Review: Temple of Fame and Friendship: Portraits, Music, and History in the C.P.E. Bach Circle


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Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the fifth child and second surviving son of Johann Sebastian, was a renowned and gifted musician in his own right. He was appointed to the court of Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia, served as Hamburg’s director of music (Kapellmeister), and wrote the influential “Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments,” which was studied by Beethoven and Haydn.

*The Temple of Fame and Friendship: Portraits, Music, and History in the C.P.E. Bach Circle* focuses not on his professional accomplishments, but rather on his exhaustive collection of nearly 450 portraits and silhouettes of prominent and important musicians, composers, and music theorists as well as kings, emperors, and other musical patrons. “Bach’s was not only the collection of musician portraits known to his contemporaries, but it was by far the largest and the most significant.”

After his death in 1788, the collection was sold off in small quantities by his widow and daughter to contemporaries, and by the twentieth century was thought to be lost. Through the detailed inventory (titled “Portrait Collection, of Composers, Musicians, Musical Writers, Lyrical Poets, and Some Prominent Musical Connoisseurs”), written in Bach’s hand, author Dr. Annette Richards has reunited much of the collection from smaller lots in Europe and the United States. Between Bach’s personal annotations and the meticulous

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reassemblage, Richards presents a new and fascinating look at historical figures through Bach’s perspective. It asks the reader not only to imagine viewing the collection—“a shrine to his musical friendships”—with the collector himself but to reconsider the contributions of the faces included. The author also juxtaposes examples of Bach’s idiosyncratic music to gain an understanding of a visitor’s experience among the arrangement of portraits while listening to the clavichord pieces their host composed and performed.

In seven chapters, more than 105 black-and-white figures, eight color plates, and several examples of Bach’s music help illustrate insights into eighteenth-century European music culture. The images are finely produced without any distortions, though some details may be lost on the matte pages. Music scholars will appreciate quality reproductions to support Bach’s music historiography and the extensive notes Richards provides.

After his death, C.P.E. Bach’s musical contributions suffered from critical decline and have been overshadowed by his father’s. Many of the unique drawings, paintings, and pastels C.P.E. Bach amassed may be lost to antiquity, having been dispersed despite his careful inventory efforts. But through his portrait collection, readers will learn a “complex representation of the collector himself, establishing beyond any doubt his own place in history.”

This interdisciplinary monograph is recommended for academic and museum libraries supporting all levels of post-secondary study of art and music histories.