

C. P. E. Bach: Concerto in E Minor, W. 24: Preface

The concerto W. 24, the second of C. P. E. Bach's two concertos in E minor and his twenty-fifth keyboard concerto overall, was composed at Potsdam in 1748, according to the catalogue of the composer's estate.¹ Its popularity during Bach's lifetime is attested by the unusually large number of surviving eighteenth-century copies and by the four cadenzas that Bach wrote out for the Largo.² The popularity of the concerto may have stemmed from the simplicity of its technical demands on the player and its restrained expressive aspirations, at least by comparison with other concertos from the same period, such as Bach's previous concerto, W. 23 in D minor.

Like many of Bach's other concertos composed in the 1740s, W. 24 was revised on several occasions. Indeed, it is exceptional among the concertos in the number of extant sources preserving revised or variant readings, as well as in the complete absence of autograph material. Nevertheless, each revision appears to have affected different sections or aspects of the work. Hence, for any given passage, there are rarely if ever more than two authentic readings, and much of the work was never revised beyond its earliest known state, at least as far as the notes are concerned. But, as in other works from the same period, many of the performance indications, including ornament signs, figured bass symbols, and indications of articulation, appear to be relatively late additions. Unfortunately, a relative chronology of the revisions is all that can be established; it is not possible to give an absolute date to any version.³

It has proved useful to distinguish four versions of the concerto, here referred to as A, B, C and D.⁴ The main text of this edition invariably presents the latest reading, that of Version D. In the absence of any autograph material, the edition is based primarily on a set of parts (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. Bach St 363) written partially by an anonymous copyist whose hand has been identified in other manuscripts that also contain autograph entries. Version A is given in an alternate score. Most of Bach's revisions took the following forms:

1. insertion or deletion of measures; revision of all sounding parts
2. revision of inner string parts; addition of inner voices in the keyboard part
3. variation (embellishment) of existing melodic material
4. addition or substitution of ornaments, articulation signs, and figured bass symbols

Passages that underwent revisions of types 1, 2, and 3 will be shown within angle brackets < > in the score for version A. In addition, for each such passage the letters A, B, and C indicate which versions of the work retained the passage in its original form (i.e., the letters "AB" indicate passages that were not altered until version C). Only twice did Bach insert or delete whole measures, and only occasionally did he revise all of the parts sounding together in any given passage.⁵

Revisions of type 4 can be identified only from the list of variant readings, or by comparing the two scores.

Although W. 24 presents few special problems of interpretation for performers familiar with Bach's concertos, a number of questions are considered in the Critical Commentary (see under "Performance Problems"). In addition, performers must choose between the various versions,

bearing in mind that the ornament signs and other performance indications found in the later versions may have merely made explicit practices already employed when the work was notated in one of its earlier forms. Most performers will probably prefer Version D, if only because its text contains the most thorough indication of performance markings. There might, however, be reasons for preferring the more austere conception represented by Version A.

Notes

1. *Verzeichniss des musicalischen Nachlasses des verstorbenen Capellmeisters Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Hamburg, 1790); facsimile edited by Rachel Wade (New York: Garland, 1981). The work is listed as item 428 in E. Eugene Helm, *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

2. The cadenzas are given in the list of variant readings.

3. Although the *Nachlassverzeichnis* assigns dates to the revision (*Erneuerung*) of some early works, it does not do so in this case. But there is no evidence that the concerto existed in any form prior to 1748, as suggested by Helm, 90.

4. There is also a printed edition (London, ca. 1775) containing a spurious fifth version. The letters assigned here to the respective versions do not correspond with those given by Helm; see the Critical Commentary.

5. Passages in which all sounding parts were revised are: I.32, 38–40, 53, and 55; II.1, 12–13, 16–17, 39, 56, 60, 71, and 85; III.53, 59–63, 67, 73–4, 109–10, 319, 332, and 376–7.