Printing the Probestücke: an eighteenth-century music publication by C.P.E. Bach

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Printing the *Probestücke*: An Eighteenth-Century Music Publication by C.P.E. Bach

David Schulenberg

Composer of roughly a thousand works of diverse types, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–1788), the second son of Johann Sebastian Bach, was also the author of a comprehensive treatise on keyboard instrument performance that remained influential into the nineteenth century and is now an important source on eighteenth-century practices. Issued in two volumes in 1753 and 1762, the treatise was one of several works published at mid-century that represented the extension of Enlightenment-era encyclopedism to music; others included books on the flute by Johann Joachim Quantz and on the violin by Leopold Mozart, father of Wolfgang. The treatise by Emanuel Bach was unique, however, in being accompanied by a musical supplement (*Exempel*) that contained not only numerous musical examples but six unusual sonatas for solo keyboard instrument, which the author called *Probestücke* or “practice pieces.” The latter remain among the best-known works


2 The German word *Probestücke* is a plural noun; the singular form is *Probestück*. As used here, the term will refer only to the eighteen pieces published in 1753, not six additional ones added in 1787. The *Probestücke* comprise the six sonatas (nos. 1–6) listed under entry 63 in the thematic catalog of Bach’s works by Alfred Wotquenne, *Thematisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1905, with notes and contents in German and French; reprints, 1964, 1972, and 1980, also with notes
of a composer who was arguably the most original and influential musician of his generation, active during what is now regarded as a transitional period between the late Baroque and Classical eras. Harvard libraries hold multiple copies of both the treatise and the supplement—fourteen items in all, in distinct versions, states, and editions (see Schulenberg appendix 1).  

Emanuel Bach’s treatise, known in English as the Essay on the True Manner of Playing Keyboard Instruments, focuses on performance in the post-Baroque (or pre-Classical) style cultivated in mid-century Berlin (see figure 4.1). There the composer worked from 1740 or 1741 to 1767 as chamber musician to King Frederick II “the Great” of Prussia. Bach subsequently moved to Hamburg, where he spent the last twenty years of his life as cantor at the Johanneum and city director of church music. At Hamburg he composed—among many other works—a small addendum to the Probestücke, as well as preparing revised editions of both volumes of the treatise itself (see figure 4.2).  

The eighteen original Probestücke comprise a series of increasingly sophisticated keyboard pieces. Each is in a different key, yet Bach grouped them into six sonatas, each of which therefore begins and ends, contrary to normal eighteenth-century practice, in different keys—a simple example of the unconventionality that typifies Bach’s music as a whole. As in the accompanying treatise, Bach never specifies any single keyboard instrument for which the work was intended, but most readers would have played the pieces on the clavichord. The latter was a stringed keyboard instrument whose small size and volume of sound made it suitable for private practice and study (see figure 4.3). A player of the clavichord nevertheless could vary its dynamic level or loudness according to the force with which the keys were struck, as on the piano. In this the clavichord differed from the organ and harpsichord—still the predominant keyboard instruments for public performance when the work was first published. The clavichord was, however, in the process of being supplanted by the piano, which had been invented in about 1700 but would not entirely supersede the clavichord in northern Europe before the beginning of the nineteenth century.

and contents in German and French), still the standard list for identifying works by the composer. The six sonatinas that Bach subsequently added to the musical supplement are listed as Wq 63/7–12.

3 See CPEB: CW, I/3 and VII/3, for the most current listing of extant printed copies and other sources of the supplement and the treatise, respectively.

4 Bach’s revisions were incorporated into the third edition of volume 1, published by Schwickert of Leipzig in 1787, which was accompanied by an expanded version of the musical supplement that included the six sonatinas Wq 63/7–12; the revised second edition of volume 2 appeared posthumously in 1797. Further details in CPEB: CW, I/3, xix–xx.


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Figure 4.1. The musical supplement to Bach’s treatise: Exempel nebst achtzehn Probe-Stücken in Sechs Sonaten zu Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Versuche über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen auf XXVI. Kupfer-Tafeln (second version of title page, presumably 1753 or later). 41 cm. Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 627.2.411 PHI. All illustrations from the musical supplement, except figure 4.7, come from this copy.
Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen
mit Exempeln
und achtzehn Probe-Stücken in sechs Sonaten erläutert.
Erster Theil.

Dritte mit Zusätzen und sechs neuen Clavier-Stücken vermehrte Auflage.

Leipzig,
im Schwickertschen Verlage
1787.

Figure 4.2. Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen, volume 1 (title page, from the revised edition of 1787). 23 cm. Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 347.12.4 PHI.

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Among Bach’s admirers were his younger contemporaries the poets Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg, Matthias Claudius, Johann Heinrich Voss, and Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, who knew the composer personally during his Hamburg years and whose texts he set to music as songs for voice and keyboard. Gerstenberg was so inspired by Bach’s solo keyboard compositions that he added words to some of them, including the final movement of the Probestücke. Gerstenberg in fact wrote two texts for this piece, one of them paraphrasing Hamlet’s soliloquy from the Shakespeare play, then newly translated into German (see figure 4.4).\(^6\) Bach’s “Hamlet” Fantasia, as it is

now known, is an example of a free fantasia, a type of piece that was meant to sound like an inspired improvisation. Bach was famous for such improvisations, and in volume 2 of his Essay he devoted the last chapter to an account of how to improvise a free fantasia. He illustrated the practice not only in the final Probestück but also in a second, much shorter, composition (Wq 117/14) whose bass line was printed as a musical example within volume 2; the complete score appeared on a separate printed sheet.

This brief second fantasia, incidentally, was probably the last engraved publication by a member of the Bach family, bringing to a close a tradition whose final major product was Emanuel’s Probestücke, but which went back at least to a vocal work of J. S. Bach published in 1708. Between the times that the two volumes of Emanuel Bach’s

7 Edited by Peter Wollny in CPEB:CW, I/8.1.
8 Gott ist mein König, composed for a city council election at Mühlhausen and known today as Cantata 71, was printed after its performance in 1708; companion works from the following years, also published, are lost. See Christoph Wolff, Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician (New York: Norton, 2000), 111.
Essay went to press, the technology for printing music examples as typeset illustrations within a verbal text was perfected. By 1762 it was therefore no longer necessary to issue the examples in separate tabulae, painstakingly engraved on copper plates and printed by hand in the same manner as fine art prints—which, incidentally, Bach collected, and in which his son the artist J. S. Bach the younger specialized.\(^9\) Bach nevertheless continued to sell the Proböstücke separately as part of the musical supplement to volume 1. The single sheet containing the little fantasia Wq 117/14, on the other hand, was evidently sold together with volume 2.\(^10\)

In Bach’s treatise as in the Proböstücke, it was the improvisatory type of music represented by the free fantasia that the composer presented as the ultimate stage in the development of the keyboard player’s art—not the elaborately worked out contrapuntal preludes and fugues made famous by his father. To instruct players in the performance of not only the fantasia but the other up-to-date types of keyboard music represented in the Proböstücke, Bach’s musical notation for the latter included a far greater number of so-called expression marks and other special indications than was customary for printed music in mid-eighteenth-century Europe. Verbal indications for tempo (speed) and dynamics, as well as symbols for articulation and ornamentation, appear with a thoroughness that was rare at the time—and Bach also placed numerals above or below almost every note to indicate fingering (which finger plays which notes). Fingering had been shown in previous publications, notably François Couperin’s L’art de toucher le clavecin (Paris, 1716), and in the nineteenth century its inclusion became customary for pedagogic editions of keyboard music. But because Bach’s musical style already included frequent changes of dynamic level, as well as highly variegated rhythm and articulation, the result here was an unprecedented density of visual or graphic information on the printed page (see figure 4.5).

These special aspects of the music and its notation presented unique challenges to the composer as he planned the printing and publication of his work. Although the general outline of this process has long been understood, the author’s recent edition of the Proböstücke uncovered details in the surviving printed copies that shed new light on the production of the work and deepen our appreciation for the originality represented by it. In 1753, when Bach published the first volume of his treatise, the text and the musical supplement still had to be printed by distinct processes and published as distinct items. The verbal text was printed from moveable type, but the musical supplement was printed through the same process of engraving—more properly,

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\(^9\) For a catalog by Annette Richards of Bach’s famous portrait collection, containing paintings, drawings, and printed likenesses of famous musicians, see CPEB:CW, VIII/4.1–2.

\(^10\) The printed text for volume 2 includes a note to the bookbinder to bind the music in as the last page.

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Figure 4.5. Bach, Sonata, Wq 63/3, movement 1, from Exempel, page 7 (plate 1).
etching—that Bach's father had used, notably for several volumes of keyboard music published during the 1720s and after.\(^\text{11}\)

While growing up in Leipzig, Emanuel Bach would have observed his father composing music and then having it engraved and printed. As a teenager, Emanuel himself gained some practice in the process by composing and engraving a little one-page minuet in 1731.\(^\text{12}\) Indeed, for both Sebastian and Emanuel Bach, writing, printing, and disseminating music were parts of a single creative process, elements of a family business in which Sebastian was engaged no later than the 1720s and which Emanuel would, in effect, carry on after his father's death in 1750. Not only did Emanuel continue to sell copies of Sebastian's music, both printed and in manuscript; he inherited the engraved plates for his father's last work, the *Art of Fugue*, which he apparently had printed and published.\(^\text{13}\) His own *Essay*, together with the *Probestücke*, was also professionally printed, and Emanuel, following his father's model, sold both out of his own house, as he did many subsequent publications.

Emanuel Bach must have been well aware of the technical challenges involved in producing and selling the multimedia work constituted by the *Essay* together with its musical supplement. Although no member of the immediate family is known to have previously published any large verbal writings, in Berlin Bach was acquainted with a number of fellow authors, including his colleague the court flutist Quantz, whose famous treatise on playing the flute preceded his own by one year and was likewise

\(^{11}\) Engraving is, properly, the preparation of a metal printing plate by mechanically cutting away material with a graver or other tool. Etching involves treatment of the plate with acid, after a design has been scratched into a wax coating that prevents the acid from “biting” the protected portion of the surface. Today the term *engraving* is commonly used for both processes, and the word is so used here. Sebastian's self-published engraved works include four volumes entitled *Clavierübung*, issued at Leipzig from 1726 to 1741.

\(^{12}\) The Minuet in C, Wq III, is sometimes described as Emanuel's first published work, but the little keyboard piece, printed on a single sheet, has no title page and could not have been published in the usual sense. As Peter Wollny notes in the commentary to his edition (CPEB-CW, I/8.2, 167), the extant exemplars were printed on paper from Prenzlau, near Berlin, and could have been made long after the original engraving. The date, and the statement that the composer engraved it himself, are given in the entry for the piece on p. 53 of the catalog of the composer's estate (the so-called *Nachlassverzeichnis*), published posthumously as *Verzeichniß des musikalischen Nachlasses des verstorbenen Capellmeisters Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Hamburg: Schniebes, 1790); annotated facsimile edition by Rachel Wade as *The Catalog of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's Estate: A Facsimile of the Edition by Schniebes, Hamburg, 1790* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981); transcription online at <http://www.cpebach.org/pdfs/resources/NV-1790.pdf> (accessed December 5, 2013).

accompanied by an engraved musical “Exempel.” By 1753, moreover, Bach had published five engraved works of his own. For the initial engraving of the *Probestücke* he apparently returned to one of those who had previously worked for him: Johann Georg Schübler, principal engraver of the *Art of Fugue*.

Because no autograph manuscripts or authorized manuscript copies survive for the *Probestücke*, the printed editions are the only primary sources for the work, and only they provide any substantial clues about its compositional history, or rather about revisions made after the initial composition. (Bach was an inveterate reviser, rarely leaving any major work unretouched.) After Bach had composed the music, the score presumably was recopied in precisely the format in which it was to be printed. This handwritten fair copy was then traced onto a copper plate, to which finishing touches could be added freehand, including titles and page numbers. After treatment with acid, the plate was ready for printing. The delicate copper plates, however, were subject to wear and could withstand only a limited number of impressions in the special presses used for fine printing work.

The use of this process had important implications for Bach and other musicians. Although music printed from type—a process that went back to the earliest examples of printed music from around 1500—might appear in a very different format from that of the author’s manuscript, an engraved print was in principle a facsimile of that manuscript. This gave the composer tight control over the layout and appearance of the printed work. Such control was especially important in keyboard music, which tends to be graphically more complex than music for other instruments (or the voice). Through...

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14 Quantz’s musical supplement contains only examples, not printed compositions, although the Berlin publisher Winter subsequently issued Quantz’s six flute duos, op. 2, in 1759, in a typeset print. As Winter also published a number of works by Bach, who at some point even rented rooms in Winter’s house—see, e.g., Dorothea Schröder, *Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Hamburg: Ellert & Richter, 2003), 43—Bach is likely to have been familiar with Winter’s extensive music catalog and business practices.

15 In addition to the famous “Prussian” and “Württemberg” sonatas for keyboard of 1742 and 1744 (Wq 48 and 49), Bach’s engraved publications comprised two concertos (Wq 11 and 25 of 1745 and 1752, respectively) and the *Zwey Trio* of 1751 (two trio sonatas, Wq 161/1–2).

16 Gregory G. Butler, “Scribes, Engravers, and Notational Styles: The Final Disposition of Bach’s *Art of Fugue*,” in *About Bach*, ed. Gregory G. Butler, George B. Stauffer, and Mary Greer (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 113–114, explains that, although engraved music prints were in principle facsimiles of a specially prepared manuscript, individual engravers could use their own distinctive forms for certain notational elements, including clefs and time signatures. It is on this basis that Butler argues against the identification of the principal engraver of the *Probestücke* as determined by Wolfgang Wiener, “Johann Heinrich Schübler, der Stecher der Kunst der Fuge,” *Bach-Jahrbuch* (1979): 77–95.

17 Butler summarizes the process in “Scribes, Engravers, and Notational Styles,” 120n3. The present author traces the printing history of the *Probestücke* in detail in CPEB:CW, I/3, 163–166.
this process, J. S. Bach had planned his publications down to the precise location of each page turn, and C.P.E. Bach must have done the same in his publications through the early 1750s. The precise number of pages in these engraved prints must have been planned from the start, and the dimensions of the compositions themselves planned accordingly. It was therefore no accident that each of the Probestücke occupied a single printed page, save for the two longest pieces (nos. 15 and 18, the final movements of Sonatas V and VI), which each took up two pages.

Of course, any printed work, engraved or typeset, had to be carefully planned. But a particular consideration of an engraved edition was that the printing plates could be held over a long period of time. So long as the plates remained intact, they could be reused, unlike the printing formes used for type, which were broken up as soon as the initial print run was completed. Reprinting a typeset work required resetting the entire text, but etched plates could not only be reused but even corrected and reworked, at least up to a point. Moreover, whereas the printer owned his type, the plates used by Sebastian and Emanuel Bach for their publications remained in their personal possession. Emanuel divested himself of the plates for the Art of Fugue only in 1756, when, apparently despairing of future sales for so archaic a work, and perhaps anticipating a need for cash during the war that was about to break out, he advertised them for sale. On the other hand, he kept the plates for the Probestücke until 1780, when he sold them to the Leipzig publisher Schwickert. Thus, until 1780 Bach had ample opportunity to revise the plates, and he remained his own publisher, selling individual copies of the Essay and the Probestücke to correspondents throughout Europe. Every printed copy of the Probestücke sold up to that date passed through his hands and thus can be considered the equivalent of an autograph manuscript.

Alterations made in engraved plates usually left visible traces in the printed pages. Hence, even though the plates themselves no longer exist, careful examination of each printed copy allows one to identify evidence for alterations as well as wear and tear on the plates over the course of time. At least fifty-nine printed copies of the Probestücke are reported to survive, of which twenty-two were examined in person or in photographic reproductions for the author’s critical edition of the pieces; three of these are preserved in collections at Harvard. This examination confirmed what

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18 Advertised September 14, 1756, in Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, Historisch-Kritischen Beyträgen zur Aufnahme der Musik; see Hofmann, Die Kunst der Fuge, Kritischer Bericht, 90.

19 As listed in Répertoire internationale des sources musicales (RISM), A/I/1 and A/I11 (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1971 and 1986). Inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the reporting of individual copies leave it unclear precisely how many exemplars survive and which editions or states of the musical supplement are held in a given collection.

20 See Schulenberg appendix 1. A fourth Harvard-related copy is that owned by the Harvard Musical Association, Boston. Details about these and other copies are included in the descriptions of sources in CPEB: CW, I/3, 153–157.
has long been known: that the original musical supplement of Bach’s Essay had been expanded by the addition of six “new sonatinas” on five newly engraved pages of music, probably printed by Schwickert in 1787 in conjunction with the revised edition of the first volume of the treatise. What had not previously been understood, however, was the extent of Bach’s revision of the Probestücke after the initial engraving of the plates, nor the reason for the substitution of a new plate for the final page of the original musical supplement, containing the latter half of the “Hamlet” Fantasia.

It is now clear that revisions were carried out in several stages both before and after the initial publication of the Probestücke. Moreover, the printing history of the work was more complex than previously realized, for the title page of the musical supplement was recomposed and reprinted several times. This title page, the only portion of the supplement that was typeset rather than engraved, exists in at least five versions. The latest of these was evidently created by Schwickert for the expanded edition of the supplement, which comprised thirty-one plates. Each of the four earlier title pages, however, must have been newly set for a distinct printing of the original edition of the supplement, containing twenty-six plates. Bach must have kept on hand only a limited number of copies of the musical supplement, ordering additional copies when his supply was exhausted. Although the original text of the Essay was reprinted only once, in 1759, the four known versions of the title page for the original musical supplement imply four printings of the latter, in smaller print runs than those for the text.\footnote{One of these title pages is known in only a single exemplar, raising the possibility that there were further short press runs from which no exemplars survive. Watermark evidence for the origin of the paper used in the printed exemplars of the supplement is inconclusive.}

This casts in a new light the composer’s complaint that the musical supplement sold less readily than the verbal text for volume 1. The Probestücke may well have been too difficult for many readers to play, as Bach indicated in a letter to Schwickert.\footnote{Letter dated February 18, 1783, German text in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: Briefe und Dokumente: Kritische Gesamtausgabe, ed. Ernst Suchalla, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 2:953–961; translated in Stephen L. Clark, The Letters of C.P.E. Bach (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 191.} But the composer may also have anticipated that professional musicians would be more likely to make their own manuscript copies of the Probestücke than to purchase printed ones. Otherwise he might have had equal numbers of copies printed for the text and the musical supplement. In any case, his real reason for writing as he did to Schwickert may have been to convince the latter to purchase additional, easier compositions from him, as Schwickert eventually did, adding the six sonatinas in the expanded edition of the musical supplement.

Bach may also have limited the press runs of the musical supplement in order to avoid deterioration of the copper plates. Nevertheless, defects that grew in size are evident in the extant printed copies. One flaw, on the last printed page of the original

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supplement, eventually grew so large that the plate had to be replaced (see figure 4.6, last system of music). The replacement was probably prepared after Bach had transferred the plates to Schwickert in 1780 (see figure 4.7). Although the replacement reveals a somewhat more skilled hand from the point of view of the quality of the engraving, its musical text contains small errors that would not have passed muster had the plate been prepared or proofread in Bach’s house. More significant, however, is the reason for the deterioration of the original plate in the first place, which was apparently damaged after undergoing alterations. The changes involved the correction of minute details, none of which is of serious musical consequence. Yet Bach was sufficiently concerned about clarifying his intentions that he risked damaging the plate. Several exemplars, including the copy shown (from the Loeb Music Library at Harvard), are marred by deep extraneous lines near the points where corrections were made. Evidently the plate eventually became unusable.

Of greater interest with respect to the actual music are the composer’s substantive changes to the musical text of the Probestücke. The printed copies reveal traces of many further alterations, most of which appear in all exemplars, showing that the plates must have been retouched after their initial preparation but before any of the extant copies had been printed. Some alterations involved minute changes in performance markings, especially ornament signs and slurs. A greater number involved the addition of performance markings, especially fingerings. Many of these added signs reveal a distinct handwriting or style, presumably that of a single engraver who reworked the plates. This engraver, who will be referred to as the “corrector,” was also responsible for adding page numbers as well as the titles of the first four works, which are designated “Sonata I,” “Sonata II,” and so forth. A third person seems to have been responsible for the original preparation of the last two plates, containing the “Hamlet” fantasia, one of which was subsequently replaced by a fourth engraver.

In all, there were at least four distinct stages in the engraving of the Probestücke, reflecting distinct stages in the composer’s preparation of the musical text for and after printing. Stage 1 involved the initial engraving of all twenty pages by two engravers, both probably working from a specially prepared fair-copy manuscript. The eighteen pieces may not have been written out in one integral copy; indeed, there are strong indications that at least the concluding fantasia originated separately from most of the others—hence, perhaps, its engraving by a second hand. The latter appears to have engraved the score of the fantasia freehand, copying rather than tracing it from a manuscript. In addition, the fantasia itself does not precisely match the account of such a piece given in the text. The latter describes the fantasia as a short piece lacking

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For instance, in figure 4.6, last system, measures 3 and 4, Bach apparently added several two-note slurs in the left hand, although they were already implied by the similar rhythm and melodic motion of the right hand in the same measures.

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barlines, despite notation under a common-time signature, and as being *Moderato* in tempo.  

In fact the “Hamlet” Fantasia contains a central barred section in triple meter (shown in figures 4.6 and 4.7), and its initial tempo mark is “Allegro. moderato” [sic], the latter word smaller and apparently a later addition.

A work considerably closer to what Bach describes in the *Essay* is a Fantasia in E-flat that probably dates from around 1747. This composition lacks a tempo indication, but it is much shorter than the C-minor fantasia, and although notated entirely without barlines, the opening passage is clearly in common time.  

Bach’s plan to publish eighteen *Probestücke* in as many different keys would have ruled out the inclusion

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24 Bach, *Versuch*, vol. 1, chap. 3, para. 15.

25 This work, unknown to Wotquenne, is no. 348 in E. Eugene Helm, *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); it is edited by Peter Wollny as no. 43 in CPEB:CW, I/8.1. Additional information, as well as the author’s recording on fortepiano, at <http://faculty.wagner.edu/david-schulenberg/the-fantasia-h-348/> (accessed December 5, 2013).
of this earlier fantasia alongside the opening movement of Sonata V, also in E-flat. Nevertheless, there is good reason to suspect that the present arrangement of the pieces into six sonatas was not finalized until after the first stage of the engraving had been completed. A second stage of engraving involving numerous small changes seems to have included the addition of the titles for the first four sonatas (“Sonata I . . . II . . .” etc.) in the hand of the corrector. Their apparent absence in the first state of the engraving reflects a curious aspect of the verbal text of the Essay, which usually refers to the pieces only by key, not by number. Indeed, the treatise contains relatively few references of any sort to the Probestücke, implying that these might have been composed only after Bach had drafted the verbal text.

If so, these circumstances would reflect the likelihood that, for an experienced composer such as Bach, writing the text of the treatise and preparing it for the printer represented a far more onerous task than composing twenty pages of keyboard music. This is so even though Bach was not nearly as facile a composer as his godfather Telemann or his Berlin colleague Carl Heinrich Graun. Both wrote far more music,
including numerous cantatas and operas during the 1740s, when Emanuel managed to compose only a few dozen keyboard sonatas and concertos and several other works. His output, moreover, slackened during the years immediately preceding the publication of the Essay, a single concerto and four keyboard works constituting his only known compositions of 1751 and 1752. No doubt Bach was drafting the Essay during these years, although the same period also saw travels that might have prevented him from completing more compositions.

Bach nevertheless may have conceived his Essay from the start as being accompanied by a set of exemplary musical compositions, as had been the case with earlier works by the German composer Johann Mattheson and the French harpsichordist and composer François Couperin—writings that Bach undoubtedly knew, and which he may have deliberately sought to surpass in his own Essay.26 His father’s Art of Fugue, published during the same period, consisted only of compositions: a treatise in the form of examples, without text.27 But as much as Emanuel might have wished his book to be coordinated systematically with the accompanying musical compositions, the technology and publishing procedures of the time made this difficult to achieve. A book as large as the first volume of his treatise—comprising 142 printed pages—could have been printed only in stages, given the limited size of any printer’s fonts (the actual metal type). Once each stage was set in type, proofs had to be printed and read; we know from his letters that Bach later proofread his typeset musical compositions, and if this was done also for the Essay then its printing might have taken a year or more. Yet a list of Bach’s keyboard works, drawn up under the composer’s supervision, indicates that the Probestücke were all composed at Berlin in 1753.28 This suggests that the composition of the pieces was practically an afterthought, taking place only after the book itself must have been been substantially completed.

26 Mattheson’s Exemplarische Organisten-Probe (Hamburg, 1719), later expanded as his Grosse General-Bass-Schule (Hamburg, 1731), is essentially an enormous commentary on a series of exercises in the art of figured bass realization, the same technique that is the chief subject of volume 2 of Bach’s Essay. Couperin’s L’art de toucher le clavecin incorporates eight preludes in as many keys, all heavily annotated with performance markings.


28 See the facsimile included in Christoph Wolff, “Carl Philipp Emanuel Bachs Verzeichnis seiner Clavierwerke von 1733 bis 1773,” in Über Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke: Aspekte musikalischer Biographie; Johann Sebastian Bach im Zentrum, ed. Barbara Steinwachs et al. (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1999), 217–235. Most of the information from this source is incorporated in the more complete list of Bach’s works included in the Nachlass-Verzeichnis.
Although Bach’s treatise says little about the individual compositions, it does point out some general features of the *Probestücke*. Bach mentions that some of the tempo marks are rather unusual, alluding to the fact that these are more precise than was customary at the time. Thus the tempo mark for the first movement of Sonata III reads *Poco allegro ma cantabile* (somewhat quickly, but singingly). As printed, however, the last two words (*ma cantabile*) are very small and, like the title, were probably added by the corrector (see figure 4.5). Bach may have added these words as an afterthought, although whether this was cause or effect of his reference to them in the *Essay* is impossible to say. Bach also mentions in the *Essay* that, because the musical notation is so crowded—incorporating so many performance nuances and fingerings—he has omitted the stems and flags (normal elements of musical notation) from certain written notes. Thus in the second movement of Sonata IV it is up to the player to determine the precise rhythmic values (durations) of some notes from the context (see figure 4.8). For this reason, all modern editions of this movement reflect assumptions about details of the rhythm that are open to question.

Figure 4.8. Bach, Sonata, Wq 63/4, movement 2, measures 18–20, from *Exempel* (1753), page 11 (plate 17).

Bach’s notation in figure 4.8 must have seemed an unsatisfactory compromise to a composer who, like his father, was more precise than most contemporaries in indicating his intentions. This could be why he called attention to the problem in the text of his treatise. Yet this is the only movement to show this notational peculiarity, and it may be significant that it occurs on a page virtually untouched by the corrector. Elsewhere the corrector seems to have completed notation left unfinished by the original engraver,

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29 *Essay*, vol. 1, chap. 1, paras. 16–17.
30 In only two other cases, however (movement 2 of Sonata III, and movement 1 of Sonata IV), are the additions to the original tempo marks clearly in a second engraver’s hand.
31 *Essay*, vol. 1, chap. 1, para. 96.
as in figure 4.9. Here, in measures 20 and 21, the beams on the sixteenth- and thirty-second notes of the inner voices, as well as the accompanying numerals (indicating fingering), have been squeezed in, probably by a more expert engraver correcting the original work.\(^{32}\)

Despite the evident care with which these changes were made, they barely affect the actual musical text. Indeed, for anyone seeking evidence about the compositional history of these pieces, it comes as something of a letdown to discover that few of the many other alterations made after the initial engraving of the plates are more substantial than these. A small number of changes carried out only after the first publication of the Prob"stücke do, however, represent substantive revisions of the musical text. These alterations represent a third stage in Bach’s preparation of the plates, and one set of revisions significantly affects the musical character of a piece, again reflecting a passage in the treatise. Throughout the third movement of Sonata III, the corrector added three-note slurs in the left hand, and these slurs are distinctly thinner and more finely drawn than the original ones in the upper staff (see figure 4.10). Bach refers specifically to the added slurs, without which one would, according to Bach, detach each note in the bass line.\(^{33}\) With the slurs, however, the notes under each slur are played smoothly, the two lower notes held until the upper one has been played, producing in effect a three-note broken chord. The result is a more elegant, if less lively, musical affect.

Several other substantive changes made at the same time consist of ornament signs added in three movements—including the third movement of Sonata III, which received the new slurs. One of these ornament signs is visible in figure 4.10: the trill symbol, taking the form of a small squiggle, above the penultimate note in the upper staff of measure 32. It was common in the eighteenth century for performers to add such ornaments improvisatorily, but members of the Bach family were famous for writing out all the ornaments to be played in their compositions. C.P.E. Bach, like his

\(^{32}\) This is clearest in the tenor part of measure 20, where the beams have been drawn over a fingering numeral “i” that remains barely visible above the note g.

father, often added ornament signs when revising previously composed works, and this example is exceptional only for the manner in which it was added to a previously etched copper plate.

The history of the Probestücke does not end with their expanded edition, which was probably published alongside the revised edition of volume 1 in 1787. By that date at least two unauthorized editions of the Probestücke had appeared, in which Bach’s musical text underwent further modification under the hands of editors who simplified Bach’s ornament signs and altered other aspects of his music. More such editions followed. The scores of his father and other eighteenth-century composers were subjected to similar changes in nineteenth-century editions; indeed, until twenty or thirty years ago most musicians learned many classic compositions not in their original versions but in more or less substantially altered texts produced by later editors. In the case of Emanuel Bach, however, the most radical editing of his music occurred not in subsequent printings but in certain manuscript copies. During the eighteenth century, most professional musicians learned their craft by making their own manuscript copies of existing works, and sometimes in the process they refashioned the music for their own purposes. Thus some manuscript copies of Bach’s Probestücke specify the piano as the intended instrument, and some omit Bach’s fingerings, which a professional player might have regarded as unnecessary (and a nuisance to copy). Some manuscripts also show altered ornament signs and even notes (see Schulenberg appendix 2).

Of thirty manuscripts known to contain all or part of the Probestücke, the greatest number include the first movement of Sonata VI, sometimes alone or together with just one or two other movements. This circumstance must reflect the presence, in this piece only, of the technique of hand-crossing. Here the player’s left hand, normally confined to the bass, repeatedly leaps over the right hand to play in the upper register of the keyboard. At other moments in the piece, the right hand similarly crosses over the left. These hand-crossings constitute just one aspect of the piece’s virtuoso manner, which also encompasses a blustery pathos that would have appealed to pianists of the early Romantic era—the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Bach’s keyboard music remained one of the most frequently played and admired repertories.

Further details in the descriptions of manuscript sources D 1–30 in CPEB:CW, I/3, 158–161.

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in northern Europe. Bach used hand-crossing with equal persistence in no other piece, apart from the early minuet Wq I11, his first engraved work. His use of the technique in the Probestücke must have reflected a wish to include examples of all important keyboard techniques, even one which, in this case, he rarely used. The device nevertheless has an obvious attraction, and the Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti (a contemporary of J. S. Bach) was famous for his frequent use of it.

A younger contemporary of Emanuel Bach whose attention may have been caught by this piece was Beethoven. Born in 1770, Beethoven must have known the Probestücke, for his teacher Neefe was an admirer of Emanuel Bach, and Beethoven later recommended Bach’s treatise to his own student Czerny. The F-minor Probestück has echoes in the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonate pathétique, composed in about 1798. This movement contains not only hand-crossings but other virtuoso figuration that recalls passages in Bach’s piece and could have been suggested by it. Whether or not Bach’s piece directly influenced Beethoven, with its popularity C.P. E. Bach joined the not inconsiderable number of composers whose best-known works are among those least characteristic of their style. Although Bach never wrote anything else like this piece, its popularity suggests that many early Romantics saw Bach as one of themselves. Certainly this is the implication of Gerstenberg’s “experiment” with the last movement of the same sonata. In fact the sources of Bach’s music lay in a very different musical culture. Yet Emanuel Bach advocated for the primacy of musical expression in place of the learning or “musical science” associated with his father, urging readers of his Essay to “play from the soul, not like a trained bird.” He would not have been disappointed if his Probestücke were included in the training of a youthful contemporary who was to join his father among the supreme musicians of the European tradition.


36 These passages occur in the second theme-group of the first movement of the Beethoven work. Resemblances are particularly notable between measures 221–225 of the latter and the opening of the Probestück (both with the recurring melodic interval A-flat–F); the figuration in broken chords beginning at measures 89 and 253 is also reminiscent of Bach’s work.

Schulenberg Appendix 1

Eighteenth-Century Exemplars of Bach's Essay and Musical Supplement at Harvard

Identified below is the edition, version, or state represented by each exemplar. Certain exemplars are bound or shelved together with others; therefore, some call numbers are repeated. Not included here are later editions, translations, facsimiles, and microform reproductions.

Volume 1, first edition (1753)
Houghton Library, *54-1758 (known as the Aldrich copy), shelved with a copy of the musical supplement, original version
Houghton Library, *55-477 (the Engel-Hipkins copy), shelved with a second copy of the musical supplement, original version

Volume 1, second edition (1759)
Houghton Library, *55-478, bound with a copy of volume 2

Volume 1, second edition (1759), with reprinted title page by Schwickert (1780)
Houghton Library, Isham 600.6*, bound with a copy of volume 2

Volume 1, third, revised edition (1787)
Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 347.12.3 PHI, bound with a copy of volume 2
Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 347.12.4 PHI, bound with a copy of volume 2
(revised edition), online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.loeb:1126055>
(accessed December 5, 2013)

Volume 2 (1762)
Houghton Library, *54-1759 (the Aldrich copy)
Houghton Library, *55-478
Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 347.12.3 PHI, bound with a copy of volume 1,
online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.loeb:1126056>
(accessed December 5, 2013)
Volume 2 (1762), with reprinted title page by Schwickert (1780)
Houghton Library, Isham 600.6*, bound with a copy of volume 1

Volume 2, revised edition (1797)
Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 347.12.4 PHI, bound with a copy of volume 1
(revised edition), online at
  <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.loeb:1126055> (accessed December 5, 2013)

Musical supplement to volume 1, original version comprising 26 engraved pages
(presumably 1753)
Houghton Library, *54-1760, state 1a, with first version of title page
Houghton Library, *55-480 (the Engel-Hipkins copy), state 1b, with second version
of title page
Loeb Music Library, Merritt Room, Mus 627.2.411 PHI, state 1b, with second version
of title page, online at
  <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:fhcl.loeb:1069648> (accessed December 5, 2013)

Musical supplement to volume 1, expanded version comprising 31 engraved pages
(presumably 1787)
[No copies at Harvard]
Schulenberg Appendix 2
Selected Variants in Manuscript Copies of the Probestücke

The various sorts of readings listed below occur in the manuscripts designated in CPEB: CW, I/3 as members of source group D, which comprises “manuscripts not used for the edition” (pages 158–161). The alterations to the text listed in the final entry also occur in source E 3, an unauthorized edition of 1804 or 1805 by Louis Adam, which may be the source for some of the specific readings in the manuscripts.

Title specifies the medium of the pieces as piano
sources D 12, D 16

Title specifies harpsichord (“Clavi Cembalo [sic]”)
D 15

Arrangement for glass harmonica
D 6

Omission or alteration of fingerings, ornaments, and dynamics or other performance signs
D 1, D 3, D 8, D 10, D 19, D 20

Copy of Sonata VI, movement 1 only (or with one or two other pieces)
D 3, D 8, D 10, D 11, D 12, D 13, D 14, D 15, D 16, D 28, D 29

Alternate notation of the hand-crossings in Sonata VI, movement 1
D 1, D 3, D 15

Alteration of the musical text in Sonata VI, movement 1
D 3, D 28, D 29
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