

Sonata in G (W 139)

C P E Bach

(1714-1788)

Adagio un poco; Allegro; Allegro

The manuscript of CPE Bach's sonata, composed in Potsdam in 1762, bears the title 'Solo für die Harfe'. Born in Weimar and brought up in Leipzig, CPE Bach had been in Potsdam at the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia since 1738, having been appointed there at the age of 24. He remained there until his departure in 1767 for Hamburg, where he succeeded Telemann, his godfather. His fellow-musicians at Potsdam included Teresa and Franz Petrini (1744-1819), both of whom were early converts to the single-action pedal harp (*harpe organisée*), whereas their father played a double or triple harp. A contemporary source describes him as being able 'to play in all 24 keys with equal facility', which implies a triple harp. There is reason to believe that it was for the older Petrini and for the triple harp that CPE Bach's Solo was written. Triple harps were certainly being made and played in Germany as late as the 1790s and there are examples by Vetorazzo in both Berlin and Leipzig.

The manuscript, copied by 'Michel' from CPE Bach's notoriously unattractive and illegible handwriting, is in the library of the Royal Conservatoire, Brussels. The unusual movement order (Slow; Fast; Fast) is uncharacteristic: of his 150 keyboard sonatas there is only one which does not follow the sequence Fast; Slow; Fast. In his essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments (1753), CPE Bach gives meticulous instructions on the interpretation of ornaments in his works, and if one follows these implicitly it becomes evident that this piece cannot have been played on any kind of single-action harp available in Bach's time. However, these problems do not arise when the work is played on the modern double-action pedal harp.