

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY:

PERFORMING MUSIC OF CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH

The motivation for this project is a deep fascination for the music of Emanuel Bach, and a wish not only to study it for myself to understand as much as possible, but also be able to communicate as much as possible of what I find to anyone who want to listen.

The music can at times be hard to access. It is difficult to play, both technically and musically. It is extremely dense in content, and can also have long, repeated sections. But through the compact surface, a personal expression breaks through, that can take your breath away.

There are many questions to consider. The questions asked depends on both the professional and on the personal approach: A performer working with a project within the field of artistic research asks – at least in part – other questions than the ones asked by musicologists.

Conclusions will thus be different, because the methods applied are different.

The subjective qualities of this repertoire seem to speak very directly to every individual fascinated by it. To me too: The questions arising in the face of repertoire is what makes this music existential for me. This is where I hope to contribute to the field: As a performer, both within the discipline Artistic Research, and in my personal encounter with Emanuel Bach's music.

1. AIM

In the project I have investigated selected repertoire by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach from the perspective of the performer and the audience. I have wanted to deepen my understanding of the music, and to try out ways to communicate this to the audience in a direct and complete manner.

2. LIMITATION: TRACKS

Bach has written large amounts of music, and there is also a lot of literature written on his music. I have therefore limited the project by selecting specific issues to work with – hereinafter referred to as "tracks". The selection of repertoire has thus included music for different ensembles and formats, but has been done in terms of relevance in relation to the track currently worked on. The same limitation has to some extent applied to the selection of literature.

As new ideas often have grown out of the reflection of the tracks I have been working with, it is not always easy to keep them separate: This will be further discussed in the section "Artistic choices and turning points" in the submitted reflection.

One example of a track could be the relationship between music and meaning: In the chapter "Vom Vortrage" ("Performance") in the *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen*, Bach writes very directly about the "true content" of the music.¹ The poet H. W. Gerstenberg challenged him in a letter² to help his "audience" (listeners and performers alike) to understand this content in his music – why not write even keyboard music based on texts, f. ex. psalms? Bach was not immediately enthusiastic, but Gerstenberg followed up on the idea; devising a text to a piece of very abstract and unsingable piece of music – the large c minor fantasia from the collection of examples³ for the Versuch. The text⁴ (one version is Socrates

¹ Bach *Versuch* pp. 115-33, especially §2, p. 117.

² Bach/Suchalla pp. 320-29.

³ Bach "Exempel".

with the poison cup, another is Hamlet's soliloquy) is very pompous, but I do not think it goes too far in comparison to the expression of the keyboard piece. The experience is nevertheless very different, when confronted with a very explicit text.

Bach has also made texts, commenting his own music: In the trio sonata "Sanguineus et Melancholicus"⁵. In this example, the dialogue between the two persons (represented by two violins) is explained in the finest detail, in footnotes.

I wanted to explore how these texts added to music influence the way we experience the music: Both my own experience, the experience of my fellow musicians, and the experience of the listeners. Maybe it will be clearer, maybe it will become too much? Maybe we will need to listen several times in order to take it all in?

3. METHODS / PROCESS

To develop an understanding is not a linear process following a predictable schedule, in which one defined task is based on the completion of another: One has to approach the work from a number of angles, to gradually come to know a landscape built of knowledge, insight, skills and experience.

The approaches have been:

A: Repertoire

I have worked with selected repertoire relevant to the work on the tracks: Practiced it in an artistically analyzing and reflecting manner, and performed selected pieces in various concert formats.

The learning of a piece, concert preparations, and the performance itself are three different work forms. They give different experiences, and stimulate different reflections.

B: Literature

I have read about the 18th century's thoughts on music and art, and on Bach's music in particular, by reading a selection of sources from a performers perspective: Examples are Baumgarten's⁶ dawning ideas on the art's role as a transmitter of meaning, Schiller's⁷ ideas on art as a catalyst in the bettering or formation of the human mind, in the tension between reason and nature. Further on; newspaper notices about Bach from his own time,⁸ to see how the public viewed him, Bach's own letter correspondence, to follow his thoughts through time,⁹ and of course Versuch,¹⁰ Bach's own manifesto on music education.

To get a glimpse of the 18th century artistic perspective on *Empfindsamkeit/Sensibility* I have also read some fiction literature from the period: F. ex. by L. Sterne¹¹, S. Richardson¹², J. W. Goethe¹³ and D. Diderot¹⁴, and a snide view by J. Austen¹⁵.

⁴ Published and discussed in Chrys. *Klavier-Phantasie*.

⁵ Bach "Trio".

⁶ As discussed in Hosler *Changing Aesthetics*, and Kjølrup "Another".

⁷ Schiller *Oppdragelse*.

⁸ Bach/Wiermann.

⁹ Bach/Suchalla.

¹⁰ Bach *Versuch*.

¹¹ Sterne *Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy*.

¹² Richardson *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.

¹³ Goethe *Werther*.

¹⁴ Diderot *Rameau's nephew*.

¹⁵ Austen *Sense and Sensibility* a. o.

I have also oriented myself in some modern literature, on 18th century aesthetics¹⁶, analyses of Bach's music from different points of view¹⁷, biographic material¹⁸ and so on. The selection of literature has been attempted limited with regard to the relevance of the project, both in relation to the work on specific tracks, and to the usefulness for me as a performer.

C: Dissemination

I have tried out various concert forms to gather experience on which situations are best suited to communicate Bach's music to the listeners in a direct and involving manner: I have tried opening the concert format – by repeating the same piece several times, discussing with the audience and asking for specific feedback. I have even forced them to read Norwegian translations of text by projecting it on to the wall. I have tried to meet listeners in unexpected locations in public spaces: Out of doors, in museums – and in different appearances: In my every day clothes, in black concert attire, and in a baroque dress. I have ventured into the intuitive, by combining fiction literature and poetry with the music. My thoughts and experiences will be discussed in the submitted reflection.

D: Reflection

Reflection on the work is a constantly ongoing process, both in the form of thought processes and of varying genres of writing; and has been an important part of the work method. It is triggered by the encounter with new knowledge and experience, and does at the same time stimulate the work in progress by posing new questions and approaches.

4. DOCUMENTATION

The various parts of the work have been documented in different ways, aiming to reproduce the original media as directly as possible:

Practice has to some extent been documented by audio recordings, in which the work is verbally commented.

Concerts were documented with audio and video recordings: Most often in both formats, but at some lesser-profiled concerts I only made a simple sound recording.

Critical reflections on the project and the process have mainly been documented in writing.

5. PUBLICATION

An Internet site was made for the project during the spring of 2012, at www.cpebach.no It has been used for publishing information about public presentations: Concerts, three radio programs and one written publication. Both in the form of announcements, and of reflections on the questions explored. The project description is also available here, and some few sound files.

A Facebook-page was also made for the project, www.facebook.com/EmanuelBach/ Much of the same material have been posted here, but with more weight on advertising concerts.

I consider the catalogue of the Society for Artistic Research www.researchcatalogue.net a suitable platform for the final publication of the project reflections, as it allows for a non-linear structuring of the text material, as well as supporting sound and video files.

¹⁶ F. ex. Kjørup "Another", Goring *Rhetoric*, Hosler *Changing Aesthetics*.

¹⁷ T.d. Busch "Redendes Prinzip" and several articles from *Studia Musicologica Norvegica* no. 15: Edler "C. Ph. E. Bach", Krummacher "Kontinuität", Schwab "C. Ph. E. Bach", Hegdal "C. Ph. E. Bach" and Kleiberg "C. Ph. E. Bach".

¹⁸ F. ex. Ottenberg "C. P. E. Bach".

6. RESULT

The project will culminate in a concert, possibly combined with an exhibition of documentation of work processes and sub-products: Both sounding, visual and textual. At the final concert, there will also be submitted a CD published on the label Eudirice. This will contain work on the last project track.

7. CONTEXT

A: Professional contexts

The project forms part of the Grieg Academy's professional environment for HIP (Historically Inspired Performance, represented by the research group HIP-GA), ranging from the late Middle Ages to early romance. The GA already has expertise on the late Baroque and the Classical era, but I am the first to work specifically with the transition between the two periods.

I will also contribute to broaden the Norwegian and Nordic community for HIP: I have not yet found any performer in the Nordic countries specializing specifically on Emanuel Bach's music: The closest exception being Inger Grudin-Brandt's LP recording from 1979, which contains sonatas and fantasias on the fortepiano and clavichord.

In Finland there is a broad interest in the clavichord, but no one has studied it as a main instrument at the doctoral education of the Sibelius Academy, nor the music of Emanuel Bach.

B: International relevance

One must assume that Emanuel Bach's music is more played in Central Europe, and taught at the conservatories, than what is reflected by the record market, and on the homepages of profiled performers: Often only one piece by Bach is presented as part of a historical timeline in these contexts. The most important exception to this, is the huge project undertaken by Miklos Spanyi – he is currently recording Bach's complete keyboard music for BIS.

However, I find no earlier work on Emanuel Bach within the field of Artistic Research.

This is where I contribute to the field, in my subjective approach to the handling of this part of the European cultural heritage. I have worked with repertoire and thoughts central to 18th century Europe, which also raises interest among today's concert audiences. My treatment of the material is innovative in the sense that it experiments with tension field between HIP and Artistic Research. I have through my work transformed the material by making it my own, and the dissemination of this subjective understanding of the material is my contribution to the international field.

LITERATURE USED IN THE PROJECT

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