

Johann Philipp Kirnberger versus Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg: A Reappraisal

For various reasons, modern evaluations of the theorists Johann Philipp Kirnberger and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg deserve greater scrutiny. First, new documentation indicates that Kirnberger's claims about and accusations against Marpurg were unfounded. Second, contrary to the belief that the pseudonyms in Berlin's *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst* 'all ... seem to have represented Marpurg', he was merely its editor, making occasional contributions. The controversy that erupted in its pages was ignited and prolonged by Kirnberger himself; his respondent has now been identified. Third, because Kirnberger's limited education prevented formulating his concepts in writing, he needed assistance from others, notably Johann Abraham Peter Schulz. Finally, Kirnberger's concepts could vacillate, as shown by his alternating acceptance and rejection of equal temperament.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century, Berlin witnessed a musical controversy that revolved around the theorists Johann Philipp Kirnberger and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg. Because the matter was complex, Marpurg is often portrayed negatively today,¹ a position based on Kirnberger's allegations as well as footnote remarks that his former pupil and associate Johann Abraham Peter Schulz made shortly before he (Schulz) died:

Long ago he [Johann Georg Sulzer] had sought to obtain information [for the music articles in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*] from men like Agricola, Quantz, Riedt, Marpurg, etc., who had attained fame as music theorists, but was unable to make much progress with them. ... He was finally compelled by necessity to try yet the last one, and turned to Kirnberger, to this ill-reputed fifth and octave hunter, whom Marpurg especially sought to belittle wherever he could. To his amazement he found a bright intelligent thinker who was everywhere at home in his art and saw far beyond the ordinary. He found an artist free of prejudice, who accepted advice as gladly as he gave it, and a profound theorist, who particularly in his favorite subject — the science of harmony — shone with the torch of his keen perception up to the most abstract heights of art as an example for the noble inquisitive Sulzer. The first fruit of this instruction was the publication of the first part of Kirnberger's *Kunst des reinen Satzes*, which Sulzer had assembled from his papers. And then the musical articles of the *Theorie der schönen Künste* were begun with zeal and finished without hesitation, to the great dissatisfaction of Marpurg, who could not put up with his neglect. Thus the increasing animosity of this man toward Kirnberger and the gibes at the eminent Sulzer, which are particularly evident in his *Legende einiger Musikheiligen*.²

- 1 For example, Jonathan W. Bernard, 'The Marpurg-Sorge Controversy', *Music Theory Spectrum* 11 (1989): 162-186 at 164; Howard Serwer, 'Theories of Fugal Composition', *Journal of Music Theory* 14 (1970): 209-236 at 211; Georg von Dadelsen, 'Kirnberger' in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1958, 7:952; Siegfried Borris, *Kirnbergers Leben und Werk*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1933.
- 2 Johann Abraham Peter Schulz, 'Über die in Sulzers *Theorie der schönen Künste* unter dem Artikel Verrückung ...', *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung (AmZ)* 2 (Leipzig, 1799-1800), 277-278n. Trans. David W. Beach, 'The Harmonic Theories of Johann Philipp Kirnberger', Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1974, 7-8.

Perhaps Schulz's late-stage tuberculosis clouded his judgment about publishing such a charge, for it is quite out of character for him. Or might this footnote stem from a more zealous individual, to whom the ill Schulz may have entrusted his manuscript? Much remains to be said about the stranger-than-fiction events in Berlin, which reveal information vital for interpreting source material. The modern perception is not only an injustice to Marpurg personally, but also leads to undervaluing his work and misinterpreting evidence. Let us first consider background information about Marpurg, Kirnberger, and Schulz.

The protagonists

Marpurg (1718-1795) spent much of the 1740s in France, and became secretary to Count Friedrich Rudolf von Rothenburg, one of Frederick the Great's closest advisers, who was sent to Paris on secret treaty negotiations with Louis XV. After returning to Germany, Marpurg produced many publications between 1749 and 1763. Besides serving as editor of the *Critischer Musicus an der Spree* (Berlin, 1749), *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik* (Berlin, 1754-1762), and *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst* (Berlin, 1759-1764), and contributing articles to them, he wrote thirteen books of a theoretical, practical, or historical nature. He edited approximately fourteen collections of vocal or keyboard music, and also contributed compositions.

After visiting Berlin in 1772, Charles Burney wrote: 'This evening I had the pleasure of being introduced to the acquaintance of M. Marpurg, a person who had so long laboured in the same vineyard as myself, that he was a perfect judge of the difficulties I had to encounter. Nothing could be more flattering than the manner in which he received me. I found him to be a man of the world; polite, accessible, and communicative. His musical writings may justly be said to surpass, in number and utility, those of any one author who has treated the subject.' Burney crowded two more meetings with Marpurg into his full schedule.³

After 1763, Marpurg's publishing activities greatly lessened; as the lexicographer Ernst Ludwig Gerber explained: 'Just when we awaited his promised continuation of Walther's *Lexikon* and his History of Music, he was forever robbed of music, in that the King around 1763 appointed him to the above positions [War Counselor and later, Director of the Royal Lottery], with extensive duties.'⁴ A position in His Majesty's service was likely not to be declined, especially after the devastation of the Seven Years' War when Prussia badly needed men of proven ability.

In 1800 the writer on music Karl Spazier noted Marpurg's great scholarly knowledge, particularly in history. His life in Paris and post with Rothenburg (through which he became acquainted with Voltaire, d'Alembert, and Maupertuis, among others) made him a master of the French language and style. Responding to Schulz, Spazier defended Marpurg, declaring that he did not share the reproof against a scholar highly respected by musical Germany and probably foreigners as well. Spazier found the blemish thrown on Marpurg's moral character particularly objectionable. 'Had Marpurg been Sulzer's teacher, as Kirnberger was, his system would have been the one utilized, as is now the case with Kirnberger's. Informed people may determine whether musical science benefits from having [Kirnberger's] as the dominating one. ... But that would lead me too far astray. The question is whether Marpurg pursued Kirnberger and "everywhere he could sought to belittle him," so that the latter must be considered as a martyr of his bad intentions. ... To single out Marpurg alone and impose on him a systematic persecution against his opponent truly appears just as unfair as a severe accusation, which at the least stands completely unproved.' Men of Marpurg's personality type 'are not apt purposely

3 Charles Burney, *An Eighteenth-Century Musical Tour in Central Europe and the Netherlands*, ed. Percy A. Scholes, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, 166, 199, 201.

4 Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler*, Leipzig, 1790-1792, 'Marpurg', 1:883. Unless indicated otherwise, translations are my own.

to pursue plans that disrupt their pleasant feelings and comfort; and Marpurg was a pleasure-loving man, accustomed to seeing everything on the cheerful side.' Spazier found no vindictiveness in Marpurg's character; sooner, perhaps, a tendency for contention and scholarly horseplay. But he did not wish to disturb the good opinion of Kirnberger's admirers, for his merit as a teacher remains undiminished.⁵

Spazier differentiated between the common offense of scholarly obstinacy and the more serious propensity to acrimonious, cruel ridicule, and contempt for the work of foreigners, noting that one could not deny the most well-known experiences concerning Kirnberger. He was 'a gloomy, morose, unsociable man. ... This character is better suited to entertain deep feelings ... for a long time and to act methodically, as well as vindictively at times. Experience teaches this, although I certainly do not presume to apply this with regard to Marpurg/Kirnberger: Marpurg 'was a good-natured, friendly, and conscientious man, a man of honest mind, who gladly with word and action, and also with his money, helped the needy. He valued merit and also put up with mediocrity in the art if it remained without arrogance.' Spazier was not aware of Marpurg having belittled Kirnberger as Schulz charged: 'I never heard anything about it, any more than he pronounced Kirnberger an amiable person.'⁶

In contrast to Marpurg, who came from an aristocratic family, Kirnberger (1721-1783) was the son of a court lackey and his formal education ended at the age of fifteen. In 1758, he was appointed to the service of Princess Amalia, sister of Frederick the Great, a part-time position he held until his death. His theoretical books, whose writing required assistance from others, began to appear in the 1770s. To Spazier's account above, Kirnberger's former pupil Johann August Eberhard added a point that 'will clarify much in their mutual circumstances. Marpurg had always lived in the great world and in public affairs, where he had learned his manners, self-control, and skill, while Kirnberger never emerged from a very secondary circle, whose tone and manners clung to him until the end of his life. For that reason, he always retained a certain stiffness and shyness as remaining traces of an inferior upbringing, which, with the very vivid feelings of his artistic worth, made in certain situations a singular and often an interesting contrast. He was well aware of his failings, and this unpleasant feeling often made him not only cross, but also mistrustful of those whose external advantages he could not overlook. He then set his superiority in their common art against them. ... But this rough cover hid a tender and kind heart. Everyone whose sound or unsound claims did not threaten to overwhelm him experienced this.'⁷

After meeting Kirnberger in 1772, Burney wrote: 'I was perhaps, the more flattered by the kindness and compliance of this ingenious professor, from his character, which is grave and austere; he is said to be soured by opposition and disappointment; his present inclination leads him to mathematical studies, and to the theory of music, more than the practice. ... In his late writings, he appears to be more ambitious of the character of an algebraist, than of a musician of genius.'⁸

According to Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, editor of Berlin's *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* and a knowledgeable musician: 'Kirnberger has many good musical ideas ... he deserves full credit as a theorist. But he is unable to bring any of his ideas to good musical fruition, perhaps because of insufficient ability. His aim is not to see good music performed, but merely to find music containing "errors" so that he may make learned — and often violent — statements about others' mistakes.'⁹

5 Johann Gottlieb Karl Spazier, 'Einige Worte zur Rechtfertigung Marpurgs, und zur Erinnerung an seine Verdienste', *AmZ* 2 (1800), 569-570n., 594-595.

6 Spazier, 'Einige Worte', 596-598, 600.

7 Johann Aug. Eberhard, 'Erklärung', *AmZ* 2 (1800), 872-873.

8 Burney, *Musical Tour*, 201.

9 Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, *Anekdoten von König Friedrich II. von Preussen*, Berlin & Stettin, 1788, 6:163. Trans. Eugene Helm, *Music at the Court of Frederick the Great*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960, 236.

Despite giving Kirnberger a generous tribute in 1775,¹⁰ the Berlin Capellmeister Johann Friedrich Reichardt was a frequent recipient of his former teacher's anger. Spazier saw a printed sheet of music that Kirnberger distributed house to house, in which Reichardt's style was made ridiculous. Everything from an opera aria that Reichardt must have composed by order of the king for Madame Mara was copied exactly, but the words were from an epigram by the poet Matthias Claudius (1740-1815): "Herr Ass, you are held to be a genius, a great man." "That would be," began the Ass, "if I have done nothing foolish!" I leave it to the reader [to determine] how cultivated or spiteful they find this and whether perchance they want to call such a peddled satire itself an ass's farewell.¹¹ Kirnberger sent a copy of his parody to Forkel, and it was found in Carl Friedrich Zelter's papers.¹²

In his article about the recently-deceased Schulz, Reichardt observed: 'Kirnberger was a very passionate man who gave himself up to his impetuous temperament, which was mitigated by no higher cultivation. With his whole soul he loved and hated; he was completely interested in some individuals with the same zeal as he persecuted others.'¹³

At the age of fifteen, the penniless Schulz (1747-1800) made his way to Berlin and told his story to Kirnberger, who promised him instruction. According to the lexicographer Gustav Schilling (1838), Kirnberger educated his pupil diligently, but also hoped to form this gigantically powerful talent into a support of his system. It was owing to these studies and also, to a greater extent, his own far-reaching scholarship and flights of artistic spirit that Schulz 'later rose far above our theorist'. He joined in Kirnberger's own investigations and work, to whose muddled presentation he brought more order and light. He prepared works that long circulated under Kirnberger's name in the scholarly musical world. Moreover, continued Schilling, Kirnberger knew to value not only Schulz's amazing talent but also much more his submission to the teacher's idiosyncrasies and moods. Schulz, who had no enemies, remained true to him under all circumstances.¹⁴ In Schulz's words:

Kirnberger not only started me again right from the beginning, but also took me into his home shortly thereafter and looked after me both as a teacher and father. ... I worked for almost three years following countless rules ... and became acquainted with all the skills of strict and polyphonic composition, and simple and double counterpoint. But these studies of one kind, which lasted too long, had imperceptibly drawn me in to such a degree that I completely lost sight of its application to my own compositions. ... At first he had strictly prevented me from taking part in all performances in concerts and plays in order, as he said, not to give my taste any false direction. This strictness soon became superfluous, for the longer I worked, the more I found all newer music dull and insufferable, and I clung with body and soul only to the older composed music. Only what appeared to be laboriously worked out attracted me, so my previously facile manner of writing became arduous and painful. Practical music lost all attraction for me, because Kirnberger was no great performer and did not attend any concerts.¹⁵

In a letter to Forkel much later, Kirnberger declared: 'Schulz is a particularly capable man; only it is a shame that he has given up scholarly music and gone astray with such foolishness as comic operettas, although retaining strict musical composition, of which

10 Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Schreiben über die Berlinische Musik*, Hamburg, 1775, 18f.

11 Spazier, 'Einige Worte', 597-598n.

12 H. Bellerman, 'Briefe von Kirnberger an Forkel', *AmZ* 7 (1872), 442-444. A copy of Kirnberger's parody is included.

13 J. F. Reichardt, 'J. A. P. Schulz', *AmZ* 3 (1800-1801), 169, 172-173.

14 Gustav Schilling, 'Schulze' [sic] in *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst*, ed. Gustav Schilling, 7 vol., Stuttgart: F. H. Köhler, 1835-1842, 6:278-281 at 278f.

15 Trans. adapted from Beach, 'Harmonic Theories', 4-5.

Hiller, Neefe and the like have absolutely no notion, least of all our former vagrant that God in his wrath has given us as Kapellmeister [Reichardt]; he is a disgrace for the Berlin previously renowned for its music from time immemorial.¹⁶

Schulz was a highly competent, but self-effacing individual who did much of Kirnberger's writing for him (and probably also participated in formulating concepts), but did not receive credit, even when the work was entirely his own. Throughout his life, Schulz seems to have felt obligated for the instruction and material goods received during his six years of training, and discounted the help he himself had furnished Kirnberger.

Kirnberger's Letters

Kirnberger's letters to Forkel in 1779 consist largely of complaints against various musicians, particularly Marpurg:

But unexpectedly the notorious Marpurg, the arch satirist, came along, published some writing [the appendix to his 1776 book] against me and Sulzer, and persecuted me with my princess in the sneakiest and most wicked way, merely because my book showed up the falsity of all his published scrawlings. What injury Marpurg's behaviour has done to my domestic circumstances, I know best. Just now they are for the first time finding out that he is the vilest and most unthankful man in the world, but too late for me. The support of wicked people for the still more wicked Marpurg has caused me much trouble and worry for some years. I have called him unthankful: Hunger drove him to writing musical essays in order to eat; he understood nothing at all of what he wrote; in a word, he was a windbag come from Paris.

Since Agricola exposed the *Critische Musicus an der Spree* right from the outset [his critique of Marpurg's 1749 journal under the pseudonym 'Olibrio' did not alter their position of mutual respect], he [Marpurg] lured me into going along with him and learned that it was possible even for a windbag to avoid fifths and octaves to a certain extent. Likewise he learned to reason out ideas about temperament, double counterpoint, and fugue from me. As a result he published his work on the fugue, which, because at the end I didn't want to help him anymore, was pitiful. For revenge, he wrote one satire after another against me, besides the scum of his *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst*, which without exception is only fit for people in an insane asylum to read. The real scholars here all say they would rather be imprisoned with bread and water than have to read his writing.

Finally there came a time during the previous war when his scribbles did not sell. Now he had nothing to eat; on his knees he begged me to stand by him in his misery. Out of sympathy I forgave him everything, took up a collection for him, and found him a living in the first lottery. He quit because of annoyances and was as miserable as before. Through my illustrious princess, I got him into the government; and he left that voluntarily and once again started up the former lottery in which he is established like a prince. In his greatest need I gave him 100 *Reichthaler* and in order to give it respectably, I let him promise me his books for it, but when I wanted to get them, he had sold most of them to others. He sweet-talked me out of the few remaining books. This is the great man before whom almost all authors thus far have trembled. Because his behaviour now becomes more infamous from day to day, I have in the third section of my second volume mentioned his [writing] only a little, so that it is seen how this vile man invents lies about his benefactor. If he lets the matter drop, it is done with; but if not, I will fully inform the world publicly in print how vilely the rogue has acted.¹⁷

On the one hand, Kirnberger says that scholars would rather be imprisoned than read Marpurg's writing, while on the other, he complains that Marpurg did not give him his

16 Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 6 (1871), 661-662.

17 Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 531-532. Partially trans. Howard J. Serwer, 'Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (1718-1795): Music Critic in a Galant Age', Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1969, 10f.

books as payment of the alleged loan. Kirnberger's claim about Marpurg begging him on his knees is a fabrication. As a member of the upper class, Marpurg would never have discussed his circumstances with Kirnberger, much less ask his assistance. With Kirnberger's reputation for the most extreme outspokenness, it strains credibility that Marpurg would risk dealing with him. If he had really needed funds, he could have obtained them from many other sources with much better assurance of discretion. Kirnberger claimed to have obtained the lottery position for Marpurg, but his work for Rothenburg had made him known to the king long before.¹⁸ Moreover, he was already holding a high-level government position when assuming the lottery directorship in 1766. In view of Kirnberger's penchant for invention, his claims cannot be regarded as factual. Nor did Kirnberger have the king's ear, for he refused to be the dedicatee of Kirnberger's *Grundsätze des Generalbasses* (c.1781).¹⁹

Remarkably, Marpurg kept two journals afloat, despite the ravages of the war between 1756 and 1763. Marpurg's 1757 letter to Johann Gottlob Immanuel Breitkopf, a trusted friend who had published several of his works, indicates that he needed a change of scenery, not that he was severely pressed financially.²⁰ This would have been five to six years after the death of Rothenburg (whom Marpurg clearly respected), years that proved unsuccessful in finding equal satisfaction. Sounding out acquaintances about a change of employment is something millions of people do routinely, and cannot be construed as supporting Kirnberger's claims about Marpurg's 'poverty'.

While Kirnberger called Marpurg's *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (1753-54) 'pitiful' because he no longer wanted to help him, it was recommended by both Carl Philip Emanuel Bach and Burney, who in 1789 called it 'the best book of the kind that is extant, except Padre Martini's *Saggio di Contrappunto*, which, for vocal fugues, is perhaps superior; but for instrumental, M. Marpurg's work is still more useful.'²¹ Gerber wrote that Marpurg's fugal treatise 'left them a work the likes of which no other nation can boast.'²² Marpurg also translated this work into French. It remained well-known and had five nineteenth-century editions in Paris, Leipzig, and Vienna.

In a later letter to Forkel, Kirnberger contradicted his own statement about not helping Marpurg with his fugal treatise: 'Everyone here knows that he could not have written his fugal work without me. How little he understands about it is shown by his stupid choice of examples, which are partly by him or other such wretched fellows, in which there is neither melody nor strict composition.'²³ In fact, Marpurg's *Abhandlung*, whose second volume is dedicated to the two elder Bach sons, is largely based on Johann Sebastian Bach's *Art of Fugue* and includes examples from Kirnberger himself. Kirnberger's other charges against Marpurg will be treated below, where their veracity can be considered in the fuller context of contemporary reports. Kirnberger did not say that Marpurg put out a 'letter' against him; instead, he meant Marpurg's *Versuch über die musikalische Temperatur* (1776), discussed below.

In another letter, Kirnberger told Forkel that he read the preface of his *Musikalisch-kritische Bibliothek* with the greatest pleasure, except for 'the note on p. XVI, where

18 Kirnberger's claim is accepted by Howard J. Serwer, 'Marpurg' in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (NG), second edition, ed. Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan, 2001, 15:880, and Laurenz Lütken, 'Marpurg' in *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (MGG), ed. Ludwig Finscher, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2004, 11:1126.

19 *Oeuvres de Frédéric le grand*, Berlin: Rodolphe Decker, 1856, 27/3, 223-225. Cited by Borris, *Kirnbergers Leben*, 89.

20 Hermann von Hase, 'Beiträge zur Breitkopfschen Geschäftsgeschichte', *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 2 (1920), 459-463 at 461f.

21 Bellermann, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 532. Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, London, 1789, ed. Frank Mercer. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935, 2:948f.

22 E. L. Gerber, *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, Leipzig, 1812-1814, xvii.

23 Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 568-569.

Marpurg's *Kritische Briefe* were praised as something good, when, after all, they are nothing but lampoons, satires, and fabricated letters of lies, and, moreover, have not the slightest value for a survey of the art. Marpurg used to make all authors fearful, and lit a fumigating candle to anyone who merely wrote. I hope this was not the case here, or you must not be completely convinced from his writing that he at that time attacked honourable people only out of hunger like a dog. Here in Berlin we know him better.²⁴ At this point, Forkel must have asked him not to mention Marpurg again, for Kirnberger opened his next letter with a promise (which he broke many times) that he is speaking about Marpurg for the last time. Kirnberger also portrayed Marpurg as hostile to music by the old masters:

The taste for true music in Berlin is so spoiled that most of the time people here say, 'Thank God the barbaric days of listening to the music of Handel, Bach, Graun, and Hasse are gone and we don't hear their names anymore.' ... In the concerts for music lovers here there are paid noisemakers who clap and applaud at the worst passages. Marpurg always starts in first and then the other fools follow; after him the bookseller Nicolai is second, and then the cowering fops and blockheads follow. ... Reichardt, Marpurg and some other such rabble have or want to establish a concert [series] to promote the a la mode taste and make the work of the best old composers laughable.²⁵

While Marpurg felt that new music deserved a hearing, his respect for the old masters often appears in his writings; for example: 'Among the old pieces, are there not some that greatly surpass those of today, and in every respect? This is why the good teacher does not train his pupil only in the pieces of the moment, but adds to them the fine pieces of past masters.'²⁶ Why would Kirnberger complain about Marpurg's taste, when, according to Schulz, Kirnberger never went to concerts?

Kirnberger told Forkel that Sulzer liked reading his [Kirnberger's] articles, but would rather be imprisoned at Spandau than have to read those of Marpurg, Scheibe, Mitzler and Riepel, which were a 'mere twaddle without any value.'²⁷ After several letters, Forkel (whose letters are lost) broke off the correspondence, without notice or explanation, to Kirnberger's expressed chagrin.

The *Kritische Briefe* Episode

In 1759, the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften* announced the new *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst mit kleinen Clavierstücken und Singoden begleitet von einer musikalischen Gesellschaft in Berlin*, noting that it was 'the fruit of an entire critical society's effort. Each letter is directed to an able musician and embellished at the end with a small musical piece. The letters themselves are written in a lively style and reflect their authors' insight. We therefore do not doubt that they will be well-received.'²⁸ Yet today's thought considers Marpurg as almost the sole author. A negative opinion of Marpurg's character, based largely on a 1759-60 controversy in the *Kritische Briefe*, was expressed in 1970:

A polemic conducted by Marpurg against Kirnberger in the pages of the former's musical periodical. ... The tone of this series of articles attacking an unpublished fugue by Kirnberger was so nasty that Kirnberger felt obliged to publish and defend his work. This led to even more unpleasant replies by Marpurg. ... For the rest of his life, Kirnberger hated the

24 Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 533.

25 Ibid., 533f., 617f. Trans. adapted from Serwer, 'Marpurg' dissertation, 15f.

26 Marpurg, *Principes du clavecin*, Berlin, 1756; rpt. 1982, 9.

27 Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 7, 458.

28 *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften* 5, Leipzig, 1759, 159.

very mention of Marpurg's name, even though Marpurg seems to have held Kirnberger in professional, if not personal, esteem.²⁹

This commentary lacks two crucial facts. First, Kirnberger was never named or implied as the individual criticized, but assumed this on his own, as he was wont to do, and published this notion himself. Second, the criticism was by pseudonymous writers, not Marpurg, who strongly denied any participation. Although the members of the musical society supporting the journal have never been identified, this is insufficient evidence to blame Marpurg.³⁰ And the alleged nasty tone of these articles needs to be documented.

According to the writer and composer Christian Gottfried Krause, Kirnberger was for years the scourge of Berlin musicians, particularly the court flautist Johann Joachim Quantz, whom he perpetually provoked, as he did everyone with musical merit. With the flute duets that Quantz published, this feud broke out with still greater bitterness. Quantz had always maintained, correctly, that the two voices of a duet must be complete in themselves, so that the ear does not desire a third voice or bass line. Now Kirnberger went from house to house telling everyone that Quantz's Duets would be insufferable without an added bass. Quantz challenged Kirnberger to supply for all six duets a bass that would sound natural and make them more pleasing than when performed with just two voices. Kirnberger may well have had difficulty in carrying this out, added Krause, for it was generally not his practice to improve what he criticized. Meanwhile he learned that Quantz would be worshipping in a certain church on Sunday. He asked permission from the unsuspecting organist and during the communion played a short Adagio from Quantz's Duets on two manuals, adding a bass on the pedals. Quantz was quite beside himself and nearly ill from vexation. Everyone with upright morality, concluded Krause, must sense how malicious it was to disturb the devotions of a good man.³¹

Kirnberger had gone too far this time, for his action against Quantz ignited the criticism in the *Kritische Briefe*. It began with a very brief letter from one Peter Kleinlieb asserting that last Sunday he had successfully invented a third voice for the Adagio of a certain duet, and had been honoured with a Bravo! for his achievement. He offered the society's members his services in similar endeavours.³² The letter is a satire, with no mention of name or place. In the next issue, a pseudonymous Paul Dreyklang declared that Herr Kleinlieb should now furnish and publish a bass for the remaining five duets, for the composer's preface indicates that such a bass line cannot be added without making it artificial [perhaps the challenge that Krause attributed to Quantz].³³

The sixth issue introduced Herr Sechsstern (signing his letters with six stars), who observed that Herr Kleinlieb has not produced the promised basses for the duets. But in the meantime, he, Sechsstern, obtained a copy of Herr Kleinlieb's new two-voice fugue. Expecting to find a masterpiece of purer and more correct harmony, more beautiful modulations, and more intricate counterpoint, he was instead disappointed. Because this journal is dedicated to criticism, he believed it an appropriate forum for discussing this work.³⁴ Sechsstern then did so in scholarly fashion for several pages. Again, nothing could enable identifying Herr Kleinlieb or the composer to whose work he had added a bass. About three months later, Kirnberger published this piece (entitled *Allegro für das Clavier alleine*), together with an extraordinary charge: 'The following *Allegro* has been found

29 Serwer, 'Theories', 210.

30 See *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst (KB)*, ed. F. W. Marpurg 1 (Berlin, 1759), 1-8, for anecdotal material about the five anonymous members.

31 Quoted by Nicolai, *Anekdoten*, 6:162-165.

32 'Nachricht', *KB*, 15.

33 'Nachricht', *KB*, 23f.

34 'Brief an die Gesellschaft', *KB*, 41-47.

fault with, not without acrimony, by a self-styled musical society in the sixth issue of the *Briefe über die Tonkunst*. Continuing with complaints about the critique, Kirnberger asked the Society to ‘refrain from all rude mocking, and present only those things useful in music. ... The world expects so much from a musical society, and must reasonably wonder at reading tittle tattle on every page, which cannot be of the slightest use in music.’ He also claimed that his letter to the Society was returned without a single excuse.³⁵

Up to this point, Kirnberger’s name had never been mentioned in the *Kritische Briefe*. Now, in the twenty-third to twenty-eighth issues, Herr Sechsstern replied to Kirnberger’s publication. He established that he is not ‘Paul Dreyklang’, as Kirnberger mistakenly called him, and denied any affiliation: ‘The composer errs in saying that his *Allegro* has been criticized by a self-styled musical society. I affirm that I, completely alone, am the one who publicly criticized it, and affirm once again that I do not belong to the musical society that publishes the *Kritische Briefe*. ... How sorry I am that Herr Kirnberger, by voluntarily announcing his name, has himself made something known that could have remained hidden.’ Sechsstern took the letter signed by Peter Kleinlieb as a small satire or warning for someone about a certain musical event that was unknown to him at the time: ‘Never would I have believed that the author had written in seriousness.’ Against the advice of all his acquaintances, added Sechsstern, Kirnberger let it be known that the letter signed by Peter Kleinlieb referred to him, even though his name was not used, and the duet and place were not identified. Meanwhile, ‘he not only in many gatherings marched through certain duets of a famous man maliciously’, but also performed the deed against Quantz. ‘I learned that he had, moreover, burst out with various insulting remarks against other compositions of this renowned composer, and in a assembly composed not solely of musicians, but others who do not understand music.’³⁶ According to Sechsstern:

If I had been in Herr Kirnberger’s place, ... I would have perceived this letter as a small warning to keep quite still and refrain from such unmannerly behaviour in the future. I would have chuckled at the fine Peter Kleinlieb, and been secretly grateful to the letter’s author for keeping my true name hidden. ... It certainly would have been no greater offence if the letter’s author had written blandly: ‘A certain double contrapuntist acts improperly in that he, according to his customary habit, trumpets forth in social gatherings criticism against the works of well-known people, and wants to defy them publicly, indeed, even in the church, where such an undertaking has the very least propriety.’ Would Herr Kirnberger have been able to begin a slander process over it?³⁷

Sechsstern asked if it would not have been better for Kirnberger to have expressed his doubts about Quantz’s Duet in print. He then could have awaited the composer’s defense: ‘But Herr Kirnberger thought quite differently. He was convinced that otherwise no one but he could be understood by the name Peter Kleinlieb. He trumpeted forth his disgrace everywhere, and cried about injustice and oppression. ... A good friend advised him to recognize the illegality of his conduct up to that time, and seek an opportunity to make it up, in case the Duet’s composer were to get angry again.’ But instead of taking this good advice, continued Sechsstern, Herr Kirnberger sent the friend the unpublished fugue which has now appeared in print. By accident, it fell into his [Sechsstern’s] hands, and

35 J. P. Kirnberger, *Allegro, für das Clavier alleine ...*, Berlin, 1759, 1, 13. Library catalogues attribute to Marpurg himself the letters in the *Kritische Briefe*: ‘The defense of the “Allegro” was written in reply to a criticism by Marpurg in his “Kritische Briefe,” v. 1, 1760, 41-47 under the pseudonym “Paul Dreiklang.”’

36 ‘Brief an die Gesellschaft’, *KB*, 175f.

37 *Ibid.*, 177-179. The term ‘double contrapuntist’ is neither ‘mysterious’ nor ‘snide’, as thought today, but complimentary, as in other contexts. See [Marpurg], *Legende einiger Musikheiligen*, Cölln am Rhein, 1786; rpt. 1977, 60-62.

he found various items deserving discussion. He compiled his criticism and sent it to the editor of the *Kritische Briefe*.³⁸

Sechsstern's present writing was a response to Kirnberger's arguments against him in the material accompanying his recently published *Allegro*. The fact that Kirnberger filled it with examples from J. S. Bach, citing him as authority for his own work, explains why Sechsstern then replied at length. The reason becomes still clearer when we learn Sechsstern's identity. In 1786 Marpurg revealed that the Berlin court composer Johann Friedrich Agricola 'was accustomed to taking part in quarrels only secretly and under an assumed name, as Herrn von Moldenit and Kirnberger had, to their sorrow, experienced.'³⁹ This is undoubtedly a reference to the present controversy in the *Kritische Briefe*, where the principal correspondent is Herr Sechsstern, a pseudonym for Agricola. The Moldenit reference concerns a much shorter episode in the *Historisch-kritische Beyträge* about Moldenit's criticism of Quantz. The latter's reply to Moldenit comprises nearly forty pages,⁴⁰ and must be what Marpurg says was written by Agricola. In another article, Marpurg cited Agricola's strength in criticism.⁴¹ Because Agricola's signed writing is generally didactic, most of his criticism must have been anonymous, and of sufficient quantity to warrant his reputation for criticism. In his *Lexicon* ('Agricola'), Gerber cited him as author of several articles in the *Kritische Briefe*.

Agricola's authorship explains the indignation expressed over Kirnberger's wrapping himself in the protection of Bach's name. Despite studying with Bach for a substantial period (1738-41), Agricola never traded on his association. In contrast, Kirnberger's study with Bach consisted of a few months in 1741,⁴² which is confirmed also by Sechsstern's comment: 'I honour the memory of this great man', but because he is dead and cannot speak for himself or reveal his true intentions, one will not take it amiss if the writer 'does not accept as evangelist this or that person who once ran through the school to him and now wants to saddle everyone with commandments attached to his name'. Least of all will Sechsstern recognize Herr Kirnberger as the true heir of the Bach principles, but will always doubt whether he has even grasped the late Bach's intentions correctly.⁴³

With respect to Bach's Fugue in B-flat major (BWV 890) which Kirnberger cited on his p. 7, Sechsstern declared: 'How pleasing is the main subject, how natural; how very different the secondary subject! And you want to hide behind this fugue! In your published fugue, where is the countersubject and its inversion; where is the counterpoint at the tenth and twelfth? ... Take your refuge in sound reason. Be more grateful toward a great man whose name is always on your lips.' To those knowledgeable about the fine arts, added Sechsstern, music is little honoured when people justify themselves with the words 'This or that one said so', without citing any further grounds. Cannot this or that great man have had his own concepts, against which, if he were still living, he would doubtless have taken another possibility and tested it? What a misfortune it is for deceased composers when certain people misuse their works as a cover for their own ignorance; when they excerpt individual pieces, which they do not understand, to give themselves authority among those who do not have the opportunity to investigate the matter themselves.⁴⁴

38 'Brief an die Gesellschaft', *KB*, 177-179.

39 [Marpurg], *Legende einiger Musikheiligen* (Cölln am Rhein, 1786; rpt. 1977), 58.

40 *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik* (*HkB*), ed. F. W. Marpurg 4, Berlin, 1758, 153-191. Moldenit's passage: vol. 3 (1758), 544-557.

41 [Marpurg], *Legende*, 151.

42 Dadelsen, 'Kirnberger', 7:951.

43 'XXIV. Brief', *KB*, 183.

44 'XXV. Brief', *KB*, 195, 196.

After Kirnberger had filed a lawsuit and more than half a year after the original event, Marpurg addressed Kirnberger for the first time, denying his or any Society member's involvement:

By the 'self-styled musical society', you understand the author of the present journal ... do you perchance wish to say that this journal is not by a whole society, but only from a single person? But I credit you, as an author, with too much insight into the differences among the [writing] styles to arrive at such thoughts. You, my friend, know perhaps only a single individual from the society; but it does not follow that only one person works on this journal. One individual must necessarily be in charge and direct the work. Something else astonishes me in the passage cited from your writing – namely, that you believe the criticism of your fugue [the *Allegro*] to be a work by this journal's editor. But your idea has already been publicly refuted by your adversary, Herr Sechsstern. You already knew, indeed in advance and long before your defense was finished, that neither the Society, nor I in particular, admitted to writing this criticism, although we had, on request, readily let it be inserted in our journal. I will herewith give you once again, unnecessarily and indeed publicly, the assurance that neither I nor anyone else from the Society had the slightest role in criticizing your fugue and in the defense of this criticism. None of us is accustomed to appropriate to himself another's work, successful as it may be. Aren't you embarrassed, *mein Herr*, over the little diversion you have had by bringing suit against the Society and me over this criticism? I forgive you.⁴⁵

Marpurg cautioned Kirnberger about mixing up so many persons and names:

Nothing is gained by this fun and one only makes the public distrustful against oneself. ... Learn to differentiate between permitted and unpermitted fabrications. One need walk past the truth only once in order never again to be believed. ... You would have had the greatest right to complain about the Society if it had acted against your person in the manner you describe. But I deny that you have been attacked in this journal several times in a strange way. At least I am assured by all Society members that not once ... has anyone thought of you in his writing. When by chance a ridiculous person is occasionally brought onto the scene, is it our fault that you immediately want to recognize yourself in it? When the second issue appeared, you strongly wanted to be the teacher represented on p.10. This was not enough. You wanted to imagine Paläophil, to whom this letter is imputed, as an imitation of your person, just as you not long ago had held Herrn Adam Riesen in the twenty-second letter to be. When the second part of my *Abhandlung von der Fuge* was published, you wanted to assume all the different and often contradictory characters sketched in the preface. What are you thinking of, *mein Herr*? Can you be black and white at the same time? Rein in your imagination and be careful of such ideas.⁴⁶

(In the alphabetical list of musical caricatures in Marpurg's *Abhandlung*, the only letter omitted is K.) Marpurg then referred to Peter Kleinlieb's letter: 'I assure you most solemnly that at the time this letter was received, neither I nor anyone else from the Society had the slightest news about the event precipitating it. How is it possible that this could seem so peculiar to you, and deserving to be avenged, after you have shown a still stranger conduct?' As 'an upright cosmopolitan, a deserving man, a great composer whom the king values, whose ideas the public admires, whose name foreigners borrow for recommendation of their works', continued Marpurg, 'how do you venture to disparage a beautiful duet in all kinds of company in the unkindest way! ... If you have the capability to criticize, and to

45 'XXX. Brief', *KB*, 232-234.

46 *Ibid.*, 234. 'Paläophil' means literally 'lover of olden things'.

criticize as permitted in the rational world of scholars and artists, then criticize publicly and in writing. No one who respects truth will take such criticism as a defamatory offence, but only one who shuns the light and is an enemy of truth.⁴⁷ Recounting that Kirnberger had, on his advice, been ready to apologize to the duet's composer before vacillating (as he often did) and changing his mind, Marpurg observed:

You did not want to hear of any peace proposal, and, if you had ever insulted the said duet, it happened now. If your treatment, even of your most trusted friends, had ever become objectionable, it was now. Was it any wonder that a certain aristocrat disguised under the signature of six stars revealed himself to be a musician as perceptive as he is sharp-witted, and, using your two-voice fugue as an example, undertook to show you that criticism would be an easy matter. Here, my friend, your basic premise should have occurred to you, that 'everyone is entitled to criticize what offends him' ... You would be far removed from the obstinacy of some musicians who hold every criticism to be a defamatory insult. But how did you burst out against this critic? The whole city resounds with your complaints. You cannot understand how your fugue, this two-part masterpiece of art, has deserved such a fate. To what extent are you jesting my friend, or do you speak seriously? You can take no criticism? You, an arch-critic who criticizes everything that displeases you, even when it too deserves no criticism?⁴⁸

After quoting Kirnberger's claim that the Society returned his letter without explanation, Marpurg asked: 'Don't you find that you have committed a serious error of memory? Quickly retract this error so injurious to your honour, and inform the world that you with your own hands took this letter back.' Marpurg affirmed that the Society was perfectly willing to publish it, and that Kirnberger re-submitted it, but: 'You came the day afterwards to me and demanded your writing back for the second time.' Kirnberger's own indecision was responsible for his letter not being published: 'You both wanted it and didn't want it.' Marpurg also offered Kirnberger the opportunity to make a major contribution to the journal. To close his letter, Marpurg declared: 'Should you, my friend, henceforth have more musical quarrels that concern me as little as your present one, I request you to be so kind as not to mix me up in it. If you are calm and courteous, you shall always find in me a sincere friend who is able to treat your efforts with justice.'⁴⁹ Marpurg kept his word by including some of Kirnberger's pieces in his 1762 and 1763 collections of keyboard music, comparing the counterpoint in Kirnberger's 'Allabreve' to that of Frescobaldi, Froberger, Bach, and Handel.⁵⁰

Modern charges about Marpurg's abusive language concern an article by Neologos, a Society member, who discussed certain theoretical principles of Georg Andreas Sorge in the fourth issue of the *Kritische Briefe*.⁵¹ His writing style differs considerably from Marpurg's. Sorge's response was published in the eighth issue of the *Kritische Briefe*. Despite being supported by a lengthy letter in the *Kritische Briefe* from one Alithophilos,⁵² Sorge blamed Marpurg for the criticism and claimed that all the pseudonyms in the *Kritische Briefe* represented Marpurg.⁵³ On behalf of the Society, Hypographus [*sic*] declared: 'I want to advise Herrn Sorge most officially that he is very poorly informed with regard to Herrn Marpurg, who has not prepared half of the [journal's] pages.'⁵⁴

47 *Ibid.*, 234f.

48 *Ibid.*, 235.

49 *Ibid.*, 236f., 240.

50 Marpurg, *Clavierstücke mit einem practischen Unterricht*, vol. II, III, Berlin, 1762, 1763, text in 3:28f.

51 See note 1, first item.

52 'Schreiben . . . Hofmann', *KB*, 138ff. 'Alithophilos' means 'lover of things not of stone'.

53 Georg Andreas Sorge, *Compendium harmonicum . . .*, Lobenstein, 1760, 120f.

54 'Nachricht', *KB*, 420. 'Hypographos' means 'the undersigned'.

In accepting Kirnberger's and Sorge's charge against Marpurg, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* asserts: "The *Kritische Briefe* employed the format of a collection of letters composed on behalf of an imaginary society very much like that devised by Addison and Steele for their *Spectator*. The letters were addressed to various musicians and most were signed with pseudonyms, all of which seem to have represented Marpurg."⁵⁵ During this period, a remarkable number of books and articles, even non-controversial, appeared without an author's name. The belief that Marpurg wrote the pseudonymous letters is not supported by evidence.

The *Kritische Briefe* published 128 issues — an extraordinarily long time for one man to keep up the presumed pretenses. Marpurg would have had to have superhuman powers to be an authority on each of many far-ranging subjects, conceive and write in longhand the copy for a weekly issue, alter his writing style and personality for each of the anonymous contributors, and see the whole through the printing and distribution process. And where did he find the funds, especially under wartime conditions? In all probability, the *Kritische Briefe* was supported by its five anonymous individuals, who were most likely well-to-do *Liebhaber* (a term denoting high social rank).

Marpurg's other activities make even more vivid the impossibility of his writing all the anonymous articles. Simultaneously, he edited the monthly *Historisch-kritische Beyträge* and also various collections of musical compositions. His own books required substantial time: *Kritische Einleitung in die Geschichte und Lehrsätze der alten und neuen Musik* (1759); *Herrn Georg Andreas Sorgens Anleitung zur Generalbass [...]* (1760); *Anhang zum Handbuch bey dem Generalbass und der Composition* (1760); and *Die Kunst das Clavier zu spielen*, third edition [greatly enlarged] (1760). During this period, Marpurg's books and collections published in 1761 and 1762, too, must have been in the planning stages.

Temperament

Like other major German theorists before him — Andreas Werckmeister, Johann George Neidhardt, Johann Mattheson, and Georg Andreas Sorge — Marpurg favoured equal temperament.⁵⁶ In 1761 the *Historisch-kritische Beyträge* published an unsigned article that presented a more precise mathematical calculation for equal temperament.⁵⁷ It was preceded by Marpurg's editorial note stating that the the debate over the superiority of this or that unequal temperament had ceased after Neidhardt's *Beste und leichteste Temperatur* (1706) began to make them acquainted with equal temperament. Subsequently, Moses Mendelssohn was identified as the article's author. Kirnberger then published the same essay under his own name, without a date but with a new title: *Construction der gleichschwebenden Temperatur*, today dated [1764]. When assigning the work to Mendelssohn, Gerber added that the late Kirnberger had, strangely enough, published this work too.⁵⁸

According to Marpurg, Kirnberger had repeatedly told him and others about the tuning he did for Johann Sebastian Bach in equal temperament:

This master expressly required him to make all major thirds sharp. In a temperament where all major thirds are somewhat sharp (that is, where they all should beat above pure), it is impossible to have a pure major third; and as soon as there is no pure major third, so also

55 Serwer, 'Marpurg' in *NG*, 15:880. This view is transmitted in library catalogue notes for the *Kritische Briefe*: 'Edited by Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, who is also author of the greater part of the letters.'

56 See Rudolf Rasch, 'Does "Well-Tempered" Mean "Equal-Tempered"?' in *Bach, Handel, Scarlatti Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Peter Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 293-309.

57 [Moses Mendelssohn], 'Versuch, eine vollkommen gleichschwebende Temperatur durch die Construction zu finden', *HkB* 5/2 (1761), 95-109.

58 Gerber, *Historisch-biographisches Lexicon*, 1:974: 'Auch hat dies Werk der sel. Kirnberger besonders herausgegeben.'

is no raised major third of about 81:80 [a comma sharp] possible. Hr. Capellmeister Joh. Seb. Bach, who did not have an ear spoiled by a bad calculation, must consequently have felt that a major third raised about 81:80 is an execrable interval. Indeed, why did he call his Preludes and Fugues in all 24 keys the Art of Temperament?⁵⁹

With all major thirds tuned somewhat sharp, Bach's temperament had to be equal.

In the late 1760s, Kirnberger's views changed and he sought a temperament with as many mathematically pure intervals as possible. His first two unequal temperaments were published initially in his *Clavierübungen* (1766), with the second appearing again in the 1771 volume of his *Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*. When reviewing his 1766 publication, the Leipzig *Wöchentliche Nachrichten* cited equal temperament as the norm: 'Herr Kirnberger rejects the hitherto accepted equal temperament of the fifths.'⁶⁰

Because 'Kirnberger I' (with an entire syntonic comma removed from D-A and 2 cents from F-sharp-C-sharp) was impractical for usage, it was rarely discussed. 'Kirnberger II', with two constantly-used fifths narrowed by half a comma, exceeded the stipulation in early sources that the ear cannot tolerate a fifth altered by more than a quarter comma. Marpurg observed that it was praised by theorists [for its pure intervals], but never used in practice.⁶¹ Kirnberger's goal was not to produce a usable temperament (he did not avoid the sour notes in his own composition), but to obtain a larger number of mathematically pure intervals. Perhaps he neglected to mention that equal temperament is necessary in practice, but unequal temperament is superior in theory. The third of Kirnberger's temperaments (the one discussed most today) appears only in a letter to Forkel,⁶² and was apparently unknown to contemporaries. While an improvement over the first two (the four fifths C-G-D-A-E are each narrowed 1/4 comma), it is unsatisfactory in practice, in part because the tempering falls on the most commonly used notes.

In his *Vermischte Musikalien* (1769), Kirnberger took a radical approach to obtaining pure intervals by presenting an octave of twenty-four pitches. A long review in the *Wöchentliche Nachrichten* took strong exception, calling it unnecessary and unworkable. Noting that the split keys used on some old instruments to enable a distinction between D-sharp and E-flat had so justifiably been abolished, the writer wondered why, with such an insignificant advantage to be gained by Kirnberger's temperament, one should change all the keyboard instruments and learn to play all over again. Nothing but slow music, such as a chorale or Psalm tune, could be played. 'The old Bach, the greatest of all organists and keyboardists, would, if he were still living, cut a miserable figure on such an instrument.' According to Kirnberger, whoever can hear the differences among the thirds (in a temperament he considers correct) will not transpose a piece into another key: 'Not a single piece of the late Bach, Graun, Händel, Capellmeister Bach in Hamburg and other great composers can be put into another key without disfiguring it and making it impracticable.' After discussing this assertion, the reviewer concluded: 'The indicated effects of a transposition originated simply in his head.'⁶³ Kirnberger exemplifies the

59 Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Versuch über die musikalische Temperatur*, Breslau, 1776, 213.

60 'Johann Philipp Kirnbergers Clavierübungen mit der Bachischen Applicatur', *Wöchentliche Nachrichten und Anmerkungen die Musik betreffend*, ed. Johann Adam Hiller 1, Leipzig, 1766; rpt. 1970, 116: 'Der Herr Kirnberger verwirft darinne die bisher angenommenen gleichen Schwebungen der Quinten.'

61 Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Neue Methode allerley Arten von Temperaturen dem Claviere aufs Bequemste mitzutheilen*, Berlin, 1790, Preface.

62 Bellermann, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 565-572.

63 'Vermischte Musikalien, von Johann Philipp Kirnberger', *Wöchentliche Nachrichten* 3, Anhang (2 Oct. 1769), 106; (9 Oct. 1769), 113: 'Die angegebenen Wirkungen einer Transposition sind bloss in seinem Gehirne entstanden.'

disconnection between theory and practice found in many theoretical writings of the period. We have often mistaken these theoretical speculations for actual practice.

Kirnberger's *Kunst des reinen Satzes*

In 1771 Kirnberger published the first volume of his *Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, which criticized Rameau's harmonic principles and rejected equal temperament because it is difficult to tune and the different character of the keys is lost. He acknowledged, however, that many consider equal temperament advantageous, for the deviation from complete purity is so slight as to be 'scarcely perceptible', enabling one to 'play all chromatic notes in both major and minor tonalities with almost complete purity'.⁶⁴ According to Burney, Kirnberger gave him a copy of his equal-temperament brochure in 1772.⁶⁵

Marpurg's *Versuch über die musikalische Temperatur* (1776) included a chapter responding to Kirnberger's 1771 views on temperament, and an appendix replying to his attacks on Rameau's harmonic principles, but expressed his desire for friendly relations: 'I respect Hr. Kirnberger's musical talents and would be sorry if certain ideas about our difference of opinion on this or that point were to sacrifice the slightest of my esteem and friendship toward him.'⁶⁶ A remarkable amount of misinformation about Marpurg's *Versuch* found its way into print in the generation after his death and again in modern times. Quoting from one of Kirnberger's letters, Siegfried Borris remarked in 1933: 'Here Kirnberger points to the blow that had wounded him the most deeply in his last years of life. When Marpurg published his *Versuch*... it was not enough to describe the Kirnberger *Grundsätze* as vague and inconsistent, but he dedicated the work to Princess Amalia. This rude tactlessness ...' Borris also quoted Kirnberger's pupil Eberhard:

What injured him [Kirnberger] the most before his death was Marpurg's *Versuch über die Temperatur*. He saw himself derided therein in the most contemptible manner. The author of this argumentative writing presented it to Princess Amalia of Prussia, as if he feared it might remain unknown to Kirnberger's noble pupil. With tears in his eyes, he spoke of it to me, while he referred to his 90-year-old father, whom he maintained until his death with filial love. How could a man of such delicacy initiate such a polemical writing against the teacher of the princess, who was the only support in his old age!⁶⁷

Instead of verifying the validity of Kirnberger's complaints, Eberhard published them. Judge what effect his remarks would have had on people unacquainted with the background information. Kirnberger had been dead for seventeen years and Marpurg for five, while the controversies themselves lay twenty-four and forty years in the past.

Marpurg's *Versuch* contains no dedication to the princess, but only a brief mention in the Introduction to the Appendix: 'Must we Germans always be the ones to make discoveries, or do we not wish to utilize the findings of foreigners? Meanwhile, the most complete work possible concerning the execution of the fundamental bass appeared; it was worthy of appearing only in the century of Frederick and his most illustrious sister Amalia.'⁶⁸ If Marpurg did give the princess a copy, this is probably the basis of Kirnberger's complaint about Marpurg's 'sneaky' conduct. She was a published composer, however, and may have asked to see it. Eberhard's emotional reference to Kirnberger's economic dependence on her does no credit to either of them. On the contrary, she was substantially influenced by Kirnberger's thinking. While

64 J. P. Kirnberger, *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, 3 vol., Berlin & Königsberg, 1771, 1776, 1779; rpt. 1968, 1:10ff., 248ff.

65 Burney, *Musical Tour*, 200.

66 Marpurg, *Versuch*, 234.

67 Borris, *Kirnbergers Leben*, 86f. Eberhard, 'Erklärung', 873.

68 Marpurg, *Versuch*, 229f.

Eberhard characterized Marpurg's work as contemptuous in tone, the theorist merely rebutted in scholarly fashion various passages, such as this one from Kirnberger:

Since Rameau was the first to introduce a written fundamental bass, his countrymen have credited him with its discovery. Some of them are so ignorant that they proclaim with amusing assurance that Rameau was the first to reduce the science of harmony, which before him was most uncertain, to its basic principles, and was the first to show that certain chords are not true fundamental chords, but inversions of others. These people must not know, then, that the science of double counterpoint, which many Italian and German composers have understood far better than Rameau, is by all means based on this recognition of fundamental harmonies, since it is impossible in double counterpoint to compose even one measure without the inversion of chords. Thus what all good composers understood and used daily more than a hundred years before Rameau, this wonderful man, this sole lawgiver of music, has discovered first.⁶⁹

Marpurg replied: (1) The fundamental bass has not been invented for those who already know the rules of harmony, but for those who wish to learn them. (2) Formerly it was taught as little in France as in Germany or Italy. (3) When the French make use of a written fundamental bass, it is in instruction books, where it belongs, but not in orchestras and concert halls, where it does not belong. (4) The opinion that Mr. Rameau is not the discoverer of the fundamental bass particularly deserves to be taken into consideration.⁷⁰

Inexplicably, Kirnberger was almost violently opposed to Rameau's theories. Yet, as Joel Lester reported (1992): 'Probably without realizing how much he was borrowing, Kirnberger based much of his approach to harmony on Rameau's ideas, including chord inversion, the seventh chord as a source of dissonance, fundamental bass to interpret chord progressions, and evaded cadences to promote harmonic continuity.'⁷¹ Lester also found contradictions in Kirnberger's publications.

When rejecting equal temperament, Kirnberger took another controversial position by adding to the third volume of his *Kunst* a lengthy vindictive personal attack on Marpurg written anonymously by a military officer at the Berlin court, Georg Friedrich Tempelhof.⁷² Later, Daniel Gottlob Türk said that equal temperament was 'hitherto almost generally accepted' and asked whether compositions conceived for equal temperament would have the appropriate effect with Kirnberger's temperament.⁷³

Tempelhof also claimed that Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach was opposed to equal temperament, which is refuted by Bach's own testimony. After Barthold Fritz's equal-temperament tuning manual was published, Bach wrote to him, observing that it provides everything necessary for tuning and is incomparably more useful than the many calculations with which some have racked their brains; this type of instruction is only for a very few, but Fritz's is for everyone, not excepting even the theorists, because theirs, too, depends on the ear's verdict.⁷⁴

69 J. P. Kirnberger, *The Art of Strict Musical Composition*, trans. David Beach and Jürgen Thym, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, xiv-xv. From Kirnberger's article 'Fundamentalbass' in J. G. Sulzer's *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*.

70 Marpurg, *Versuch*, 268.

71 Joel Lester, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, 240f.

72 Kirnberger, *Kunst*, 3:182-187. In a letter to Forkel (Bellerman, 'Briefe', vol. 6, 550), Kirnberger identified Tempelhof as the writer, claiming that he 'exposed Marpurg's disgrace to the world'.

73 Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule*, Leipzig and Halle, 1789; rpt. 1962, 382, 383.

74 Barthold Fritz, *Anweisung, wie man Claviere, Clavecins, und Orgeln nach einer mechanischen Art, in allen zwölf Tönen gleich rein stimmen könne*, second edition, Leipzig, 1757, Vorbericht: 'und dass insbesondere meine Anweisung zum Stimmen bey dem berühmten Hrn. Bach zu Berlin Beyfall gefunden, als welcher in seinem an mich erlassenen Schreiben sich darüber dergestalt geäußert hat, dass in meinen wenigen Bogen alles gesagt sey, was nöthig und möglich gewesen, und dass solche ungleich mehrern Nutzen stiften würden, als

The record indicates Kirnberger's ambivalence about equal temperament: he accepted it in the 1760s by publishing Mendelssohn's article under his own name, rejected it in the first volume of his *Kunst* (1771), accepted it again in 1772 when giving Burney his brochure on this subject, and rejected it once more in the third volume of his *Kunst* (1779). Was Marpurg's strong support of equal temperament a factor in Kirnberger's opposition to it?

To Tempelhof's remarks, Kirnberger added his own: 'I have enough testimony of great musicians that it [Marpurg's work] is not worth any answer. They unanimously grant me that his work is more a twaddle than a thorough treatise, and who does not know that what Herr Marpurg knows about music he has learned from me? ... That he uses against me entirely improper means not suitable for an honest man will truly no expert or man of honour approve.'⁷⁵ Kirnberger's claim about teaching Marpurg is without merit, for Marpurg had published nearly a dozen books of a theoretical and/or practical nature (and many articles) before Kirnberger published his first one. In alleging that Marpurg used improper means against him, Kirnberger made a serious unsubstantiated charge. Judging from his customary behaviour, he would have broadcast any real infraction on Marpurg's part. Kirnberger's conduct calls into question his alleged quotation from C. Ph. E. Bach.

Besides, what Herr Capellmeister Bach in Hamburg thinks about the admirable work of Herrn Marpurg is shown by some parts of a letter that this famous man has written me: 'Herr Marpurg's conduct against you is abominable.' And further: 'You can loudly proclaim that my and my late father's harmonic principles are anti-Rameau.'⁷⁶

Marpurg had known Emanuel Bach, his father Sebastian, and other family members since the 1740s, had dedicated the second part of his fugal treatise to Emanuel and Friedeman Bach, surely was well acquainted with Emanuel's views, always spoke respectfully of him, and cited him as an authority. Moreover, Marpurg had included some of Emanuel's pieces in his collections, and introduced him to the Breitkopf publishing firm.⁷⁷ Was the relationship then so one-sided that Emanuel Bach would respond with the spleen in Kirnberger's quotation? Emanuel Bach probably was instrumental in having Marpurg write the introduction to the 1752 edition of his father's *Art of Fugue*. When offering to sell the plates of this work in 1756, he recommended Marpurg's fugal treatise. Judging from the warm tone with which Marpurg regarded the Bach family in his *Legende* (1786), Kirnberger's quotation from Emanuel Bach is a fabrication. In one example, Marpurg refers to 'W. F. B.' as 'among the most ingenious harpsichord and organ extemporizers of his time', adding that he [Marpurg] visited P. [Potsdam] to see W. F. B.'s brother [C. P. E. Bach], this 'virtuoso who is as kind as he is great. Since I often had the pleasure to see him at my place, it happened one day ...'.⁷⁸ Had Kirnberger's alleged quotation from Emanuel Bach been true, Marpurg could not have spoken so highly of him afterward.

die vielen Ausrechnungen, womit sich mancher den Kopf zerbrochen hätte, indem diese Art von Anweisung nur für sehr wenige, die meinige aber für jedermann sey, selbst die Berechner nicht ausgenommen, weil diese von dem Ausspruche des Gehörs so gut als andere abhiengen.'

75 Kirnberger, *Kunst*, 3:188.

76 Kirnberger, *Kunst*, 3:188.

77 Marpurg's letter of March, 1757 to Breitkopf quoted by Hermann von Hase, 'Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach und Joh. Gottl. Im. Breitkopf', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 8 (1911), 86-104 at 87.

78 [Marpurg], *Legende*, 185.

Writing to Forkel, Kirnberger boasted: ‘My little vindication in my third part against Marpurg has at least gotten rid of the scoundrel [*Holunken*] who has abused so many honourable people. He will not dare to pick a quarrel with me anymore because he would then have to expect something still worse. This Marpurg is also Reichardt’s only friend; almost no honest man associates with them because of their bad character.’⁷⁹

Marpurg made a deliberate effort to adopt a conciliatory tone with Kirnberger. Besides publishing Kirnberger’s ‘Allabreve’ (above), he was the first to publish Kirnberger’s compositions by including them in his collections of 1756, 1757, 1761, and 1762. Marpurg included many Kirnberger examples in his *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (1753-54), where he dedicated four canons to Kirnberger: *Kirnbergero amico optimo, melopoëtae sagacissimo, dicatorum ab auctore quadrigae canonum perpetuorum*.⁸⁰ More Kirnberger examples appear in Marpurg’s *Anleitung zur Musik überhaupt und zur Singkunst besonders* (1763), which lists Kirnberger, together with Graun, Quantz, Bach, Tosi, and Agricola, as ‘excellent musicians’.

* * *

Around 1784, the composer and writer on music Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart evaluated the two theorists as follows:

Marpurg, one of the greatest theorists in all of Europe. His critical writings are not only written in a very clear style, but also reveal profound musical insights and great scholarship. Kirnberger, an ice-cold theorist, to be sure, but yet an author of great importance. There is not yet anything more thorough than his *Kunst des reinen Satzes*. ... His system is indeed profound, but, however, too partial, and therefore leads to injustices against men who have another [system]. ... Between the ice-cold theorist and the passionate man of genius lies a yawning chasm; this is seen also with Kirnberger, who with his fault-finding and hypercriticism brought the Berlin school into bad report.⁸¹

Just as Kirnberger had attacked Quantz, Reichardt, Rameau and others of recognized merit, he did the same against Marpurg, making offensive accusations and assertions. Kirnberger’s pupils Schulz and Eberhard, who experienced only the benign side of his character, believed his complaints with the faith of a disciple.

The idea that Marpurg was responsible for the anonymous criticism of Kirnberger and Sorge lacks both logic and proof. With all of his simultaneous activities, Marpurg could not have been more than the *Kritische Briefe*’s editor, perhaps contributing an article now and then. The journal’s full title specifies it to be the work of a music society, as announced also by the *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaft*. By publicly identifying himself as the subject of a satire, Kirnberger brought the criticism, whose tone remains within the bounds of scholarly discourse, upon himself. A re-examination of Marpurg’s work may disclose why Gerber exclaimed in his second edition: ‘He too is no more! ... Death has robbed us of our foremost writer and music educator.’

79 Bellerman, ‘Briefe’, vol. 6, 663.

80 Marpurg, *Abhandlung von der Fuge* (Berlin, 1754), vol. 2, Tab. LVIII.

81 Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, Vienna, 1806; rpt. 1990, 92f.