

AN ENIGMATIC LEGACY:
TWO INSTRUMENTAL WORKS
ATTRIBUTED TO
WILHELM FRIEDEMANN BACH

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Within a few years of his death, if not during his lifetime, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach had come to be viewed as the most brilliant of Sebastian's children. His next younger brother, Carl Philipp Emanuel, seems to have considered him as such,¹ and Friedemann may well have been his father's favorite, as is now generally taken for granted, although this view derives in part from Friedemann's own less than generous remarks about his siblings.² Friedemann left relatively few compositions, but they are

¹For instance, Sebastian's biographer Johann Nicolaus Forkel quoted Emanuel to the effect that Friedemann "represented their father better than all the rest of them put together." This remark, quoted in English as early as 1870 in *Dwight's Journal of Music* (Feb. 26, 1870; 29:197), first appeared in the *Leipziger Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 2 (1799–1800): 829; the anonymous reviewer for *Dwight's* had probably found it in Carl Hermann Bitter's recently published *Carl Philipp Emanuel und Wilhelm Friedemann Bach und deren Brüder*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Wilhelm Müller, 1868; facsimile in one volume, Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1973), 154. The review, incidentally, was of a performance ostensibly of a fantasia by Friedemann but more likely, as several other reports in *Dwight's* of that year make clear, of a work actually by Johann Wilhelm Hässler, published in 1870 by James William Davison as Friedemann's "Grand Fantasia" in the series *Revivals* (London: Duncan Davison, 1870–1872).

²Bitter, *Carl Philipp Emanuel und Wilhelm Friedemann Bach und deren Brüder*, 150, called him Sebastian's *Lieblingssohn*, but the idea is traceable to posthumous remarks by Carl Friedrich Cramer, whose source was Friedemann himself. Cramer's 1792 report that Sebastian was "satisfied" only by Friedemann is also the source for Sebastian's supposed comments about the ephemerality of Emanuel's music ("it's Prussian blue; it fades") and Christian Bach's "stupidity" (*Dummheit*). See *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, eds. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel; rev. and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York: Norton: 1998), 413 (item