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THE FLUTE DUETS OF W.F. BACH: SOURCES AND DATING

Anita Breckbill

The six flute duets of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784) are among the finest examples of this genre from the eighteenth century. That they are still not as well known as they deserve to be may stem partly from the problems with the editions that have been available until recently.¹ The question of when these duets were composed has never been completely answered, largely because the sources present a confusing picture. In his classic biography of Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1913), Martin Falck remarked that Bach is known to have composed pieces for the flute in Berlin (or, in other words, during the last decade of his life) but it was not known whether the duets belonged to those pieces.² From a consideration of the autograph manuscripts he did conclude that one of the duets was composed in Berlin and that another was presumably also composed there. But the best he could offer about the four others is that two of them were written in a youthful hand and two more in a hand "not of old age." The purpose of the present article is to examine all the sources of Bach's duets and to determine the works' dates of composition more exactly.

Four eighteenth-century manuscripts of all or portions of the duets survived into the twentieth century. Of these, Bach's autograph manuscript (W) is missing, having presumably been destroyed in World War II; thus only three copies are extant. Two of these copies (K and P) are housed in the music section of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, and one (Q) is in the Royal Library in Copenhagen. The contents of the four manuscripts are as follows:

Autograph manuscript (W)

E minor
G major
E \flat major (F. 55)
F major
E \flat major (F. 56)

Berlin (P)

G major (minus Allabreve)
F major
E \flat major (F. 55)
G major (Allabreve)
E minor

Kirnberger's manuscript (K)

E minor
G major
E \flat major (F. 55)
F major
E \flat major (F. 56)
F minor

Quantz's *Solfeggi* (Q)

G major (excerpts)
F major (excerpts)
E \flat major (F. 55) (excerpts)

Autograph Manuscript (W)

The early history of W.F. Bach's autograph manuscript is unknown. At some point it came into the possession of the Singakademie, Berlin, an institution formed in 1791 to perform and study choral music. There are several ways in which the autograph of the flute duets, which was probably with Bach in Berlin, could have come to be in this library. First, it could have happened through the auspices of Carl Friedrich Zelter (1758-1832), who became a leader of the Singakademie in 1800 and who knew the composer. Another possibility is that Friedemann's brother Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach could have received the manuscript on the composer's death, and that subsequently the manuscript arrived at the Singakademie by way of Georg Pölchau (1773-1836), the Singakademie librarian from 1833 to 1836, who bought most of the musical portions of C.P.E. Bach's estate. A third scenario is that Bach's last student, Sara Levy, may have owned the manuscript. She was a friend of Zelter, and her collection of music passed to the Singakademie after her death.

For information on the autograph manuscript of the duets one must rely on Martin Falck's description from 1913:

The autographs—only the F minor sonata is certainly not preserved in Bach's hand— . . . can be divided into [three] groups on the basis of handwriting and paper.

(1) The sonatas in E minor and G major and the beginning of the first sonata in E♭ major have as watermarks a coat of arms with the heraldic double lily, under which "4" and then "ICH" are written. Might the handwriting, which bears all the marks of Friedemann's writing except that the stems of the notes are written differently and stiffly, represent an unknown youthful hand?

(2) The first sonata in E♭ major and the one in F major are preserved in another autograph which has the same paper as the first group but not the same handwriting. The writing is powerful, not a script of old age. The F major sonata has (faintly) two letters (K.B?) on the other side.

(3) The second sonata in E♭ major is entitled *Duetto a duo [sic] Flauti di W. Fr. Bach*, whereas the remaining are called "Sonata à 2 Flauti." This sonata has the watermark of Group 1, but without the letters; it is, therefore, on different paper. Late, shaky, large Berlin handwriting. In Kirnberger's transcription the F minor duet is placed with this duet.³

Kurt Walther, who was also able to see the autograph, probably in the

1930s, provides a few additional clues to its content in the introduction to his edition of the duets. He reports that ZD 1747 a-c is 30 pages long and has a few mistakes that are easy to rectify after seeing the other two manuscripts.⁴

Kirnberger's Manuscript (K)

One of the two extant manuscripts from the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz (Mus. ms. Am. B. 112) has a long and largely substantiated history. This manuscript has the ownership marks of Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721-1783), who was in the service of Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia. It later came into the Princess' collection. The manuscript remained as part of her library until her death in 1787, when the collection was given to the Joachimsthal, a well-established school, in accordance with codicils to her will (1782 and 1786).⁵ The cataloging of her library, the Amalienbibliothek, was begun in 1800-02 by Carl Friedrich Zelter, and the manuscripts are identified by his numbers.

Because of strong feeling that the holdings of the Amalienbibliothek should remain in Berlin, the library was shifted to the Königliche Bibliothek on 2 May 1914, shortly before the Joachimsthal itself was moved to Templin. The Kirnberger manuscript and the only other W.F. Bach manuscript from the Amalienbibliothek,⁶ like the remaining holdings of the Königliche Bibliothek, later became part of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in West Berlin (although the Bach manuscripts were moved for a few years during and after World War II to the Tübingen University Library).⁷

The flute duets from the Amalienbibliothek are given number 112 in Zelter's catalog. The copy consists of two introductory pages, followed by forty numbered pages of music in folio (37 x 22 cm).⁸ The Berlin Staatsbibliothek reports that the paper is very strong and the chain lines are about 2.4 cm apart. On the introductory page is a clear watermark with the letters CFLB above the numbers 1771, presumably the papermaker's insignia over the date.⁹

The Joachimsthal siglum, its name surrounded by bugles and plant vines, is stamped onto both the first introductory page and the first page of the music itself, and the title page is written and signed by Kirnberger. Robert Eitner, in his catalog of the Joachimsthal music collection (1854), in fact identifies the two W.F. Bach manuscripts from

the Amalienbibliothek (Nos. 111 and 112) as being from the estate of Kirnberger, who died in 1783 leaving many manuscripts to the library he had himself helped to establish. The first four duets, in the order E minor, G major, E♭ major (F. 55), and F major, are in a large, clear hand on pages of fourteen staves. The last two duets, in E♭ major (F. 56) and F minor, are in a smaller, more closely written hand on pages of sixteen staves. K is the only extant manuscript of the F minor duet.

Manuscript of the Berlin Königliche Bibliothek (P)

The third eighteenth-century manuscript of the duets is also held by the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (Mus. ms. P 681), having formed part of that library's original holdings. During World War II and until the mid-1960s it was held in the Westdeutsche Bibliothek, Marburg.¹⁰ The strong, brown paper has parts of a clear watermark on the introductory page: three half moons, a coat of arms, and the initials BV. The copy, eighteen pages long, is entitled "3 Duetti a 2 Flauti Traversa senza Basso dal Signore Gugl. Fried. Bach." It contains four of the six duets in the order: G major (minus the Allabreve movement), F major, E♭ major (F. 55), G major (Allabreve movement), and E minor. The E minor duet seems to have been added as an afterthought, as it is labeled "(Sonata 4)." The manuscript bears no marks of ownership.

The *Solfeggi* (Q)

Excerpts from the duets in G major,¹¹ F major,¹² and E♭ major (F. 55)¹³ appear in the *Solfeggi*, an instruction book compiled by Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773) for his royal flute pupil, Frederick II ("The Great") of Prussia. Winfried Michel and Hermien Teske, the editors of a modern edition of the *Solfeggi*, summarize the known history of the manuscript:

As far as we know, the manuscript was mentioned only twice during the 18th century: in *Westphal's Verzeichnis geschrib. Musicalien* (Hamburg, 1782) and in Traeg's Catalogue (Vienna, 1799); not much later, it apparently came into the possession of H.R.R. Giedde (1756-1816); after his death it remained, with numerous other manuscripts, in the Christiansborg Castle (Denmark) for almost a hundred years. In 1903 it entered the Royal Library in Copenhagen, which had acquired the entire "Giedde Collection." It is kept there under Class. Nr. C I 45 (Gieddes Samling I, 16.).¹⁴

Michel and Teske go on to say that the writing of the music notation

and commentaries of the 74-page volume “conforms in all particulars to Quantz’s writing.” The same paper is used throughout—a paper from Holland with a watermark of a Strassburg lily in a crowned shield with the letters J KOOL.

The Relationship of the Sources

Establishing the relationships of the four eighteenth-century manuscripts (W, K, P, and Q) will help us understand when the duets were written and how they were disseminated. Because W is an autograph manuscript, it must be considered the primary source for the five duets it contains. K appears to be closely related to it. In W the first four duets are written in two hands on one kind of paper, whereas in K they are written in one hand on one kind of paper. The order of the sonatas is the same in W and K, and from the testimony of Kurt Walther the musical markings and content are so similar that differences can be explained as the copyist’s errors. We may therefore conclude that the first four duets of K were copied from W.

W and K include the only copies of the duet in E♭ (F. 56); in addition, the duet in F minor appears only in K. Here the relationship of the two manuscripts is more complex. It seems reasonable to suggest that the first four duets in K were copied before the last two duets were composed, yet not before 1771, the earliest date allowed by the paper on which K is written. Probably, then, the E♭ major duet (F. 56) was added to W on different paper by an older W.F. Bach or by a different scribe; and both this E♭ major duet and the F minor duet were added to K, also on different paper by a different scribe, when the rest of the manuscript had already been in existence for some time. One would imagine that this was done after Friedemann moved to Berlin in 1774. K is clearly the most direct descendant of W; through its inclusion of the F minor duet, it is even more complete than W.

Q contains three of the core of four duets in W and K, although in a different order. We could ascribe the choice of three duets from the four to the taste or pedagogical instinct of the teacher, Quantz, or perhaps to an unknown incomplete manuscript from which he was copying. Still, the appearance of the excerpts in the *Solfeggi* implies that Quantz had a copy of the three duets he drew from and that King Frederick had a similar copy. Quantz’s copy could well have stemmed from his acquaintance with Friedemann Bach in Dresden. Perhaps still

other copies were made from those scores. Certainly the appearance of P in Vienna at the end of the century seems to point back to the copies on which Q was based, more directly than to W or K. The first three duets in P are the same as those in Q and in the same order: G major, F major, and E♭ major (F. 55). The Allabreve from the G major duet seems to have been added to P as an afterthought—perhaps one copyist was enamored of three-movement sonatas and therefore deleted the fourth movement? The E minor duet was also added later. Whoever wrote out P, although he ultimately had access to the four duets, started by writing only three (thus the title “3 Duetti . . .”), then added the Allabreve movement and the fourth duet. The order and the preference for the duets in G major, F major, and E♭ major (F. 55) are points of similarity between Q and P.

The three extant copies of the duets (K, P, and Q) contain many variants, ranging from notes and a time signature to articulation marks and dynamics. One major disparity among the manuscripts is the time signature and rhythmic values of the second movement of the F major duet. In P and Q the time signature is 6/8, whereas K (and W, according to Walther) present the movement in 2/4 meter, producing an apparent conflict between dotted and triplet rhythms.

Treatises of the day differ in how dotted rhythms in the context of triplets should be played. Quantz, in his treatise on flute playing (1752), wanted to distinguish the two rhythms: “You must not strike the short note after the dot with the third note of the triplet, but after it. Otherwise it will sound like 6/8 or 12/8 time.”¹⁵ Friedemann’s brother Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, however, writing only a year later, took the opposite view: “With the advent of an increased use of triplets in common or 4/4 time, as well as in 2/4 and 3/4, many pieces have appeared which might be more conveniently written in 12/8, 9/8, or 6/8.”¹⁶ Bach then gives an example in which the short notes of dotted figures are aligned with the third notes of triplet figures, showing a clear preference for transforming the dotted figures into triplets.

When rhythmic notation was in flux in the eighteenth century, perhaps the copyist of P and Q lent an improving hand to this movement as it was being copied. It is curious that Quantz chose to use the 6/8 time signature in the *Solfeggi* when in his treatise he directed the player to preserve the triple/dotted distinction. Perhaps he was copying from another manuscript in which the choice had already been

made, or perhaps he had asked the composer his intentions and made the change himself.

Two errors in the first movement of the E minor sonata reveal a hitherto unsuspected relationship between K and P. On one note (m. 44, c''') K neglects to add a sharp. P has a sharp on the note—but placed above, not beside, the note, as if it were added later by the correcting hand of a copyist or performer. In addition m. 63 is transmitted in K with an extra sixteenth-note beat in the measure. The first sixteenth-note rest, which Walther reports is correctly written in W, is an eighth-note rest in K. P also has an eighth-note rest, but leaves out the pick-up sixteenth-note. Perhaps W was difficult to read in this measure, so that every source that copied from it had to make a supposition; or perhaps P actually copied from K for this sonata, then corrected K's errors.

The transmission of slurs, staccato signs, and dynamic markings in P differs in several general ways from that in K. In some cases P provides a greater consistency than K in these markings. In other cases P provides additional markings, such as cadential trills and slurs. Sometimes P's additions alter the principal theme of the movement. The first theme of the Presto movement of the F major sonata is adorned with trills in P, although plain in K. P makes a similar change in the fugue subject of the Presto in the E♭ major sonata (F. 55). This time the trills are cadential, leading into the fourth and sixth measures of the subject, and—like the trills added in the F major sonata—they appear throughout the movement at the returns of the subject. Additions of appoggiaturas in the first movement of the E♭ major sonata change the character of the first theme, making it more poignant. In all three movements the copyist of P (or the copy P used) takes an imaginative hand in decorating the principal theme.

The markings in Q do not match those in either P or K. In his excerpts Quantz is concerned with details of articulation and expression that are not usually written into the music by the composer. He makes numerous suggestions about tonguing syllables (*ti, ri, di, dl*). Quantz also writes specific prose directions into the music, such as instructing the royal flutist to turn the flute inward or outward for certain notes, to place the accent on an appoggiatura, and to play trills with a particular finger and to end them in a certain way.¹⁷

In sum, of the three extant manuscripts, K is most closely related

to the lost W, although the first four duets in it were not copied until the 1770s. Q and P are related to another manuscript—copied earlier in the century, connected to W, but not K—and they have significant copying variants from W.

Dating the Duets

The first four duets are harder to date than the last two. Judging from the two hands in W, the duets in E minor and G major seem to have been written before those in E \flat major and F major, in what Falck calls an “unknown youthful hand.” Yet the duets in G major, E \flat major, and F major all appear in the *Solfeggi*. In their edition of the *Solfeggi*, Winfried Michel and Hermien Teske posit 1728-1741 as a dating for that document, the period when Quantz was travelling back and forth between Dresden and Berlin to teach Frederick. Bach's duets make the first appearance early in the *Solfeggi* (p. 12 of 94 pages in the published edition), so it is likely that the composition of the duets preceded the commencement of the *Solfeggi*.

W.F. Bach probably gained early experience in writing two-part music. His family's move to Leipzig in 1723, when he was 13, would have signaled the beginning of his travels with his father to Dresden, where the great flutists Buffardin and Quantz were working. J.S. Bach suddenly wrote much difficult music for the flute in his cantatas in 1724. Perhaps J.S.'s eldest son, too, was impressed enough by the playing of these virtuosi to wish to compose music for the instrument. Yet these duets exhibit more solidity of style than a fourteen-year-old boy, even a Bach, is likely to have acquired. A more probable dating for the first two is 1729 or later, when Friedemann returned from Merseburg to begin studies at the University, or even—if the *Solfeggi* were actually begun later—after 1733 when he moved to Dresden, where he composed the largest part of his instrumental output.

The melody and form of the duets show a decisive difference in style between the first two and the second two. The E minor and G major duets use clear binary or canonic forms and simple themes. The E \flat major (F. 55) and F major duets, on the other hand, present flexible, more complex binary and fugal forms, ornate themes, and generally longer movements. Probably several years separate the composition of the two pairs of duets.

If the editors of the *Solfeggi* are incorrect and those exercises

were not begun before Quantz moved to Berlin that year, they were presumably begun not longer afterwards. In any case, the crucial observation is that Quantz would have had Friedemann Bach's duets in hand when he left for Berlin in 1741, since he taught them to Frederick early on in the *Solfeggi*, and Friedemann does not seem to have gone to Berlin before he visited the city with his father in 1749. In all likelihood, all four duets were composed by 1741.

To sum up, the E minor and G major duets could have been composed as early as 1729 (or even 1724, if we give Friedemann Bach credit for an early maturity) when the composer was in Leipzig. The E♭ major and F major duets could have been written as late as 1741, when Bach was in Dresden. Further study of the *Solfeggi* and the music that appears in them could lead to a more precise dating of Bach's duets.

There is strong evidence that the last two duets, in E♭ major (F. 56) and F minor, were composed in the last decade of W.F. Bach's life when he lived in Berlin. Quantz's copy, as we may surmise from the *Solfeggi*, included only three of the first four duets, while P, a copy which seems to have the same source as Q, includes the first four. W contains only one of the final two duets and in a hand different from the two hands employed for the first four duets. K has the last two duets appended, although the first four were written into that manuscript as late as 1771. Finally, in his *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes* of 1771, Kirnberger (who owned the manuscript K) mentions only four flute duets in the only known reference to the duets in eighteenth-century literature. We may conclude that the final two duets were written after that date, probably after Bach moved to Berlin in 1774. They are similar to other music Bach composed at that time, notably another set of compositions for two unaccompanied instruments, three viola duets. In addition, four of the six movements in the last two flute duets are fugal; since Bach composed eight keyboard fugues in 1778, these duets may be assumed to reflect his compositional interests during his last decade. Thus, it seems probable that the final two duets were composed in Berlin between 1774 and 1784.

Bach moved to Berlin soon after Kirnberger praised the first four flute duets in *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes*. Could it have been this public appreciation of his work that pulled the wandering Bach to Berlin and spurred him to write the final two duets? If so, we are

indebted to Kirnberger for the composition of the last pair of these remarkable works.

Notes

1. The main edition has been Kurt Walther's: *Sechs Duette für 2 Flöten* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, [1939?]). Although Walther had the advantage of having access to the autograph manuscript (W) as well as copies K and P, and he does present a brief critical report, his system of indicating editorial markings made it difficult to distinguish them from the original readings. The other widely used editions of three of the duets have been: Martin Glöder, ed., *Sonate Es-Dur für zwei Flöten (oder Violinen)* [F. 55], Nagels Musik-Archiv, 39 (Hannover: Nagel, 1929) and Albert Rodemann, ed., *Zwei Sonaten für Querflöten allein* [E minor and F minor], Nagels Musik-Archiv, 120 (Kassel: Nagel, 1936; reprint, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1978); the former is based on W and P (and possibly K), and the latter on Martin Falck's copy of W and/or K. The Cundy-Bettoney edition, *Three Sonatas / Two Flutes*, is a pirated version of Glöder and Rodemann's editions. The Kalmus/Belwin Mills edition, *Six Duets for Two Flutes*, is pirated from Walther's. The other American edition, also *Six Duets for Two Flutes* (New York: International Music Company, 1960), was based on Walther's edition but "newly edited by John Wummer," unfortunately making no distinction between editorial markings and original readings. One of the two recent editions, Gerhard Braun's, *Sechs Duette für zwei Flöten* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1988), is unsatisfactory, having been based on K and P but "closely drawn" from P; there is no critical report to distinguish the readings of the two sources. Oskar Peter's edition, *Sechs Sonaten für zwei Querflöten* (Winterthur: Amadeus, 1989), follows K; the additional articulation markings and ornaments from P are shown in parentheses, with editorial markings in brackets. Some of the performance suggestions from Quantz's *Solfeggi* are reproduced in an appendix "for inspiration." The only slightly unsatisfactory feature of Peter's edition is that it consists of parts only, not a score.

2. Martin Falck, *Wilhelm Friedemann Bach: sein Leben und seine Werke* (Leipzig: C.F. Kahnt, 1913; reprint, Lindau: C.F. Kahnt, 1956), 119.

3. *Ibid.* (my translation).

4. Kurt Walther, preface to *Sechs Duette für 2 Flöten*.

5. Eva Blechschmidt, *Die Amalien-Bibliothek* (Berlin: Merseburger, 1965), 27.

6. The other manuscript of W.F. Bach in the Amalienbibliothek was number 111, a concerto for harpsichord, 2 violins, viola, and basso continuo (Falck no. 44). It is in the hand of the same copyist as the duet manuscript, no. 112. The sole other manuscript in the hand of that copyist (identified as J.S. Bach XVI) owned by the Amalienbibliothek is no. 65, J.S. Bach's double harpsichord concerto in C major, BWV 1061. Blechschmidt, *Amalien-Bibliothek*, 90.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. Letter to author, 28 March 1984, from Dr. Uta Hertin, Musikabteilung, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

10. Paul Kast, *Die Bach-Handschriften der Berliner Staatsbibliothek* (Trossingen: Hohner, 1958), 42.

11. I, mm. 1-2, 6-9, 13, 40-41, 49, 58 (fl. 1), mm. 26-27 (fl. 2); III, m. 22 (fl. 1).

12. I, mm. 1, 7, 14, 32, 33-34, 37, 39, 42-43, 45, 46 (fl. 1), mm. 3, 11, 29-30, 32-33, 33, 41-44, 42-44 (fl. 2); III, mm. 1-2, 32-34, 65 (fl. 1), mm. 34-37, 47-50 (fl. 2).

13. I, mm. 13-14, 61, 79-80 (fl. 1), mm. 1-2, 37-38, 44-45, 45-51, 46-51, 59-60 (fl. 2); III, mm. 1-3, 1-2, 10-13, 15, 15-17, 26-28, 62-63, 79-81, 125-26, 156-57, 157, 172-end (fl. 1), mm. 57-59, 71-72, 101-06, 104-08, 116-17, 126-28, 166-68, 172-end (fl. 2).

14. Johann Joachim Quantz, *Solfeggi*, ed. Winfried Michel & Hermien Teske (Winterthur: Amadeus, 1978), iii.

15. Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. & ed. Edward R. Reilly, 2nd ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 68.

16. C.P.E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), 160.

17. For a translation and discussion of Quantz's instructions, see Amy Laura Edmondson, "Johann Joachim Quantz's *Solfeggi* for the One-Keyed Flute: A Study and Practical Application" (D.M. treatise, The Florida State University, 1989).