

THE PIANOFORTE AND ITS MUSIC

Classicism and the Sonata—A Pair of Definitions—Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach—Joseph Haydn and His Pianoforte Music—Father Bach and Silbermann—At the Court of Frederick the Great—Mozart and Stein's Instruments.

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In a peculiarly intimate manner the pianoforte, which superseded the other instruments of the clavier family about the close of the period illustrated by the men last discussed, is bound up with classicism and the sonata. I use these terms arbitrarily, intending that they shall serve as observation points, and to this end I must attempt a definition of them. Such a definition ought to be general and comprehensive rather than specific. Strictly speaking, the dividing lines commonly considered as existing between periods, schools and artistic forms do not exist. These things are overlapping and gradual growths. We recognize them, note their elements, give them names, and employ these names in broad characterization after a man of strong individuality has arisen and stamped them with the hallmark of his genius. Such a man the people of a later day are prone to look upon as an innovator or inventor, when, in point of fact, he is only a continuator, and, at the best, a perfecter. So Palestrina; so Bach; so Haydn; so Beethoven; so Wagner. All these are but products of an evolution of vast scope and antiquity, and were surrounded by men who worked with them on the lines which they drew, broad and luminous, across the pages of musical history. That fact explains why it was that some of them seemed less great to their contemporaries than to those who came after them. They were not so pre-eminent in their day because they were surrounded by composers whose learning and skill satisfied the critical demands and the popular taste of their times. Not even the greatest of these men would loom up in the historical vista as he does were the works of his predecessors and contemporaries intimately known and his relationship to them properly appreciated. The history of every art is full of pretty fictions—too much occupied with biography. When musical history shall be revised (as it will be when the labors of the critical antiquaries now active are completed) it will have lost some of its romance, but it will better disclose the processes of musical evolution.

But to the definitions. Classical music is music written by men of the highest rank in their art—men corresponding with the *classici* of ancient Rome. It is music written in obedience to widely accepted laws, disclosing the highest degree of perfection on its technical and formal side, but preferring aesthetic beauty to emotional content, and refusing to sacrifice form to poetic, dramatic or characteristic expression. In this definition I have embraced the notion of rank and also the antithesis between classicism



MOZART.

After a copper-plate by an Italian artist.

and romanticism which will have to be borne in mind when we proceed to a discussion of the music of the nineteenth century.

A pianoforte sonata is a piece of music designed for the instrument, consisting of three or four movements, which are contrasted in tempo and character, and, in the best specimens, connected by a spiritual bond. Strictly speaking, the model, or design, which distinguishes the sonata from other compositions is found in the first movement. This is tripartite. In the first

section the subject matter of the movement (generally two themes, which are contrasted in mood but related in key) is presented for identification; in the second it is developed, worked out, illustrated, exploited. The third section is recapitulatory; it is made up of a repetition of the first part, with modifications and a close.

The sonata became the dominant form in all kinds of instrumental music in the middle of the eighteenth century, and has remained the dominant form ever since. Like everything else in this world, it was a growth. Its name existed centuries before the thing itself as we know it now. If my readers will think back upon the story of the pianoforte as I have sketched it they will note that it illustrates the first, the simplest and the most pervasive principle in the law of evolution. Each step, from the savage's bow to the grand pianoforte of today, shows a development from the simple to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. So, too, does the history of the sonata. When the term was first used it served only to distinguish pieces that were sounded—i. e., played—from pieces that were sung. Sonata was the antithesis of cantata, and nothing more. The orchestral pieces of the Gabriellis, in the sixteenth century, were called sonatas; so were the instrumental preludes, interludes and postludes in mixed pieces. A century later the term was applied to compositions in several movements for combinations of viols, for violin alone and for violin solo with *continuo* for the clavier. Essentially there was no difference between the sonata and the suite of this period, a relic of which fact is still seen in the inclusion of such dance forms as the minuet and rondo in the sonata of to-day. The sonata form, with its triple division into expository, illustrative and recapitulative sections, moreover, is itself little else than an expansion of a device found in some of the oldest printed dances. The repetition of the first section, the modulatory nature of the second section and the reprise in the third may be seen in the following branle (Shakespeare's "brawl"), from a book of French dances published in 1545:



A Bach closed the epoch last described; a Bach opened the new. The greatest master of the fugue was succeeded by a son who laid broad the foundations upon which the structure characteristic of the new century was to be reared. The contrapuntal style gave way to the free, polyphony to homophony, counterpoint to harmony. The change was not abrupt, but gradual. The achievements of Johann Sebastian Bach had long been presaged, and his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-'88), had many forerunners. There were Rameau and Couperin, in France; Domenico Scarlatti and Paradisi, in Italy, and Kuhnau, in Germany. Nevertheless, his immediate successors, Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-'91), looked upon him as the real fashioner of the form which each of them took a hand in perfecting. "He is the father, we are the boys," said Mozart. The form was a purely arbitrary one. Unlike the suite, it owed nothing to the dance; nor was it beholden to any type or types of folksong. Yet it proved to be a marvellously efficient vehicle for beauty, an inviting playground for the fancy. It promoted a love for symmetry, furthered unity between the parts, and at the same time increased the opportunities for contrast in moods not only between the movements, but in the movements themselves. Varied expression, flux and reflux of sentiment, wide and fruitful harmonic excursions, richness in modulation—all were invited by it. The way was broadened for the exercise of the imagination and opened to the play of the emotions. German music in especial lost some of its seriousness and sobersidedness and took on some of the careless gaiety of its French and Italian sisters. The sonata was a convenient formula for composers, and stimulated them to vast productiveness. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach wrote 146 sonatas for clavier alone, 52 concertos with accompaniments, besides a mass of other works; Haydn wrote 34 sonatas and 20 concertos, and employed the form in his 125 symphonies and many chamber pieces; Vanhal composed 23 sonatas and 106 sonatas; Clementi, 64 sonatas; Cramer, 105, and so on.

The laws of the sonata were less rigid than those of the polyphonic forms, yet it permitted the exercise of any amount of skill and learning. Logic was not excluded, but its demands were

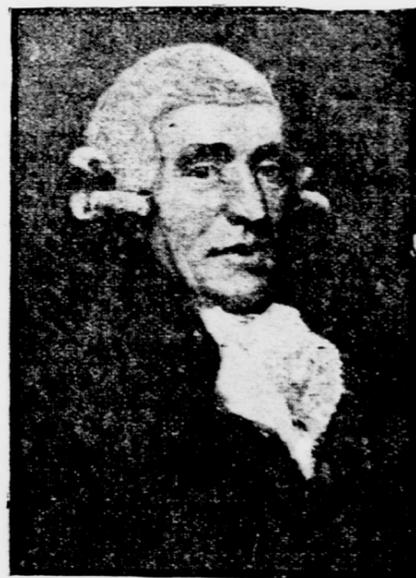
no longer tyrannous. Originality and ingenuity were expended chiefly in the invention of themes—that is, the discovery of material. This material, once found, was easily poured into the mould waiting to receive it. But there was scope for all the known styles of writing—for thematic development, which, along new lines, is become the be-all and end-all of music since Beethoven; for homophony and polyphony, for fugue, for recitative, for variety of rhythm,



CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH.

and, as appeared later, for dramatic expression as well as lyric.

C. P. E. Bach has suffered at the hands of modern criticism because he stands in the shadow of his father. He was Johann Sebastian's third son, and after he had abandoned the law became chamber musician and cembalist at the Prussian court. There it was his special duty to accompany the tootling of Frederick the Great's flute at the court concerts, of which Dr. Burney gives us so delightful an account in his "Present State." He was accounted less gifted than his elder brother, Wilhelm Friedemann (who inherited his father's genius in a large measure, but squandered it in an aimless and dissolute life), but he did a great service to music in strengthening and improving the lines of the sonata, and also in laying the foundations of pianoforte playing in his book, entitled "Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen, mit Exempeln und 18 Probestücken in 6 Sonaten erläutert" ("Essay on the True Manner of Playing the Clavier, Illustrated with Examples and 18 Trial Pieces in 6 Sonatas"). This book was an authority in its field for generations, and is still sought by students of pianoforte pedagogics. Its first part was published by Bach himself in 1753, the second part in 1761. It discusses methods of fingering, embellishments (*Manieren*), style (*Vortrag*), accompaniment and thoroughbass. Bach printed much of his music in periodical publications and otherwise, and thus enjoyed an opportunity to reach the public ear vastly greater than did his father, who ruined his eyes copying and engraving his compositions. Adolf Prosnitz, in his "Handbuch der Clavier-Literatur" (published by Carl Gerold's Sohn in Vienna, 1887), describes his music



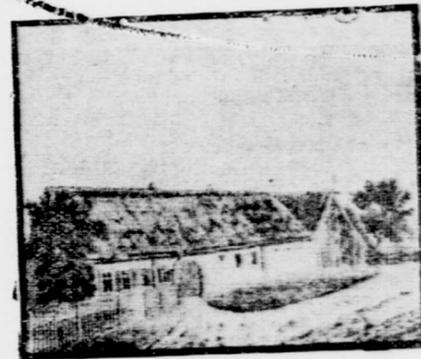
HAYDN.

After a painting by John Hoppner.

as predominantly melodic, vivacious and varied in rhythm; at times full of feeling, and anon humorous; rich in concertos and modulations which occasionally run out in *diverria*. Flowing cantabile alternates with lively figuration and passage-work calculated to develop the capacity of the instrument. As in Domenico Scarlatti, two-voicedness prevails; wherefore

the music frequently sounds empty. In only a portion of his works did this Bach utilize the complete sonata form as he handed it over to Haydn. Couperin and Scarlatti seem to have influenced him more than the great father who begot and taught him, though this may have been largely due to his surroundings. There was nothing German about Frederick the Great's court except the people. The great soldier's tastes in art and literature were French; he had no patience with German ideals. Bach followed his French predecessors in writing little dance pieces, to which he gave titles supposed to be suggestive of their contents. Sometimes the titles were proper names (of his friends, doubtless); sometimes they were fancifully delineative of character, like those of Couperin which I have cited—*La Journalière*, *La Complaissante*, *La Capricieuse*, and the like. The French excess of ornament also remains in Emanuel Bach's music.

Scan the programmes of the pianoforte virtuosi of to-day and you shall occasionally find the name of Haydn connected with the "Andante varié" in F Minor. It is an exquisite musical blossom, standing far from its companions and redolent of romanticism. Supposing the recital to be an historical one, you may also look for a sonata, even two sonatas, in E-flat major, and a fantasia in C. Is this, then, the great Haydn, the "father of modern instrumental music"? It is. So far as this study goes, we are concerned with Haydn in the least significant aspect that he occupies in musical history. On this promenade we can only glance at him who established the string quartet and crystallized the symphony and make obeisance in passing. Some of his sonatas live in the classroom, and the teachers are not few who prefer some of them to most of the sonatas of the greater Mozart. "Indeed, in some of them he seems to step beyond Mozart into the Beethoven period," remarks C. F. Pohl in the article on the master in Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians." Haydn does not mark so wide a stride beyond his immediate predecessor as C. P. E. Bach marked beyond his in the mere structure of his pianoforte pieces, but there is a great advance in the firmer, clearer modelling of his material, the greater depth and beauty of his melodies (especially in the slow movements) and the de-



HOUSE IN WHICH HAYDN WAS BORN.

velopment of the spiritual bond of unity between the parts. Artificial elegance has given way to that ingenious winsomeness which mirrored the composer's happy disposition in all that he did. There is less of salon courtesy and more of out-of-doors geniality in the new music. The largest groups of Haydn's music for the pianoforte consist of the thirty-four solo sonatas, the thirty-one trios for pianoforte, violin and violoncello (also denominated sonatas when first published), the sonatas for pianoforte and violin (eight in number in the edition of Breitkopf and Härtel), and the concertos for pianoforte and orchestra. The groups are here put down in the order of their artistic value. The concertos have long been in the limbo of oblivion; the duet sonatas and trios live modestly in the home circle of musical folk; the sonatas survive in the classroom. The order is reversed in the case of Mozart, the best of whose concertos still possess vitality and charm enough to engage the attention of public performers.

Though I have associated the pianoforte with the perfection of the sonata in its classic state the instrument did not become a dominant influence in composition until the advent of Mozart. The invention of Cristofori had practically been forgotten and had to be revived in Germany by Silbermann. That manufacturer produced instruments and brought them to the notice of Bach. It is a familiar story in the books how the great man visited Potsdam in 1747 on the invitation of the great Frederick, arriving at the palace while a court concert was in progress. "Gentlemen, old Bach is come," said the royal flautist, and closed the entertainment at once. Then the company went from room to room to hear Bach play "on the forte-pianos of Silbermann," and to listen with amazement and delight to that improvisation on a theme set by the king, which, when elaborated at home, became the "Musikalisches Opfer." Silbermann was extremely anxious to

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