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## The New York Times

### An Evening Full of Bach, the Father and the Sons Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin Performs at Zankel Hall

By Anthony Tommasini, April 9, 2014

***“On Tuesday night at Zankel Hall, when the acclaimed period-instrument chamber orchestra Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin finished its fleet, incisive performance of this work, there were gasps of delighted surprise from people in the audience, including one audible ‘Oh, gee!’”***

The final, agitated movement of Johann Christian Bach’s Symphony in G minor, written in 1770, does not so much end as kind of check out. A twisting melodic line in the strings spins delicately upward and trails off. **On Tuesday night at Zankel Hall, when the acclaimed period-instrument chamber orchestra Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin finished its fleet, incisive performance of this work, there were gasps of delighted surprise from people in the audience, including one audible “Oh, gee!”**

By now it should no longer surprise us that at least two of the sons of Johann Sebastian Bach who went on to important careers, Johann Christian (1735-1782) and Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714-1788), wrote music of great beauty and lasting importance. In their time, they had no trouble emerging from under the shadow of their respected father, especially Johann Christian, who, at 20, five years after his father’s death, took off for Milan, then seven years later settled in London, where he had enormous success composing church music and Italian operas.

Yet Papa Bach still towers, not just over his sons but over the whole history of music. So there is inevitably an element of special pleading when works by other members of the Bach dynasty are performed. On this occasion the Akademie offered concertos and symphonies by J. C. and C. P. E. Bach on a program that opened with the well-known Orchestral Suite No. 1 in C by their father.

**Two concertos, each receiving its first Carnegie Hall performance on this program, were especially good.** The Akademie musicians should have an affinity for C. P. E. Bach since he spent some 30 years in their hometown, Berlin, working in the court of Frederick the Great. His Concerto for Oboe, Strings and Basso Continuo in E flat was composed in 1765, toward the end of his Berlin period, and it is a marvelous piece, at once moody, expressive and taut. What struck me, especially during the vigorous first movement, was the way phrases unfolded in varying lengths and took unexpected turns. The finale is stately yet playful. **The oboist Xenia Löffler, the impressive soloist, played with elegance and flair.**

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J. C. Bach was a major influence on Mozart, who, as a boy, studied with him during extended visits to London with his father. The influence of this Bach on Mozart's piano concertos has long been written about, something that came through here with the performance of Bach's Concerto for Harpsichord, Strings and Basso Continuo in F minor, with Raphael Alpermann as the harpsichord soloist. I also heard intimations of Mozart operas in this Bach concerto, especially the opening orchestral flourish, which sounded like the tempestuous music at the start of "The Magic Flute," when Tamino is being pursued by a monstrous serpent.

**There was also a vibrant account of C. P. E. Bach's String Symphony No. 5 in B minor. The Akademie began the program well with a lithe, engaging performance of J. S. Bach's Suite No. 1, a cavalcade of ingenious, charming dances.**

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin