circled half-note: *can you love this?*

SCOTT FOGLESONG

Chair, Department of Musicianship and Music Theory, San Francisco Conservatory of Music program annotator, and as an "Inside Music" lecturer for the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, weekly subscription concerts. Mr. Foglesong also writes the weblog S.F. Classical Music Examiner for the *San Francisco Examiner*.
<http://www.scottfoglesong.com/>

TRACKS & TIMING

1. Sonata 1 – Allegretto Tranquilamente 1	(1:01)
2. Sonata 1 Andante 1	(1:42)
3. Sonata 1 Minuetto 1	(1:14)
4. Sonata 2 Allegro 1	(1:06)
5. Sonata 2 – Adagio Sostenuto 1	(2:18)
6. Sonata 2 – Presto 3	(1:05)
7. Sonata 3 – Poco Allegro 1	(2:03)
8. Sonata 3 – Andante Lusingando 1	(1:37)
9. Sonata 3 – Allegro 1	(1:45)
10. Sonata 4 – Allegretto Grazioso 1	(1:45)
11. Sonata 4 – Largo Maestoso 1	(3:23)
12. Sonata 4 – Allegro Siciliano e Scherdzando 1	(2:18)
13. Sonata 5 – Allegro di Moloto 1	(1:00)
14. Sonata 5 – Adagio Assai 1	(3:52)
15. Sonata 5 – Allegretto 1	(3:56)
16. Sonata 6 – Allegro di Molto	(1:31)
17. Sonata 6 – Adagio 1	(3:59)
18. Sonata 6 – (Fantasia) Allegro Moderato	(4:49)

Total Running time 40:13



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