

INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the symphonies Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach composed for the musical public of Berlin between 1741 and 1762, with the six works of Wq 182 he turned his attention toward music for the connoisseur. He composed this set of symphonies, all scored for four-part string orchestra with continuo, in Hamburg in 1773 to fulfill a commission from Baron Gottfried van Swieten. Bach included these symphonies as the final item in the numbered list of compositions he compiled for his 1773 *Autobiography* (p. 207), where he noted that they were written “to order” (auf Verlangen) though he did not identify the recipient.

Unfortunately, neither the original request nor any other correspondence between van Swieten and Bach survives, despite the fact that van Swieten eventually became an important patron and ardent promoter of Bach’s music. They had not met at the time of this commission; Bach had left Berlin for Hamburg in 1768 while van Swieten did not arrive there until 1770 when he was appointed Austrian ambassador to the court. Probably Johann Philipp Kirnberger introduced van Swieten to Bach’s music, as he was the common link between the two. From 1772 van Swieten’s name frequently appeared on lists of subscribers to Bach’s publications. Furthermore, he may have acted as distributor since he often purchased multiple copies, in some cases as many as the largest music dealers. In 1781 Bach dedicated his third set of sonatas and rondos “für Kenner und Liebhaber,” Wq 57, to van Swieten, perhaps in appreciation for his support. Though they must have eventually corresponded regularly there is no proof that they actually met. In a letter to Breitkopf, Bach referenced friends who had collected subscriptions on his behalf as well as several “unknown patrons,” including van Swieten, who had done the same, suggesting that at that time their contact was limited.¹

Bach wrote many of his works “to order,” catering to the tastes and abilities of his recipients, and he acknowledged the limitations this caused him in an oft-quoted passage

1. See letter of 18 June 1776 in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Briefe und Dokumente. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Ernst Suchalla, 2 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 1:578–79; *The Letters of C. P. E. Bach*, trans. and ed. Stephen L. Clark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 97.

from his autobiography: “Because I have had to compose most of my works for specific individuals and for the public, I have always been more restrained in them than in the few pieces I have written merely for myself.”² Bach clearly distinguished between public music—in which he toned down his style for broad popular appeal and made concessions to the limited abilities of amateurs—and private music for himself or a small group of connoisseurs in which he was freed from technical and aesthetic constraints. His concern with music destined for publication was to boost sales by appealing to a wide audience. For Bach this dichotomy played out between music that would be printed and music that would remain unpublished and of limited distribution.

Our knowledge of the commission is scanty and the sources that document it are sparse. A 1789 letter from the Hamburg music dealer Johann Christoph Westphal to the Schwerin Bach collector Johann Jacob Heinrich Westphal, as well as an entry from Georg Poelchau’s 1832 catalogue of his manuscript collection, both identify van Swieten as the recipient of the Wq 182 symphonies. The only known account to give any details of the commission is a passage from Johann Friedrich Reichardt’s autobiography, written forty years after the fact and published in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. If the majority of commissions Bach received caused him to temper his style, the one he received from van Swieten must have been exceptional as he deliberately requested difficult and sophisticated music. Indeed, the supposed wording that we have secondhand from Reichardt seems a direct response to Bach’s claims about being constrained when writing for specific individuals: it explicitly instructed Bach to be subject to no restrictions and to allow his artistic expression free rein without any consideration for the difficulties that would arise for the performers.³

2. “Weil ich meine meisten Arbeiten für gewisse Personen und fürs Publikum habe machen müssen, so bin ich dadurch allezeit mehr gebunden gewesen, als bey den wenigen Stücken, welche ich bloß für mich verfertigt habe.” *Autobiography*, 208; trans. in William S. Newman, “Emanuel Bach’s Autobiography,” *Musical Quarterly* 51 (1965): 371.

3. “Bach componirte damals eben für den Baron van Swieten in Wien sechs grosse Orchester-Symphonien, in welchen er sich, nach Swietens

The circumstances of van Swieten's commission must have played a significant role in the dissemination and reception of the symphonies. He may well have arranged for their performance by one of the many amateur musical societies or private salons in Berlin whose concerts he doubtless attended. At least during his earlier years there he seems to have organized concerts held in the embassy. There would have been numerous venues in Vienna where van Swieten might have arranged performances of the Wq 182 symphonies after he returned there in 1777 and was appointed prefect of the Imperial Library. If he held exclusive rights he may have controlled their limited circulation. Several details suggest this may have been the case. (Reichardt warned of the loss to art if they were to remain buried in a private collection.) Reading between the lines one could extrapolate that an agreement arranged for van Swieten to be the sole possessor of them and that they would remain in his private library for him to do with as he saw fit, though it is reasonable to assume that Bach was allowed to retain a copy for his private use. That music dealers offered manuscript copies of the symphonies was apparently against Bach's wishes. For example, he seems to have gotten angry with J. C. Westphal, a dealer with whom he had an otherwise good business relationship, for offering the symphonies for sale in his catalogue. In a letter of 29 May 1789 to J. J. H. Westphal, the Hamburg Westphal explained that Bach had wanted to know how he had acquired copies since Bach had written the symphonies exclusively for van Swieten. Westphal concluded that this situation was "all the better for them" (Desto lieber waren sie uns), perhaps because he was one of the few dealers to

gain access to these works and to be able to make money from them.⁴ Finally, it is curious that Bach included the Wq 182 symphonies with his "printed works" in his 1773 list of compositions even though they were not published in his lifetime. At the time Bach compiled the list he must have expected that they would be printed.

This facsimile includes the autograph scores of Symphonies II–V in Brussels and that of Symphony VI in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, which are likely the dedication exemplars prepared for van Swieten. The autograph of Symphony I is lost, along with any title page or dedication that C. P. E. Bach might have prepared. What van Swieten did with the scores after receiving them from Bach is not known. The autograph scores are on a uniform paper in upright format (c. 32 x 21 cm). Each symphony has a separate title page with the instruments listed: "2 Violini, | Violetta | e | Basso, | da | C. F. E. Bach." Symphonies II–V were acquired by Guido Richard Wagener (1822–96), probably in the 1860s; Wagener's adopted son, the Marburg physician Hans Strahl (1857–1920), sold the entire music collection to Alfred Wotquenne in 1902, who in turn sold it to the Library of the Royal Conservatories in Brussels in 1904. Symphony VI was offered in a catalogue of material from the archive of the publisher Moritz Adolph Schlesinger (Berlin and Paris) in 1845 that includes other items of Viennese provenance. It was bought by Auguste Vincent (1829–88) and subsequently acquired by the Paris Conservatory, whose holdings are now part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. We are grateful to the holding libraries for giving us permission to publish a facsimile of these autograph scores.

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Wunsch, ganz gehen liess, ohne auf die Schwierigkeiten Rücksicht zu nehmen, die daraus für die Ausübung nothwendig entstehen mussten." *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 16 (1814): col. 29.

4. "Er sie nur allein für Durchl. v. Swieten gemacht hätte." *CPEB-Briefe*, 2:1304.