

These three important works were composed in 1788, the year of the composer's death. He was not able to see them printed. The autograph manuscripts – incomplete in places – which were used as the basis for our edition are preserved in the Music Department of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, as a permanent loan from the Sing-Akademie, Berlin, under the signature SA 3327. This includes a score and three part books with the cover title “Drey Quartetten für Fortepiano, Flöte und Bratsche, von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach”.* In both score and part, the keyboard instrument is given as “cembalo”.

The manuscript was originally owned by Sara Levi, née Itzig (1761–1854), a pupil of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach. She was particularly fond of the music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, and built up an extensive collection of autograph scores, copies of his works and original printed editions, some from C. P. E. Bach's personal effects. This famous Berlin patron, a great aunt of Felix Mendelssohn, was friendly with Karl Friedrich Zelter, director of the Sing-Akademie in Berlin from 1800 onwards. Thanks may be due to him for the fact that Sara Levi bequeathed a large part of her collection to the Sing-Akademie.** In the years between the end of World War II and 1999, when the Sing-Akademie collection was thought to have disappeared, before it returned from Kiev to Berlin, it was feared that the autograph manuscripts of these quartets had been lost. This source is therefore not listed in Helm's catalogue of works (pp. 116/117); instead, just a copy preserved in the Library of the Conservatoire Royal in Brussels is listed, which has also been consulted (signature 6358). This beautiful and clear manuscript was made by Michel, C. P. E. Bach's main copyist in Hamburg. It comes from the personal effects of the Mecklenburg court organist Johann Heinrich Westphal († 1825). Three years after Bach's death, Westphal wrote to the composer's widow concerning these pieces and the divergence between the title “Quartette” and the actual scoring for trio, for he felt that a separate bass part might be missing. Writing on behalf of her mother Johanna Maria, Anna Carolina Philippina Bach replied: “For the quartets there is no bass part other than that of the keyboard part, otherwise Your Honour would certainly have received it immediately with the other parts.”

In the 18th century, works were not described according to the number of performers required (quartet, quintet, sextet), rather according to the number of parts composed. Thus, for example, a work scored for fully written out keyboard instrument and violin could be entitled “trio”. As the keyboard part of our “quartets” is not a figured bass, rather two fully written out parts, the description “quartet” is quite logical in the sense of the conventional terminology. In the “Verzeichnis des musikalischen Nachlasses des verstorbenen Capellmeisters Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach” [Catalogue of the musical works of the deceased Capellmeister Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach] prepared by Bach himself and published by his widow in Hamburg in 1790, we read, however, in the scoring details for our pieces, “Quartetten

fürs Clavier, Flöte, Bratsche und Baß”. We have therefore decided to include a separate cello part with our edition, although there is no such part in either the Berlin or the Brussels sources. Depending on tonal factors such as the carrying capacity of the bass register of the keyboard instrument chosen, or the availability of a cellist in the ensemble, the use of an ‘ad lib’ cello may be considered. For a performance with cello, great sensitivity is requested, for a cellist playing in the old basso continuo style could easily sound anachronistic, given the eminently “modern” style of the pieces, especially as keyboard, flute and viola have parts of equal musical interest, and are written out and notated meticulously.

With regard to the keyboard instrument, we may assume that Bach very probably conceived the pieces for fortepiano or even clavichord, and less likely for harpsichord; the general descriptions “cembalo” or “clavier” stand in the 18th century for clavichord, cembalo or fortepiano. In his *printed* editions, which were aimed at the general public, Bach was much more precise. Thus, as early as the second collection of pieces “for connoisseurs and amateurs” of 1780, the keyboard instrument is indicated as “fortepiano”. The richness of texture and nuances in the keyboard part of our quartets indicate an instrument which was capable of a gradation of dynamics. Only an instrument that offered the possibility of flexibility in the sound was suitable for C. P. E. Bach's late style in the jagged discontinuity of his Storm and Stress phase. But in order not to preclude the harpsichord entirely, we have used the historical generic term for all keyboard instruments, “clavier”.

“As I have had to write most of my compositions for particular people and for the public, I have always been under greater constraints than in the few pieces that I have written for myself. Amongst my works, particularly those for keyboard, are only a few trios, solos and concertos that I have composed with complete freedom and for my own use.” This confession from Bach's autobiography clarifies a dilemma felt by many composers of the Baroque period. We see how much the feeling of freedom inspired him, in his 75th year (!), to try his hand at something new and thus to demonstrate that “composing the way young people do, forgetting the figured bass, and venturing into new stylistic and tonal worlds – I can do this too!” This is shown impressively in his consistent motivic development, his technique of developing extended forms from minimal material and his innovative ideas on instrumentation in these three progressive, indeed almost pre-Romantic sounding mature works by this great composer.

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* The copies of both the “quartets” in a minor and D major in the Széchenyi National Library, Budapest bear the title “Quartetto für Klavier, Flöte und Bratsche”.

** On the titlepage of the Berlin manuscript, a note has been added in Zelter's hand: “Die beyden letzten Quartetten sind von des Componisten eigener Hand geschrieben und ein Geschenk der Madame Sara Levi, geborene Itzig. Z.” [“Both the last quartets are in the composer's own hand and a present from Madame Sara Levi, née Itzig, Z.”]