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Identifying clavichord repertoire

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Illus. 1 Kuhnau, *Frische Clavier Früchte*, title page

The clavichord has been with us for many centuries, and for most of this time it served as a household instrument and work-horse for composers, organists and teachers, but without a distinctive idiomatic repertoire drawing on its particular musical qualities. Towards the end of the seventeenth century this situation began to change, and a combination of elements, sociological, musical and organological combined to produce a flowering of clavichord-specific literature in parts of middle and North Germany. The clavichord was the right instrument at the right time in the right place. Carl Philipp Emanual Bach was a focal point for this movement, and his tutor of 1753 influenced generations of musicians and composers. The musician and writer Charles Burney coined the term 'Bachists' for these composers.[1] Despite renewed interest in the clavichord over the past decades, much of this music remains unknown and unpublished at present. My intention in this article is to draw attention to this forgotten repertoire and in subsequent articles to highlight selected composers and their music.

The first clue to repertoire identification is the title page, and in some cases prefatory information by the composer. Here it is necessary to realize that the word "Clavier", mostly spelled with a C rather than a K, was at this time generally, but not always, synonymous with Clavichord. In Adlung's *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* we read '... although the word *Clavier* has generally a wide meaning one associates it mostly with the clavichord'.[2] In the index of Adlung's later *Musica Mechanica Organoedi* (1768) the two words are juxtaposed as one entry.[3] Even clearer is Johann Samuel Petri in his *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik* (1782), where he states that the instrument (*Klavier* with a K) is so well known, that a description thereof would be superfluous, and he restricts himself to listing the characteristics of a good instrument, itself of interest, by the way.[4] Both writers accord the harpsichord (*Flügel, Klavessin, Cembalo, Klavezimbel*) separate chapters. Türk is also quite clear in the introduction to his *Klavierschule* (1789) where he lists other keyboard instruments to distinguish them from the 'true Clavier' (*dem eigentlichen Klavier*).[5] Later he writes, 'The *Clavier*, or Clavichord, is generally so well known that I will not detain readers with a description of it'.[6] The opening words of G. F. Wolf's *Unterricht im Klavierspielen* (1783) advise those '...desirous of learning to play the *clavier* (clavichord)...' to source a good clavichord, rather than a fortepiano or harpsichord[7] – and this instruction comes as late as 1809 in the fifth edition! F. W. Marpurg in *Die Kunst das Clavier zu spielen* uses the word as a general term for keyboard and as a synonym for clavichord, depending on what he is explaining. For example, when recommending an instrument for beginners he uses the term *Clavichord* to clearly distinguish it from the spinet or harpsichord (*Flügel*).[8] In the very next paragraph, however, when referring to Barthold Fritz's tuning system he lists *Claviere, Clavecins und Orgeln*.[9]

The earliest use of the word *Clavier* meaning clavichord is a good hundred years earlier. The title page of Johann Kuhnau's *Frische Clavier Früchte* (1696) depicts a clavichord on a table (illus.1).

The situation is not clear, and therefore the association of the word *Clavier* with a piece of music is alone not necessarily an indication that clavichord is meant. The term *Clavier-Uebung*, as used by J. S. Bach in connection with the Goldberg Variations, Italian Concerto and organ works, as well as the six partitas, is used as a general reference to keyboard instruments, as is *Das wohtemperierte Clavier*. After Bach's death in 1750, when one would expect from the heightened profile of the clavichord that the word *Clavier* had settled for one meaning, one still cannot take it for granted. With a publication with title *Sonaten für das Clavier* we can be sure that the clavichord is meant, but with the compound word *Claviersonaten* it has been suggested that the general term is being used.[10] This suggestion is

not supported by evidence. For example in the preface of Türk's six sonatas *für das Clavier* of 1776 the composer writes; 'that these sonatas are intended for clavichord alone one will clearly see'. He goes on to advertise a further six sonatas to appear the following year (1777) giving them the name *Klaviersonaten*. However in the Breitkopf publication thereof the title page reads *Sechs Sonaten für das Clavier.*

Georg Benda published six volumes of *Vermischte Clavier- und Gesangstücke* with volume one appearing in 1780. The preface to this publication is both helpful and unhelpful for our purposes. He writes, 'the Sonata in C minor is intended mainly for the clavichord (*Clavier*) or rather for the few players who are familier with the superiority of that instrument, in expression, over the harpsichord (*Flügel*)'. The implication is that the other sonatas could be realized on other instruments, so Benda is using the term *Clavierstücke* here in the general sense.

Christian Gottlob Neefe, in the preface to his *Zwölf Klaviersonaten* of 1773 writes clearly, 'These sonatas are clavichord sonatas (*Klaviersonaten*): I wanted that they be played on the clavichord (*Klaviere*), because most of them would have little effect (*Wirkung*) on the harpsichord (*Flügel*) or pianoforte, as neither of these instruments is as capable of the cantabile and modifications of the notes as the clavichord'.

Some title pages are in Italian, although published in Germany for a German public. This may have been in deference to the dedicatees – the three sets that I have, one by E. W. Wolf and two by Reichardt, are dedicated to Frederick the Great or his sister, Anna Amalia in Weimar (Wolf's employer). All are entitled *per il Clavicembalo*. Four sonatas, two by Wolf and one each by Binder and Löhlein, were published in 1765 in the *Musikalisches Magazin* and are also entitled *per il Clavicembalo solo*. The title page to the *Magazin*, however, states clearly that they are *für das Clavier*. That 'Clavicembalo' was synonymous with clavichord seems to have been current some 80 years early. The title page to Johann Krieger's *Musicalische Partien* of 1697 is in both languages. The German text reads that the pieces are composed for *allen Liebhabern des Claviers auf einem Spinet oder Clavicordio zu spielen* (for all keyboard amateurs to be played on a spinet or clavichord). The Italian text includes Connoiseurs (Virtuosi) with the amateurs and gives *Spinetto overo Clavicembalo* as preferred instruments. Note that the German text uses 'Clavier' in the sense of keyboard instrument, and gives an Italian word for the clavichord. For whatever reason *clavicordio* was not taken over into the Italian version. The clavichord as an instrument was no longer popular in Italy, and maybe the word had ceased to have any significant meaning as a result.

There are few title pages in French, which is not surprising, as the harpsichord dominated in France throughout the century. Six sonatas by E. W. Wolf were published posthumously in Berlin in the early 1790s '*...pour le Clavicord ou le Fortepiano*'. The German expatriate Johann Gottfried Eckard published his only keyboard works in Paris in the 1750s and 60s, and although questionably suitable for the harpsichord gives understandably this instrument as his first choice, with the clavichord and forte-piano as second and third choices respectively. He is for this reason sometimes accorded the status of the first composer in Paris of works for the piano, which is an over-simplification of the situation. In the preface to his six sonatas he writes that he has added dynamics for the benefit of the pianists and clavichordists.

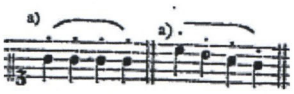
An interesting publication appeared in 1805, namely the *Clavier-Stimmbuch* published by Gall in Vienna. The little book deals with tuning, maintenance and repair of clavichords, fortepianos and harpsichords. His terminology is remarkably consistent; his general term is *Clavierinstrumente* (keyboard instruments). For the individual instruments he employs the terms *Clavier*, for clavichord, *Flügel* for harpsichord and Fortepiano. Of particular pertinence I find his separation of fortepiano types into *Fortepiano in Clavierform* for square pianos, and *Fortepiano in Flügelform* for grand pianos, a clear indication of the general association of the term *Clavier* with the clavichord.

A last word on the subject of title pages I give to J. W. Hässler. In the preface to his 1779 publication *Sechs neue Sonaten furs Clavier oder Pianoforte* he writes, 'The following sonatas are composed partly for the clavichord, partly for the pianoforte. Connoiseurs will notice the difference without any help from me'. Indeed? For us today, playing through for the first time, maybe not, but then the whole point of this article is to identify what has been specifically written with the clavichord in mind, how the music differs from harpsichord or piano music. This understood, we can then identify, or adapt pieces to suit the instrument, and for this it is clear we cannot rely on title pages alone.

Keyboard range provides another clue. Clavichords were being built in the 1750s, if not earlier, with a compass up to g3. The catalogue of the maker Barthold Fritz offers such instruments, for exampl, and Karl Lemme was also

making instruments up to a3 in the 1780s. Harpsichord ranges, irrespective of the number of registers did not extend beyond f3.[11] As regards pianos, it was only in the 1790s that the treble compass generally exceeded f3, although there were exceptions.[12] Charles Burney commissioned in 1777 a piano from the maker Merlin with a range of CC-c4.[13] It can therefore be assumed that pieces requiring the extended compass prior to the 1790s were for clavichord. A number of pieces by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach exceed the five-octave compass. Two of his sonatas (Falck 7 and 9) require f#3 and g3 respectively. Falck dates them before 1744,[14] but Wollny groups them with the later works (1764-1784).[15] Polonaise No.12 in G minor also requires g3. Further works exceeding the five octave compass can be found in the compositions of Hässler, Fr. W. Rust and Türk.[16]

The use of ornamentation provides us with a further clue. C. P. E. Bach is given the credit for the devising of a number of new ornament signs, described for the first time in his *Clavierschule*. Daniel Schubart wrote in his *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik* (1808) that Bach introduced the *Pralltriller* and the *Doppeltriller*, together with numerous other ornaments into the clavichord literature.[17] Certainly the first description of many of them is in his Essay, and the *prallende Doppelschlag* or *Doppeltriller* was associated very much with him, even during his lifetime. Although the main sources describing these new ornaments and their execution are by known clavichordists (C. P. E. Bach, E. W. Wolf and D. G. Türk), their notation cannot be taken as an indication of a clavichord-specific piece. Bach, certainly, was writing for keyboardists in general, although he does mention that the execution of the snap (*Prall-Triller)* 'is almost insuperably difficult to play lightly on the pianoforte. Because the snap requires a certain degree of force its performance on this instrument increases its volume ..... I doubt that the most intensive practice can lead to its complete control at the pianoforte'.[18] The reasons for this are admirably discussed in an article by Menno van Delft. [19] That these ornaments are best suited to the clavichord is clear, but only one, maybe two, ornaments are an indication of the clavichord as preferred instrument, and these are the *Bebung* (ex.1) and the *Tragen der Töne* (ex.2).



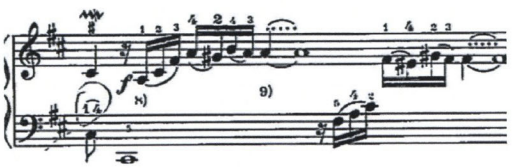
Ex.1 Tragen der Töne

Ex.2 Bebung

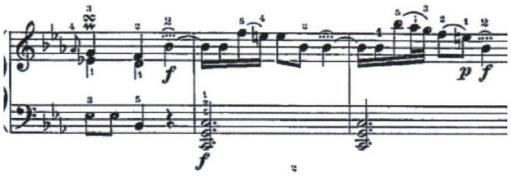
The *Tragen der Töne*, or portato, has a particular quality on the clavichord, indeed Bach in his *Versuch* claims that both the portato and vibrato 'apply only to the clavichord',[20] but omits to explain that it was notated for other instruments with a different interpretational execution expected.

Interestingly, the *Tragen der Töne* is described in piano tutors as late as the second half of the nineteenth century; the description in the method by Gustav Damm (1869) for example, could have been lifted from a clavichord tutor: 'Carrying the tones is marked thus (...); the playing of such notes should be executed so as to separate them by short pauses and make them sound with somewhat increased energy'.[21]

The *Bebung*, can only be realized on the clavichord, despite attempts by pianists, past and present, to convince us of the contrary. Its first notated indication of the sign is in Bach's *Versuch*, so it would seem that he devised it. He writes 'A long affetuoso tone is peformed with a vibrato'.[22] From then onwards it is described, in many cases probably unthinkingly reproduced, in just about every published tutor, even into the 19th century.[23] Most sources agree that it should be used sparingly, and indeed notated *Bebung* signs in the publications of the known 'Bachists' writing for the clavichord are few. In the keyboard output of C. P. E. Bach I have located only four pieces where it is called for. The most well-known piece, the Rondo *Abschied vom Silbermannschen Clavier* could be said to compensate for this, as *Bebung* is notated no less than 39 times in a piece totalling 84 bars! There was probably a good reason for this, in that the dedicatee, Ew. Grotthuss, was hard of hearing. It is useful to examine the piece carefully, as it could give us an idea where *Bebung* is appropriate, and secondly what Bach considered sparing application. Two pieces in the *Probestücke*, published to complement the *Versuch*, have *Bebung* indications (exx.3-4). These examples should also be examined closely; being as they are educational pieces they are instances of the suitable application of *Bebung* which can therefore be translated to other pieces.

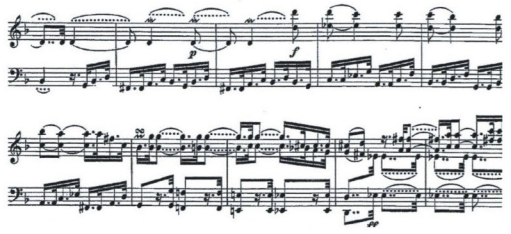


Ex.3 Excerpt from C.P.E. Bach, *Probestücke*, Sonata No.4, first movement



Ex.4 Excerpt from C.P.E Bach, *Probestücke*, Fantasia

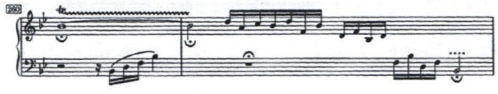
Another reason for notating *Bebung* could be that the composer wanted it in a place where one might not necessarily think of applying it. In the Andante of the second sonata in the first *Kenner und Liebhaber* publication (Wq.55), Bach notates *Bebung* copiously (ex.5), mostly combined with an ornament or in a relatively dense texture – both instances where *Bebung* might not automatically be applied.



Ex.5 Excerpt from Sonata No.2, first movement (*Kenner & Liebhaber*, Book 1)

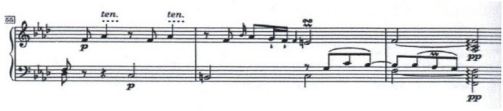
A not dissimilar passage with Bebung indications is in the final Adagio of the Fantasie with variations in E. W. Wolf's 1785 publication. Wolf indicates *Bebung* with the dots alone, without the bracket.

This publication is of particular importance, as it includes a lengthy and detailed preface 'a guide to good performance when playing the clavichord' and the composer gives advice as to the interpretation of the pieces. To an indication in the opening section of the Fantasie (ex.6), Wolf writes, 'The line then plunges down, as it were, to the second fermata on which there is a Bebung, which should sound like someone quickly catching his breath'.



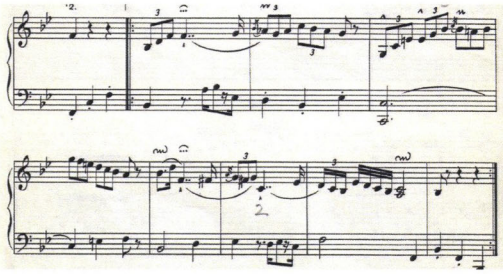
Ex.6 E. W. Wolf, Fantasie (1785), excerpt

In the fourth sonata in the same publication there are two further indications of *Bebung* (ex.7), and what is of particular interest is the commentary that Wolf makes to them in his preface.

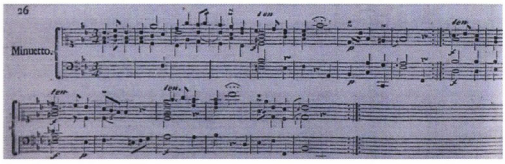


Ex.7 E.W. Wolf, Sonata No.4 (1785), excerpt

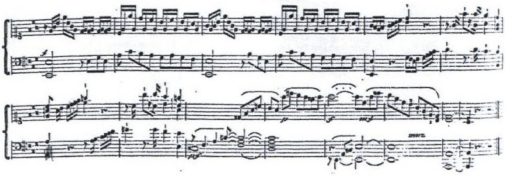
Regarding Bebung in general he writes, 'Father Bach [C. P. E.] in Hamburg really does wonders with this ornament on his favourite clavichord (to which I was a witness two years ago). It can be used in the (fourth) sonata mentioned above at bar 18 of the first half-movement, at bar 35 of the second half of this movement, *and elsewhere* [emphasis added]'. My understanding of this passage is that Bebung was not applied so sparingly as some writers would have us believe, although notated instances in the repertoire are scarce - maybe the indications in Bach's 'Abschied' piece were not far from a realistic approach. At this point it may be a good idea to take a look at some more instances of notated *Bebung* by various composers (exx.8-14).



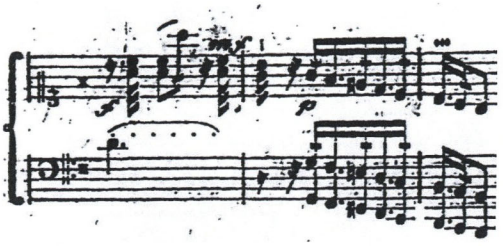
Ex.8 J. G. Müthel, Sonata in B♭, excerpt



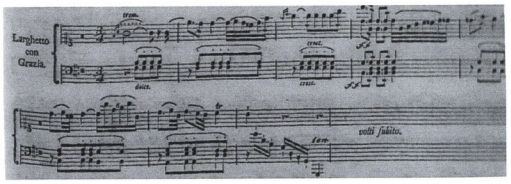
Ex.9 F. G. Fleischer, Sonata No.2 (1762), excerpt



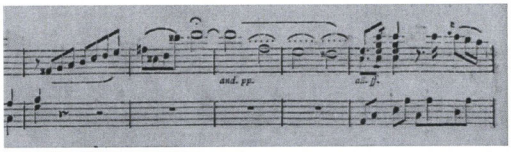
Ex.10 J. W. Hässler, Fantasia (1779), excerpt



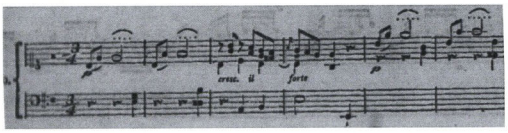
Ex.11 J.W. Hässler, Sonata No.1 (1780), excerpt



Ex.12 N. G. Gruner, Sonata No.1 (1783), excerpt



Ex.13 N. G. Gruner, Sonata No.2 (1781), excerpt

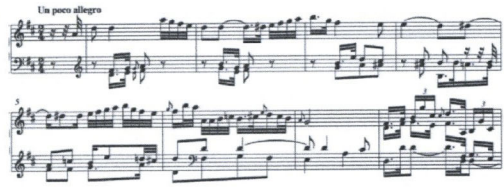


Ex.14 H. S. Sander, Sonata No.5 (1785), excerpt

From the above examples we can draw, albeit cautiously the following conclusions:

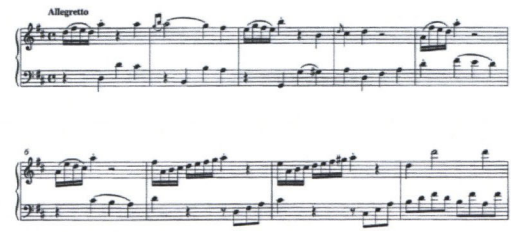
1. As in the Bach prescription, the *Bebung* signs are almost always on relatively long note values. This is logical; on notes held for a short time the effect would go unnoticed. Türk substantiates this: 'The Bebung can only be used over long notes with good effect, particularly in compositions of melancholy character and the like'.[24]
2. Notes with particular expressive content are favoured, again logical; players of string or wind instruments would tend to apply vibrato in similar instances.
3. Notes given a *Bebung* sign stand alone. If you have a clavichord at your disposal, apply B*ebung* to a note and play simultaneously a chord or indeed one other note. The *Bebung* will be masked to the point of inaudibility. It is worth pointing out that a characteristic of the instrumental music of this period was to leave strong beats, for example the first beat in a bar, unaccompanied, a fact which makes sensitive continuo accompaniment with a harpsichord difficult, as dynamic emphasis is thrown onto a subsequent weaker beat. For the clavichord, however, this compositional fashion was a gift, and could well account for the rise in popularity of the instrument and the volumes of music written specifically (in my opinion) for it.

I have mentioned the sonatas by Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, and at this point it might be interesting to look closer at extracts from these works. Some were written in the 1740s, when the harpsichord was still the dominant solo keyboard instrument, whereas others owe their gestation to the 1770s and 80s. Two sonatas, in D major (Falck 3) and E♭ major (Falck 5), were published in 1745 and 1748 respectively. The texture of the writing is dense, often with three or four part chords in accompaniment roles, giving little or no possibility for typical clavichord interpretation, but ideally suited to the harpsichord (ex.15).



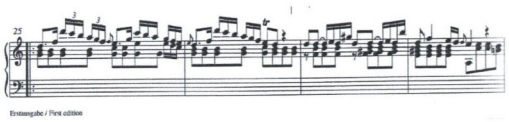
Ex.15 W. F. Bach, Sonata in D F3, excerpt

Contrast the style of writing with the Sonata in D major (Falck 4) which dates from around 1778/9. Here the texture is predominantly two-part with the figuration and melody supported by a bass line alone (ex.16). The melody can be presented in clavichord terms without subtlities being masked by the rich overtone texture of the tenor and bass areas of the harpsichord.

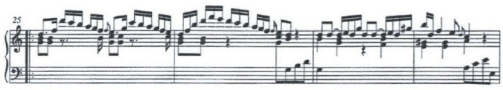


Ex.16 W. F. Bach, Sonata in D F4, excerpt

Of particular interest are the two versions of the C major sonata (Falck 1). The earlier version from around 1750[25] has a typical harpsichord texture with the melody accompanied by repeated three-part chords. In the later version, from a manuscript compiled around 1780,[26] these chords, and the texture in general, have been considerably thinned out, transforming the piece into a more clavichord friendly sonata (exx.17-18).



Ex.17 W. F. Bach, Sonata in C F1 (early version), excerpt



Ex.18 W. F. Bach, Sonata in C F1 (later version), excerpt

The reverse process, that is the reworking of clavichord repertoire to suit a later keyboard instrument, is also known. Johann Wilhelm Hässler (1747-1822) composed and published extensively for the clavichord in the 1770s and 1780s. He moved to Moscow in 1794, where the fortepiano enjoyed more popularity than the clavichord, and he is known to have re-worked a number of his earlier clavichord pieces to suit the former instrument. This must be the subject of a future study.[27]

If one associates one name with the clavichord it is that of C. P. E. Bach, and rightly so. However, to assume that all his solo keyboard music is by default for the clavichord is a step too far. As with his brother's music much of his early output would have been conceived for harpsichord, or at best generic, favouring no specific instrument. His Prussian and Wurttemberg sonatas, for example, have a texture suited to the harpsichord or fortepiano (one should remember that he had access to a fortepiano at his employer's court). Joel Speerstra has attempted to identify the real clavichord repertoire in Bach's output and his conclusions, which I by and large agree with, are that of his 342 known keyboard works fewer than a third can be designated clavichord music in the strict sense, although a number of pieces have a more generic character.[28]

At the time of Bach's death, the harpsichord was losing ground fast, the fortepiano was developing rapidly as an instrument (John Geib had just patented his escapement action), but the clavichord was the favoured household instrument, primarily in Germany. It is the group of composers catering for this market, Türk, Hässler, Wolf,[29] Gruner and many more whose music we should be re-assessing, and I hope in future articles to be doing just that.

Paul Simmonds was born in London in 1949 and brought up in South Africa. He studied at the University of the Witwatersrand, and in 1974 moved to Brighton as a freelance musician, worked with many leading early keyboard specialists. In 2008 he relocated to Switzerland, and was Organist of the Roman Catholic church in Zofingen until last year. His CD of clavichord sonatas by Wolf was awarded the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritiken in 1997. Website https://paulsimmonds.com.

Notes

1 See the excellent article by Christopher Hogwood, '"Our old great favourite" - Burney, Bach and the Bachists', in *De Clavicordio*, iv (2000), pp.55-85.

2 Jacob Adlung, *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* (1758), §254, p.568; facsimile (1953)

3 Jacob Adlung, *Musica Mechanica Organoedi* (1768), Register p.187; facsimile (1961).

4 Johann Samuel Petri, *Anleitung zur praktischen Musik* (1782), p.332; facsimile (1999).

5 Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule* (1789), §.1, p.1; facsimile (1997).

6 Türk (1789), §.3, p.4.

7 Georg Friedrich Wolf, *Unterricht im Klavierspielen, fünfte verbesserte Auflage* (1809), §.1, p.5.

8 Fridrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Die Kunst das Clavier zu spielen* (1762), §.5, p.3; facsimile (1969).

9 Marpurg (1762), §.6, p.3.

10 Kenneth Cooper, *The clavichord in the eighteenth century*, PhD dissertation (Columbia University, 1971), p.7.

11 In a study published in the last issue, Leonhard Schick, 'Harpsichords in Bach's Germany', *Harpsichord & Fortepiano*, xxvi/2 (Spring 2022), pp.10-20, our attention is drawn to one harpsichord with the compass of CC-c4. With its seven registers, including a 32' stop, this instrument should be considered exceptional.

12 It should be born in mind that these assumptions are based on surviving instruments, and this could be as little as 4% of the total made.

13 I am grateful to Derek Adlam for private communications in this connection. His thoughts are supported by Michael Cole, *The pianoforte in the classical era* (Oxford, 1998).

14 Martin Falck, *Wilhelm Friedemann Bach; Sein Leben und seine Werke, mit thematischem Verzeichnis seiner Kompositionen und zwei Bildern* (Leipzig, 1919), pp.75-76.

15 Peter Wollny, foreward to *W. F. Bach, Klaviermusik* 1, Carus Verlag 32.001 (2009), p.x.

16 I am endebted to Menno van Delft for drawing my attention to these pieces.

17 Refered to in Hogwood (2000), p.71.

18 C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753), §36, p.84.

19 Menno van Delft, '*Schnellen*: a quintessential articulation technique in eighteenth century keyboard playing', in Christopher Hogwood (ed), *The Keyboard in Baroque Europe* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.187-197.

20 Bach (1753), § 21, p.127.

21 Gustav Damm [pseudonym for Theodor Steingräber], *Klavierschule* (Leipzig, 1869), p. 51. My copy, jointly in English and German, is the 187th edition, suggesting a considerably later date.

22 Bach (1753), p.126, §20.

23 For a detailed discussion of *Bebung* indications readers are refered to Christopher Hogwood, 'A repertoire for the clavichord', *De Clavicordio*, ii (1996), pp.170–180.

24 Türk (1789), p.293, §88.

25 The sonata is in a manuscript compiled by the court organist in Dresden, Peter August (1726-1787), now in the Saxon University library in Dresden.

26 This version of the sonata appears in a manuscript compiled by the 'Hallische' Bach (Johann Christian, 1743-1814) now in the Lithuanian National Library in Vilnius.

27 For Hässler's 1786 autobiography and a thematic catalogue of his surviving keyboard works, see are Christopher Hogwood, 'The inconstant and orginal Johann Wilhelm Hässler', *De Clavicordio*, iii (1997), pp.151–220.

28 Joel Speerstra, 'Towards an identification of the clavichord repertoire among C. P. E. Bach's solo keyboard music: some preliminary conclusions', *De Clavicordio*, ii (1996), pp.43-82.

29 At time of writing the complete solo keyboard works by Ernst Wilhelm Wolf have just been published for the first time in a modern edition, edited by Ryan Layne Whitney and available from Lulu books.