JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
SONATAS AND PARTITAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN:
ASPECTS OF PERFORMANCE ON THE INSTRUMENT

GOTTFRIED SCHNEIDER

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Music
Presented to the School of Performing Arts at the University of Malta
Malta

August 2016

STATEMENT OF AUTHENTICITY

No portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Gottfried Schneider

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Dr. Frederick Aquilina and Dr. Hans-Juergen Nagel for their guidance, inspiring discussions and sincere support during my research.

I would like to thank Evi for her patience during the last three years.

ABSTRACT

With self-imposed limitations J.S. Bach contrasted a maximum of musical content with a minimum of instrumental and tonal potential in his six sonatas and partitas for solo violin. This is a challenging task for any interpreter, and the purpose of this study is to help the violinist to improve his interpretation.

Two fields of knowledge about the solos were investigated. The first one – the historical – has a strong but indirect impact on the artistic development of the interpreter, a comprehensive insight into the origin of the solos as well as into their reception up to this day by both audience and musicians. Such questions that were researched therefore include: (i) for which purpose did Bach compose the solos? (ii) which influences were important for him? (iii) was there a logical compositional development from an organ virtuoso to a violin composer?

The other line – the performance – refers directly to the researcher's final performance (BWV 1001, 1002, 1004) and deals with more concrete and practical issues resulting from an analysis of the compositions. On the one hand, numerous indications for a preferably mainstream-orientated (MS) interpretation of the solos were studied and discussed in the presentation of the *Ciaccona*. This investigation refers to technical aspects as well as to interpretative problems. On the other hand, the 'Baroque Affective Theory' is applied to the dance movements of the first and second partitas based on a Historically Informed Performance (HIP) approach. Some final reflections towards the interpretation of the final programme are given in the Conclusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction

1.1 Preliminary Note

Musicologists have stated that performing musicians usually find their artistic style quite early in their career and tend to avoid significant change of their approach to pieces.[1]

The reader of this dissertation should know that I have been performing Bach's solos for a long period of time. Of course, a lifetime of learning, playing and teaching these pieces has resulted in continuous development in my style and attitude towards playing them. Nevertheless, my basic approach to the solos was formed when I studied the pieces with my teachers and attended recitals given by the violin virtuosos of the day. This is important to note because there are various approaches musicians use to find their own individual and personal style of interpretation.

Recent studies have proven that the modern approach to Baroque performance practice is divided in two divergent sections.[2] The first comprises interpreters observing an HIP (Historically Informed Performance) approach; these performers tend to get their legitimacy by researching eighteenth-century performance style and by understanding the aesthetic criteria of the period, which becomes the most important guideline for their interpretation. Although this group has gained increasing influence in the music scene in the last fifty years or so, many interpreters as well as teachers at academies and conservatories do not feel the need for a radical change in their performing style, and instead are accustomed to being part of a 'living tradition'. In their opinion, students learn from their teachers, and orchestras maintain their own traditions through such students; aesthetic criteria are passed on from one generation to the next.

---

[1] See, for instance, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Recordings and Histories of Performance Style.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson & John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 246-62.

[2] Dorottya Fabian, *Ornamentation in Recent Recordings of J.S. Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas for Violin*. Israel Studies in Musicology Online, Vol. 11, 2013/II. https://unsw.academia.edu/DorottyaFabian (retrieved, 11/09/2015).

This group of musicians is referred to as 'mainstream performers' (MS).

A discussion about the implications caused by the divergence between HIP and MS styles will be presented later in this dissertation. At this point, I would like to affirm that my own approach to performing the Bach sonatas and partitas is based on using a modern instrument and on relying on standard advanced modern violin techniques in the way I was taught by my teachers Max Rostal (1905-91) and Ivan Galamian (1903-81).

The timeless quality of J.S. Bach's solos seems to stand for itself. Numerous compositions of this period were practically forgotten until HIP-influenced performers reinvented them to make them interesting for a larger audience. A major part of the activity of the HIP movement deals with a repertoire of this kind. A rediscovery in this sense, however, did not take place in the case of the violin solos because they had never fallen into oblivion. Musicians recognised the unique value of these compositions from the moment selections from them were performed publically in Leipzig in 1840. An almost endless list of different editions of the solos published from that time (until today) shows an overwhelming interest in these works irrespective of whether the violinists were influenced by a romantic, an objective or a historic interpretation.[3]

Taking an MS approach for my research, my aim is to find aspects of interpretation which do not necessarily depend on the 'style' of interpreting, but which are based on either of the following:

(i) an insight analysis into the compositional structure of the pieces; or

(ii) mental or technical problems arising in general for violinists when performing them.

However, I will also give examples of how an HIP-based approach can influence an interpretation which is otherwise mainly MS based.

---

[3] See, for instance, Robin Stowell, 'Bach's Violin Sonatas and Partitas: Building a Music Library: 5', in *The Musical Times* 128/1731 (1987), 250-56.

Not all of the researched aspects can be clearly separated from each other. Due to the complexity of the subject the essay style of this dissertation ('scientific essay') proves to be helpful.

In the beginning I will deal with a basic problem: there is great uncertainty regarding the question of whether or not Bach wrote the pieces to be performed for an audience. This fact might cause real problems for a performer – and it became actually important for me in a painful way when I felt unable for years to play the solos for an audience.

In light of this, it seems logical to investigate the origin of the *Sei Solo,* which will include a reconstruction of violin-related biographical facts about the composer, exploring the possibilities as to how and why Bach wrote these pieces for violin solo. Together with an insight into their performance history*,* the research presented in this dissertation is helpful in explaining, in a convincing way, the true role of the performer on stage as well as in the recording studio.

Continuing the investigation, I will give a short description of the cycle of the *Sei Solo.* In detail however, I will concentrate on describing and analysing the pieces of my final program with particular focus on the *Ciaccona* (BWV 1004/5). Instead of dividing the problems into special technical categories, I prefer an 'artistic' approach which seems to be more true and closer to the regular work of a violinist who has to optimise his[4] approach to musical and technical problems during every day practising. Thus I will go through the composition and select certain aspects where particular decisions have to be made. Special excursuses serve as methodical instruments to shed light on several themes without distracting the reader from the progress of the analysis. Further, I will present an HIP related inquiry based on the Baroque Affective Theory in a way that can be applied by MS orientated violinists. This will illustrate the mutual influence of HIP and MS performance. Also for this section, I consider the essay style to be appropriate. Ultimately, in the concluding chapter, I will reflect on a few aspects of my own interpretation of the final recital programme.

---

[4] In the following, the masculine form is used for reasons of readability and brevity of the text, but members of both sexes are meant to be included.

1.2 The Significance of the Work

Johann Sebastian Bach's six sonatas and partitas for unaccompanied solo violin are central to the repertoire of every violinist. No young, ambitious violinist can ignore the technical and musical challenge posed by this unique cycle. Bach's *Soli* are a mandatory part of the program of every academic exam and every violin competition, which makes these pieces seem omnipresent in the violinist's world.

These works also appear on the programme of major concert halls, even if not nearly as regularly. The general concert-going public finds these pieces 'great' and 'impressive' on the one hand, but also difficult to listen to, hard to digest on the other. The average listener appears to have trouble with the sound of the unaccompanied violin, especially if he can sense that these works are significant, great compositions – as they clearly are.

Nevertheless, some of the pieces have attained a significant measure of popularity, such as the Ciaccona of the Partita in D minor, the Preludio and the Gavotte of the Partita in E major and certainly the Fugue of the Sonata in G minor. The concert-going public 'knows' these pieces.

But this was by no means always the case. We do not know whether these pieces were ever performed in public when they were first composed, whether they had an audience; and we also do not really know what purpose Bach had in mind for the cycle – we can only conjecture. And thus, every violinist who plays the *Soli* is forced to ask:

1.3 Why did Bach Compose the Violin Solos?

This question is closely connected to the topic of my dissertation, which aims to examine the problems, which – in my opinion – necessarily arise when one attempts to execute Bach's score on the violin. As the reasons why Bach composed the *Sei Solo* and the performance-related problems are presumably interconnected, I will attempt to answer the question in the following, and refer back to this point further on in my argument.

A 'fair' copy of the work, dated 1720, is in Bach's own handwriting. This means that the

cycle was completed during Bach's Köthen period. He composed major instrumental works during these years, such as the *Brandenburg Concertos*, a significant portion of his keyboard music (Part 1 of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *French Suites*, the *Two- and Three-Part Inventions*), and the *Cello Suites*. It is in no way surprising that Bach wrote compositions for the violin; indeed, it is somewhat self-evident. What requires an explanation is the fact that the *Soli* go beyond what was considered possible to accomplish on the violin at the time.

Although we know very little about the details of Bach's composition process, it is debatable as to whether Bach had the time to compose pieces that would never be performed. His oeuvre is more directly connected to the context in which it was performed than that of most composers. As *Konzertmeister* in Weimar (1714-17), and as *Hofkapellmeister* in Köthen (1717-23), he was constantly called on to compose new music for the court and the church, respectively. This makes the composition of this more or less 'unplayable' cycle puzzling.

Recent studies speculate that Bach may have composed these pieces in order to perform them himself.[5] His son Philipp Emanuel later attested to his solid violin-playing ability ('clean and penetrating'[6]) during exactly this period of his life, namely as a concertmaster in Weimar and conductor in Köthen. Nevertheless, it is easier to picture J. S. Bach playing the violin and leading the orchestra from his music stand, rather than performing his solo compositions as a brilliant violin virtuoso. The organ and the harpsichord were without doubt the instruments that Bach was most interested in; on the organ, he was both an expert and a virtuoso. So where did this curious interest in making the violin transcend its technical limitations come from? What was Bach's intention?

A large part of the monophonic dance movements in the partitas can be executed properly (in the conventional sense) on the violin without significant technical problems. But the same is not true for the polyphonic movements, especially the three fugues and the Ciaccona. A keyboard instrument or, even better, an ensemble of several instruments, would be far better suited to present their compositional content. It is well known that Bach was interested in and

---

[5] www.theaterforum.ch/uploads/media/Vortrag_Dominik_Sackmann.pdf (retrieved, 06/25/2014).

[6] Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, eds., *The New Bach Reader. A life of Johann Sebastian Bach in letters and documents* (hereafter, NBR) (New York: Norton, 1998), 397.

committed to the technical development of the organ in order to improve the sound of his compositions. The same appears to be true of Bach's work with orchestral instruments. In later years (Leipzig), Bach pushed the limits of what was feasible for the instrumentation at the time.

Why, then, did Bach consciously choose an instrument with only four strings to perform compositions with such a complex structure? Why did he write such great music for an instrument that was at least partially unsuited for it? Is there a tension, produced deliberately, between the musical/compositional substance of the works and the extreme limitations on how they can be performed, as dictated by the nature of the instrument?[7]

The chasm between the musical standards and content on the one hand and material/technical execution on the other is emphasised time and again. For instance, George Bernard Shaw's review of a concert given by Joseph Joachim in London is well known and amusing to read:

> He played Bach´s Sonata in C at the Bach Choir Concert at St James's Hall on Tuesday. The second movement of that work is a fugue some three or four hundred bars long. Of course you cannot really play a fugue in three continuous parts on the violin; but by dint of double stopping and dodging from one part to another, you can evoke a hideous ghost of a fugue that will pass current if guaranteed by Bach and Joachim. That was what happened on Tuesday. Joachim scraped away frantically, making a sound after which an attempt to grate a nutmeg effectively on a boot sole would have been as the strain of an Eolian harp. The notes which were musical enough to have any discernible pitch at all were mostly out of tune. It was horrible – damnable! Had he been an unknown player, introducing an unknown composer, he would not have escaped with his life. Yet we all – I not less than the others – were interested and enthusiastic. We applauded like anything; and he bowed to us with unimpaired gravity. The dignified artistic career of Joachim and the grandeur of Bach´s reputation had so hypnotised us that we took an abominable noise for the music of the spheres.[8]

---

[7] There were other works which were initially considered unplayable. The Violin Concerto by Brahms was called a concerto against the violin. Leopold Auer (1845-1930), who was supposed to perform at the premiere of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, had certain particularly unusual passages revised before he consented to play the piece in public. However, experience shows that instrumental technique advances with the demands made upon it by the most important composers of any given epoch – and accordingly, these concertos have both long been part of every violinist's standard repertoire.

[8] George Bernard Shaw, *London Music in 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto (later known as Bernard Shaw) with some further autobiographical particulars* (London: G. W. Holt, 1937), 318.

In this manner, the works themselves have always evoked more admiration than the sounds produced during the performance. For instance, in his foreword to the facsimile of the handwritten manuscript, Günter Hauswald[9] emphasises the pleasure for the music lover to 'read and study the artistic movements'. Philipp Spitta, the early biographer of Bach, even prefers the piano version in G major of the Adagio (BWV 1005/1) of the *C major Sonata* to the original:

> Even with the most perfect performance the intention of the composer can never be realised on the violin; the execution of chords of three or four notes has inevitably a violent and harsh effect, which contradicts the character of the movement. When played on the clavier in that enriched form which the composer himself gave it, it is discovered to be one of the most marvellous productions of Bach's genius; one of those preludes which is pervaded by a single rhythm throughout, and in which the harmonies softly melt into one another like cloud shapes, while from beneath their magic veil comes a long-drawn and yearning melody.[10]

It is impossible to play the calm yet flowing movement, which clearly characterises the Adagio, on the violin in an uncontrived manner. The listener, not accustomed to hearing music of a similar character played on a single violin, is too easily distracted by the necessary arpeggiation of the chords and by the fact that the performer is forced to let go of harmonic tones which are meant to be held. Nevertheless, the modern violinist is able to play sustained three-note chords in *forte*, avoiding the most evident performance problems (such as incorrect voice-leading).

There remains a partly intrinsic approach to what seems to be an 'impossibility' of keeping the three- and four-note chords at each dynamic level sustained according to the notation. Bach appears to have willingly accepted that the text would be unplayable (as has often been noted) in return for an ideal, practically visual notation that the violinist cannot achieve on his own. It is impossible to perform Bach's polyphony on the violin in a satisfactory manner without the help of the listener. When the (intrinsically homophonic) string instrument is forced to capitulate to Bach's polyphonic musical meshwork, the listener is called upon to

---

[9] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sonaten und Partiten. Faksimile-Ausgabe* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 55ff.
[10] Philipp Spitta, *Johann Sebastian Bach. In three volumes. Vol.2* (London: Novello, 1899), 81f.

'fill in' the sounds as necessary and 'hear them correctly' in order to complete Bach's vision of the polyphony of an unaccompanied violin.

This made a particular impression on Philipp Spitta:

> By the extension of the chords produced by double stopping, and the skilful employment of the open strings, an almost inconceivable fulness of tone is produced; the sharply defined rhythms, the bold and almost violent execution made necessary by the polyphonic treatment, and especially the fire and force of the fugal allegro movements, give to the sonatas more perhaps than to any other of Bach's instrumental works a certain demonical character.[11]

Nowadays, we would perhaps call it Bach's utopia rather than his demon; a utopia which calls for a triangle of forces[12] between composer, performer and listener in order to realise an ideal act of musical communication. Its 'demonic' aspect would then lie in the shared effort of violinist and audience to comprehend and do justice to Bach's vision.

1.4 The Endeavour of the Violinist

In the following discussion I examine the violinist's role in this triangle of forces more closely. My argument is based on the assumption that only a fully trained violinist who can perform at the highest levels of the contemporary instrumental standard will attempt to play these works in public and, accordingly, to mediate between author and audience. I intend to show what is important and relevant to such an endeavour. One might picture the autograph of the violin solos lying next to a recording of the works, that is, the written source juxtaposed with its actualisation in sound. Performers are interested in what lies *between* these two 'poles': the path that the violinist takes from the text to its audible representation, the translation of written music into sound. To put it another way, I will attempt to identify the considerations and processes that are important or, perhaps, even necessary for the interpreter to produce a well-informed performance of the *Soli.*

---

[11] Ibid., 78.
[12] Cf. parallelogram of forces in *Traité de Mécanique* (1679) after Bernard Lamy (1640-1715).

The following topics will be examined in more detail:

A) The historical origin of the *Soli* (Chapter 2)

(i) The textual history

(ii) Our latest knowledge about Bach the violinist and the origin for the solos

(iii) The reception of the *Soli*

B) Practical performance aspects related to my final performance (Chapter 3)

C) Reflections on the interpretation of the works for my final recital (Conclusion).

The edition of the score used throughout my dissertation is: Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Drei Sonaten und drei Partiten.* Edited by Günter Haußwald. Kassel/Basel/London: Bärenreiter, 1959.

The pitch reference adopted in this dissertation is the Scientific Pitch Notation (also known as American Standard Pitch); the open strings on the violin are referenced as: G3, D4, A4, E5.

2 Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas – An Overview

2.1 The Textual History

2.1.1 The Autograph

As mentioned above, a fair copy of the cycle handwritten by Bach himself has survived. The manuscript forms part of the collection of the Staatsbibliothek Berlin (catalogue number Mus. Ms. Bach P 967); it is entitled *Sei Solo à violino senza Basso accompagnato*. The text is dated 1720. It thus falls in the period when Bach was the *Kapellmeister* in Köthen. The care with which Bach wrote the manuscript leaves no doubt that it is the final version, which makes the source binding for the performer in every respect. The world of music can count itself lucky that the autograph has survived and is now accessible to everyone.

This score will serve as the primary basis for the performer's interpretation.

2.1.2 Secondary Sources

It may thus be surprising that other sources also play a significant role in the research on Bach, and form the basis of wide-ranging speculation. The reason for this is that there are no records regarding the composition process of the cycle, and we do not know who could have played the pieces, either in public or in a private setting. Bach's first biographer, J. N. Forkel, still considered the *Soli* 'the best means to make an ambitious student a perfect master of his instrument',[13] but he praises its monophony as complete in itself, as it does not need a second voice. Bach performed parts of the *Soli* on the harpsichord later in a private setting, and made them harmonically richer in the process. There is no information available regarding their execution on the violin. However, there are a number of contemporary copies which testify to an evident interest in the piece. The most famous copy is that of Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena (Mus. Ms. Bach P 268), which is also the main source of the six solo Cello Suites

[13] NBR, 472.

(BWV 1007-1012) (no original autograph of this group of works survives). As the composition process of the *Soli* was not documented, researchers have attempted to reconstruct earlier versions using these later handwritten copies.

According to current research, a total of thirteen handwritten copies have survived, four of which were used in the most recent critical edition by Dagmar Glüxam.[14] They are of interest because they (unlike Anna Magdalena's copy) are presumably partially based on a draft by Bach which was later lost, and may thus provide us with insights about the time period when the individual solos were composed. One of the copies (P 267 SBB), made by an unknown copyist in the eighteenth century, differs from the fair copy in one significant point. Before 1714, instead of the natural sign in use today, the B quadratum (♮), Bach used an older form called the B rotundum (♭).[15] While the autograph fair copy uses the new form of the natural sign with no exceptions, the older form can be found in the copy. This suggests that the copyist in question could have been in possession of an earlier version of the *Soli*. This would, in turn, mean that the fair copy prepared by Bach in 1720 was of a work that he had composed many years earlier. This does not sound very likely, although this opinion has been voiced several times in the literature. It is, naturally, equally possible that the person who prepared that particular copy of P 267 was so conservative and old-fashioned that he refused to use the new B quadratum. One can thus conclude that a great deal must remain in the realm of the hypothetical in an investigation of the genesis of the violin solos, because the sources do not enable us to make solid claims.

2.1.3 The History of the Original

Bach's second youngest son, the 'Bückeburger Bach' Johann Christoph Friedrich, presumably inherited Bach's original autograph after his death, perhaps because he was a competent violinist and showed particular interest in the manuscript. In any case, one of the cover pages bears a note which reads 'Louisa Bach, Bückeburg 1842', and refers to his

---

[14] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sonaten und Partiten: für Violine solo* (Wiener Urtext Edition), ed. Dagmar Glüxam (Wien: Schott, 2009).

[15] Clemens Fanselau, *Mehrstimmigkeit in J. S. Bachs Werken für Melodieinstrumente ohne Begleitung* (Berlin: Berliner Musikstudien, Vol. 22, 2000), 321ff.

unmarried daughter (1762-1852). This may be interpreted as proof of possession. Wilhelm Rust (1822-92), the *Thomaskantor* and one of the publishers of the *Bach Society Edition,* appears to have acquired it at some point after 1879. We can be sure of this date because Rust's partner, Alfred Dörffel, did not have access to this source for his first complete edition of Bach, which was published in that year (it is difficult to imagine that Rust would not have informed Dörffel of his 'treasure'). The first print edition based on this original manuscript – which will be discussed later – was edited by Joseph Joachim and his student Andreas Moser and published in 1908. Their foreword contains the following curious passage:

> By a happy chance it happened that two years ago Joachim had seen a copy in Bach's writing of the Sonatas and Partitas. This manuscript, the property of the widow of the late 'Thomascantor' Professor Dr. Wilhelm Rust of Leipzig, and at present in the care of Herr Dr. Erich Prieger of Bonn, had remained hitherto practically unknown.[16]

Later in the text, Moser thanks the widow almost obsequiously for the right to reproduce a facsimile of the first page for the new edition. How did this unique treasure end up in the estate of one of the publishers of the *Bach Society Edition,* and yet remain entirely unknown? After all, Rust (who died in 1892) and Joachim both taught in Berlin starting around 1870, the former at the Akademische Hochschule, the latter at the Stern Conservatory. It would have been quite self-evident for the most important Bach researcher and the preeminent Bach interpreter of the time to 'exchange notes'. The manuscript finally ended up at the Berliner Staatsbibliothek in 1917, where it is now freely available online – along with Anna Magdalena's copy.

The world of music has admired it ever since. Yehudi Menuhin (incidentally, the first violinist to record the entire cycle of the *Soli*) writes:

> Looking at Bach's autograph, I seem to see a heavenly body in motion, to witness a natural phenomenon unfolding according to the immutable order of the

[16] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sonaten und Partiten,* ed. Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser (Berlin: Bote & Bock, 1908).

world, of which man is but a fraction.[17]

Menuhin speaks for many music lovers with this enthusiastic and emotional appreciation of Bach's autograph. After all, it is the only direct connection that a contemporary musician has to the composer and his work, and this immediacy exerts a special fascination.

The autograph exhibits a wonderful artistic and graphic care which is not due to it being dedicated to, or having been commissioned by a particular person. And the lack of an addressee can thus reinforce the impression that this music is – even today – made for every person who is ready to enter its 'sphere'. Bach clearly considered the fair copy to be final – there are no signs of revisions or corrections, which is not the case with the clean copies of other, later works.

What was the context which led to the creation of this singular document?

> Bach's privileged post of court organist and chamber musician appears to have entailed special, if loosely defined, responsibilities for the court capelle, allowing him opportunities to perform his own compositions as well as works by others. Regrettably, virtually all musical sources related to Bach´s function as chamber musician and, later, as concertmaster in charge of instrumental music have vanished, which makes it impossible to assess Bach´s activities and creative output in the instrumental sphere.[18]

I will nevertheless attempt to describe the musical context that Bach was working in at the time when he composed the *Soli*, based on the little information available – even if certain aspects cannot be proved conclusively, and must thus remain a matter of speculation.

---

[17] Bach, *Faksimile* ibid. 5 (‚Schaue ich auf Bachs Handschrift, so meine ich einen Himmelskörper in Bewegung zu sehen und Zeuge zu sein, wie sich eine Naturerscheinung entfaltet nach der unabänderlichen Weltordnung, in welcher der Mensch nur ein Bruchteil ist.').

[18] Christoph Wolff, *J. S. Bach, the Learned Musician* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005), 133.

2.2 Bach's Increasing Interest in the Violin

2.2.1 Beginnings

Bach turned to composing pieces for the violin primarily in his Köthen period. It was there that he composed, in addition to the violin solos, the violin concertos, the Brandenburg Concertos (particularly the first for violino piccolo and the fourth with the two flutes contain challenging violin parts), some continuo sonatas and the BWV 1014-1019 duo sonatas. By the time Bach moved to Leipzig in 1723, his interest in the solo violin was seemingly reduced to its function as an indispensable accompanying instrument within a larger instrumentation. The reasons for this are presumably closely connected to Bach's professional development.

We do not have much more information regarding Bach's ability as a string player, and more particularly, as a violinist, than what Philipp Emanuel reveals in a letter to Forkel:

> As the greatest expert and judge of harmony, he liked best to play the viola, with appropriate loudness and softness. In his youth, and until the approach of old age, he played the violin cleanly and penetratingly, and thus kept the orchestra in better order than he could have done with the harpsichord. He understood to perfection the possibilities of all stringed instruments. This is evidenced by his solos for the violin and the violoncello without (accompanying) bass.[19]

We can assume that Bach's father, Ambrosius, gave him his first violin lessons.[20] After Ambrosius's death, Bach moved in with his brother Christoph.[21] During that time the violin

---

[19] NBR, 397.

[20] Ambrosius Bach was a musician to the council and the court in Eisenach until his death in 1695, and was thus a violinist as a matter of course. At the time, it was entirely self-evident for a student of music to learn to play several instruments, and this must have also been true of Sebastian. There are examples of quite virtuoso solo passages played on the violin in the Bach family traditions of that time, for instance in the compositions of Ambrosius's cousin, Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703), not to be confused with Sebastian's brother of the same name) and of Daniel Eberlin, the violin virtuoso also working in Eisenach. Sebastian may well have received his first impressions of the violin here.

[21] Christoph had been a student of the famous Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706), a family friend, in Erfurt. Polyphonic violin music played a major role in Pachelbel's works. For instance, he wrote a Zwillingspartie for two violins, a sonata for solo violin and harpsichord obligato and an Aria con Variazioni – all works characterised by an ambitious approach to the violin technique of the time, including fast passagework and three-note chord-playing. The famous Pachelbel Canon for string orchestra, which is part of everyone's musical education, contains some features in nuce which appear in a more completely developed form in Bach's works.

could not have been of great importance to him.[22] In the years leading up to his first temporary post in Weimar, young Sebastian's musical development was doubtless focused on keyboard instruments. But he must have been well-practised on the violin as he earned his first paid position (if only for half a year) as the *HoffMusicus 'Laquey Baach'* at the Red Castle of Duke Johann Ernst of Saxe-Weimar in 1703. According to Forkel, he was 'engaged to play the violin';[23] let us say that he was employed as a *tutti* player (or as a 'Ripienist', as it was called at the time). It is possible that he also played the 'Clavier', but it is difficult to establish the extent to which he could dedicate himself to developing his skills on keyboard instruments during this half-year in Weimar. By contrast, it is very possible that he met an artist here who may have been of decisive significance to the genesis of the *Sei Solo*. This person was Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656-1705), one of the most important violinists of his time, who was serving as the concertmaster of the official Weimar Hofkapelle (the orchestra of the reigning Duke Wilhelm Ernst, brother of Johann Ernst) in the neighbouring 'yellow' Wilhelmsburg castle.

2.2.2 Westhoff's and Pisendel's Works for Solo Violin

As the literature on Bach currently considers the compositions of Westhoff to be the most

---

[22] He first encountered the famous organs of Northern Germany during his time as the recipient of a choir scholarship at St. Michael's School in Lüneburg, where he was an academically ambitious student. Johann Adam Reincken (1643-1722), evidently a most fascinating person who was nearly seventy years old, was his most important inspiration and mentor during this period. During his time in Lüneburg, Bach often visited him in Hamburg to learn from him, despite the difficult circumstances (travelling by foot!). Reincken was considered a great improviser on the organ of the Katharinenkirche, which was probably the most majestic and imposing instrument of its kind near and far. Bach would later go on to use parts of Reincken's six Trio Sonatas from the *Hortus musicus* in some of his keyboard pieces. What is of relevance to us here is their form. All six 'Sonatas' are made up of five movements each in the following order: Sonata-Allemand-Courant-Saraband-Gigue. The first movement, called the *Sonata*, is in turn composed of four parts in the following order: a slow introduction, a fugued Allegro, a Solo for violino primo and a Continuo (mostly slow – fast), which means that we actually have a complete sonata da chiesa, followed by a Suite (Sonata da Camera). If we consider the Keyboard Sonata in A minor (BWV 965, an adaptation of Reincken's first 'Sonata'), we may find Bach's designation of the movements surprising: Adagio - Fuga (Allegro) - Adagio - Presto - Allemande - Courante - Sarabande - Gigue. Playing BWV 1001 and BWV 1002 consecutively results in the exact same sequence of movements (the Siciliano being equivalent to the second Adagio). This could explain the order of the various parts of the *Soli*: Sonata and Partita appear to form some kind of a unit. This correspondence is too obvious to be a coincidence. Additionally, it is readily apparent that there are great similarities of style between the Adagio and Fugue of the BWV 1001 and the BWV 965. It seems as though the seed that Reincken planted in the education of the sixteen-year-old Sebastian came to flower in the *Soli*.

[23] NBR, 426.

important model and source of inspiration for the genesis of the *Sei Solo*, we will now take a closer look at the life and works of this long-forgotten musician.

The entry on Westhoff in Johann Gottfried Walther's Lexicon of 1731 is suggestive of an extremely adventurous life. He was 'a musician and violinist well-versed in the Italian, French and Spanish languages, born in Dresden in 1656'.[24] It is utterly unimaginable that the 'music-obsessed' eighteen-year-old Johann Sebastian, who was employed as a violinist in the neighbouring castle, would not have sought to get acquainted with the violin virtuoso who had travelled so widely, and who was beloved 'also for his other good and Christian virtues.'[25] The influence of the violin composer would not have left traces in the work of the budding young organ virtuoso immediately. But we can assume that Bach would, at least, have heard Westhoff and studied his compositions.[26]

The discovery, in 1913, in the southern Hungarian town of Szeged, of a thirty-page booklet of copperplate engravings yielded six previously unknown suites for solo violin. The dedication names the composer as Jean Paul Westhoff. This collection, together with Westhoff's 1683 piece Suite pour le Violon sans Basse Continue, are currently considered to be the most

---

[24] Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig: Wolffgang Deer, 1732), 649f. ('Ein in der Italienischen, Französischen und Spanischen Sprache wohl versirter Musicus und Violinist, ward gebohren zu Dreßden an 1656'). To paraphrase the rest: he became an instructor of exotic languages to the Prince of Saxony in 1671; went to Lübeck in 1674 but was recalled by Prince-Elector Johann Georg II (the father of Augustus the Strong) to serve as Cammer-Musicus; accompanied the Danish princess to Sweden for her wedding (because of an outbreak of the plague) and then returned to Saxony. He travelled to Hungary in 1680 as an ensign to protect the Occident from the Turks, but had to leave military service on the command of the Prince-Elector to travel to Italy and France in 1681 – finally, as a violinist. Westhoff received generous gifts from the Grand Duke of Florence and the French king (Louis XIV), and extended his concert tours (which also comprised diplomatic assignments) to Holl- and England [sic!], Lower Germany, Brabant and Flanders. In 1685 he married the oldest daughter of the Archdeacon of the Marienkirche in Dresden. Westhoff's career suffered a small setback when Prince-Elector Augustus (the Strong) became King of Poland and converted to Catholicism. Consequently, Westhoff moved to Wittenberg as a professor of foreign languages (a trilingual Latin/German/French edition of the biographies of Cornelius Nepos by J. P. v. Westhoff is kept in the Munich Staatsbibliothek). He was finally appointed to the Weimar Hofkapelle in 1698 and received the title of Kammersekretär (chamber secretary). He remained there until his death in 1705.

[25] Walther, ibid., 650 ('Auch wegen anderer guten und Christlichen Tugenden').

[26] It may perhaps not be by accident that Bach and his bride Maria Barbara later moved into the very same house on the market square of Weimar which had once belonged to the violinist Westhoff, called the *östliche Freyhaus*. Westhoff died in 1705, that is, during Bach's time in Arnstadt as an organist. However, as he had played an important role at the Duke's court, and had even been allowed to dine at the Duke's table, his memory must still have lived on. www.bachhausweimar.de/media/pdf/Baugeschichte_Bachhaus.pdf, 5 ff. (retrieved, 06/10/2014). As Westhoff acquired the house in 1701, it is quite possible that Bach got to know it in 1703 and he may even have encountered Westhoff's polyphonic violin playing there.

important source of inspiration for the *Sei Solo*. An analysis of the instrumental technique and the composition of these suites may be helpful for a better understanding of Bach's solos, particularly as we have such little tangible information regarding the genesis of the *Sei Solo.*

The work is dedicated to Christine Eberhardine of Brandenburg, Queen of Saxony, and it was published on July 6, 1696. The notation is striking: it is absolutely unusual, yet delightful to look at.

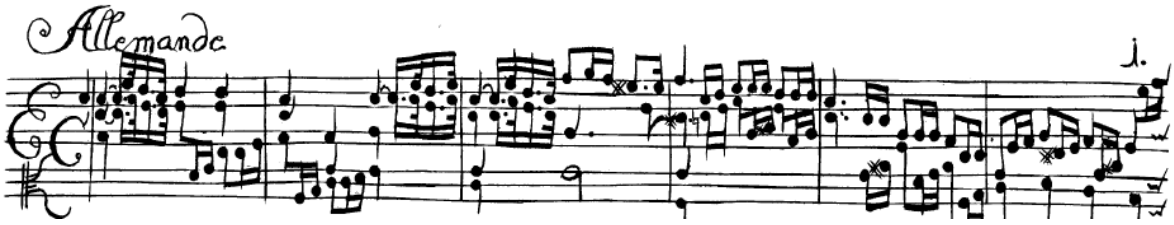

Fig. 1: Westhoff: *A minor Suite*, Allemande, handwritten score.[27]

In Figure 1 Westhoff uses an eight-line stave and a combination of different clefs, in which the C in the center marks the note C4. The conscious avoidance of the notation system in common usage is certainly not meant to make reading or sight-reading easier. It seems to serve a different purpose: the visual impression made by the score suggests a striking polyphony – it represents an attempt to translate the polyphony into a visual experience. Westhoff was considered a specialist of a sleek style of playing involving multiple stops. It was perfectly consistent of him to make the score of his compositions recognisable as the work of a violinist who developed polyphony on the violin to a level of mastery unequalled at the time. For our purpose it is important to notice that Westhoff as a direct predecessor of Bach avoided the so called scordatura.[28] If one considers Westhoff's compositions and career as a whole, his great international success appears to rest on the fact that he astounded the listeners with this polyphony – their surprise primarily being due to the fact that the violinist performed solo, without accompaniment.

---

[27] http://imslp.org/wiki/Suites_for_Solo_Violin_(Westhoff,_Johann_Paul_von) (retrieved, 01/13/2015).
[28] For more details on the Scordatura in contrast to tuning in fifths, see Appendix 1.

All six of Westhoff's suites consist of the usual (Froberger) sequence of French dance movements: Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. Thus, with regard to form, Westhoff was composing at the standard levels of his time – except that he did not need an accompaniment for his performances. Let us examine a few examples:

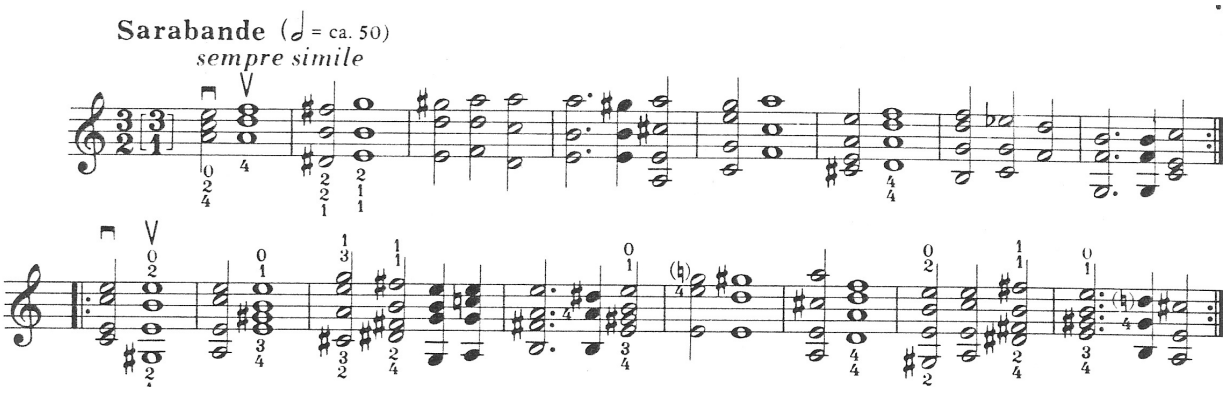

Fig. 2: Westhoff: *A minor Suite*, Sarabande.

It is striking that a truly unaccompanied violin part is capable of producing four-part harmony here. The slow, measured character of the Sarabande (Figure 2) is naturally particularly well-suited to playing such three- and four-note chords. It opens with a triad (A minor) which is one of the only two easy-to-play chords in the usual close position (the other one being the D minor chord with which Bach's Ciaccona begins). The piece then progresses comfortably without any performance difficulties. The chromatically ascending upper voice of the antecedent phrase can be made to harmonise delightfully and is nevertheless relatively easy to play. However, in my view, the violinist's approach to improvisation here lacks musical imagination. The consequent phrase does impressive justice to the Sarabande rhythm and is also easy to play. But one is plagued by the feeling that the way the harmony progresses is dominated by what is obvious in terms of the instrument. The harmonic structure of the second part is bolder. The chords are somewhat more difficult to play here, even if (as in a parallel place in the first part) one breaks the D minor chord in the third-to-last bar using the open strings; this avoids the awkward use of the fourth finger to play a fifth. The melody of the upper voice uses the open E string excessively. The obvious reason for this is to make harmonies, without an accompaniment, possible. A modern listener is left with the impression that the piece demonstrates the range of sounds that a violin can produce brilliantly despite its musically, rather simple, substance. One does not need to compare it to

the miracle of the inimitable Sarabande of Bach's fifth cello suite in order to show the compositional value that unaccompanied monophony can have. In the short Sarabande entitled *Largo* from the seventh of his twelve Fantasies, published in 1735 (Figure 3), Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767) uses simple means to create an intermezzo which flows wonderfully peacefully, and is deeply felt; it absolutely needs no harmonic accompaniment.

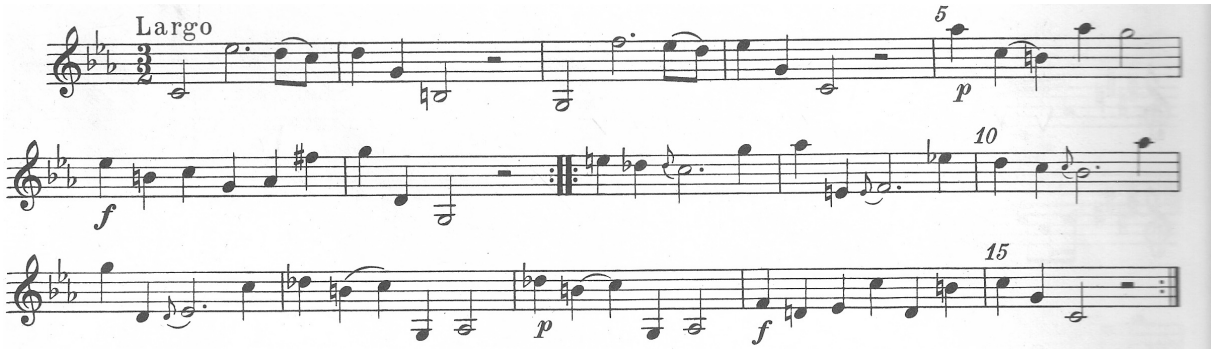

Fig. 3: Telemann: *7. Fantasie*, Largo.[29]

Not only in the Sarabandes does Westhoff demand what were very ambitious chord techniques for his time. His Courantes and Gigues also contain triads in the usual close position (Figure 4) which are difficult to play in a flowing tempo. They do not appear to have posed a problem to the virtuoso Westhoff, as he clearly did not even consider making them easier to execute by using Biber's *scordatura.*

Fig. 4: Westhoff: *B-flat major Suite*, Courante.[30]

Elsewhere, Westhoff also uses his chord technique to harmonise simple diatonic passagework

[29] Georg Philipp Telemann, *Zwölf Fantasien*, edited by Günter Hausswald (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1955), 41.
[30] Jean Paul Westhoff, *Six Suites pour Violon seul sans basse,* edited by Péter P. Várnay (Winthertur: Amadeus Verlag, 1975), 11.

in a homophonic way. The following Courante can serve as an example (Figure 5). The compositional content of the piece is clearly driven by playability. The quaver passagework is only comprehensible in the context of the difficult chordal accompaniment. However, one should note the four-note chords in the fourth position. They mark the outer limits of what could be played on the violin at the time.

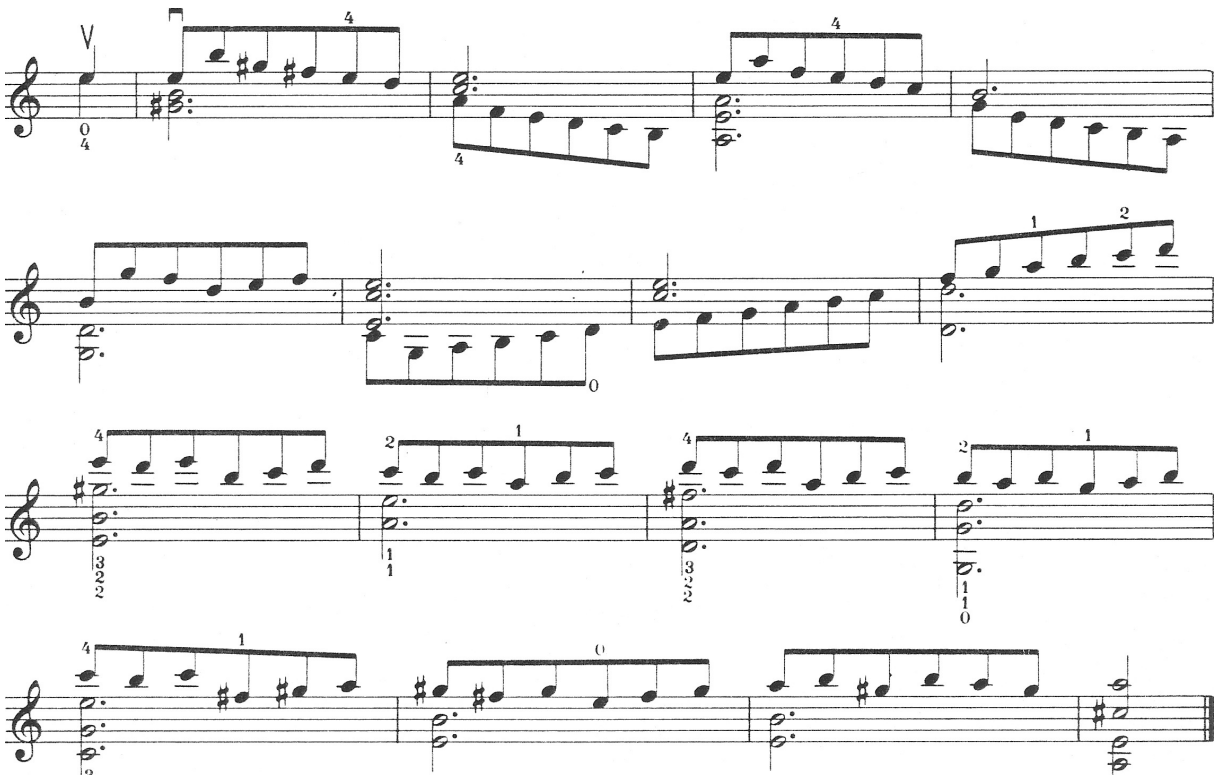

Fig. 5: Westhoff: *A minor Suite*, Courante.[31]

In conclusion, one can say that Westhoff succeeded in proving that the unaccompanied violinist is capable of producing music that sounds 'complete'.[32]

Apart from Westhoff, the other key figure to influence Bach on his composition of the solos

[31] Ibid., 6.

[32] By contrast, his *Sonata a violino solo con basso continuo*, published in 1694, exhibits a considerably more complex musical texture. The continuo accompaniment clearly makes Westhoff feel less constrained; he reveals a visionary level of composition here which he is denied in the suites by the handicap of the *non accompagnato.*

was Johann Georg Pisendel (1687-1755). Pisendel is considered the most important violinist of Bach's era. This alone would make him a likely addressee of the *Sei Solo.* Two copies of a concerto for two violins by Telemann, one in Bach's handwriting and the other in Pisendel's suggest the charming possibility that the two may have played together. However, even without direct evidence, one can assume that Bach and Pisendel stayed in contact after their only recorded encounter in Weimar (1709). This acquaintance might have lasted well into the period when Pisendel had a dominant role at the Dresden *Hofkapelle* (where he served as concertmaster starting in 1728).[33]

His *Sonata à Violino solo senza Basso di Pisendel* is the piece which is most relevant for our purposes.[34] There are two different views in the literature about how this piece relates to Bach's *Soli*.

(i) Pisendel may have composed the sonata around the time of his travels in Italy (that is, it was completed by 1716-17); Bach may have heard it during a visit to Dresden, and it may have served as a model for his *Soli.*

(ii) Since it is impossible to date Pisendel's sonata reliably, it may have been composed after Bach's *Soli*; in that case, any influences could have been absorbed the other way round.

Pisendel's sonata comprises three movements, the first of which is a Largo (Figure 6):

---

[33] Pisendel had travelled widely. He studied in Venice (1716) with Vivaldi (who was nine years older), who became his friend, and also dedicated four violin concertos (among others) to him. He owned a large collection of contemporary violin literature which he had brought back from his travels. In addition, he was a competent, if scrupulous, composer. He left behind a relatively small oeuvre; he is reputed to have worked for a very long time on his compositions before finally publishing them.

[34] The manuscript is to be found in the Saxon State Library (Mus. Ms. 2421/2).

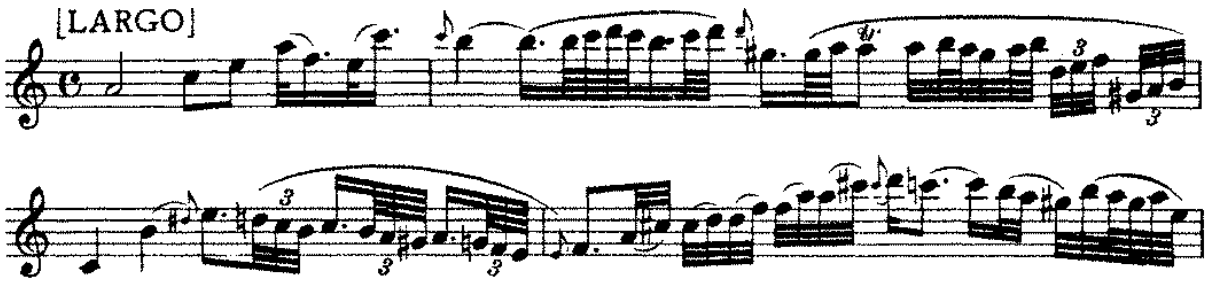

Fig. 6: Pisendel: *A minor Sonata*, Largo.[35]

Superficially, it has an unmistakable similarity to the Adagio of the BWV 1001 and the Grave of the BWV 1003. The precisely calculated rhythm of the ornamentation appears positively Bachian. However, the figuration of the second bar is not particularly natural and seems somewhat muddled in terms of its rhythm. In my opinion, this is suggestive of a slightly unsuccessful imitation of Bach's style rather than of authentic invention on Pisendel's part. The style does not change significantly later on. The second movement, an Allegro based on Lombard rhythms, shows more signs of having been influenced by the linear counterpoint of the *Sei Solo* than the other way around. The implied polyphony of the asynchronous two parts could very well be more complex.

The final Giga with variations is ambiguous with regard to its form, but its chordal harmonies are quite attractive on the violin. One might classify it as 'functional music' for capable violinists. It does not seem particularly likely that it might have served as a model for Bach's solos. Rather, if one leans towards the second argument presented above, Pisendel may have indirectly influenced Bach to compose the *Soli* in the form in which they exist today. My point here is that Bach's knowledge of Pisendel's outstanding abilities could have influenced the high technical and spiritual standard of the works.

With regard to Bach's performance on the violin, the year 1714 marks a decisive point. Although up to this time he was primarily established as an organ virtuoso, he decided at the age of 29 to take the position of a concert master that was offered to him. From this point

---

[35] Johann Georg Pisendel, *Sonate für Violine allein ohne Baß,* edited by Günter Hausswald (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952).

onwards, the violin suddenly played a much more important role in his composing career, more than ever before: Bach now had the task of composing a new cantata every month. His first opportunity to prove himself worthy of his new duties came on Palm Sunday, March 25, 1714, for which he composed the cantata *Himmelskönig, sei willkommen* (BWV 182). This composition illustrates nicely Bach's increasing engagement with the instrument.

This cantata begins with a violin solo (Figure 7) which, most likely written to be performed by himself, allowed Bach to present himself confidently as the new concertmaster. It is as though he wanted to express his advancement in musical terms by having the solo violin play with an energy that propels the melody on and up by an entire octave.[36]

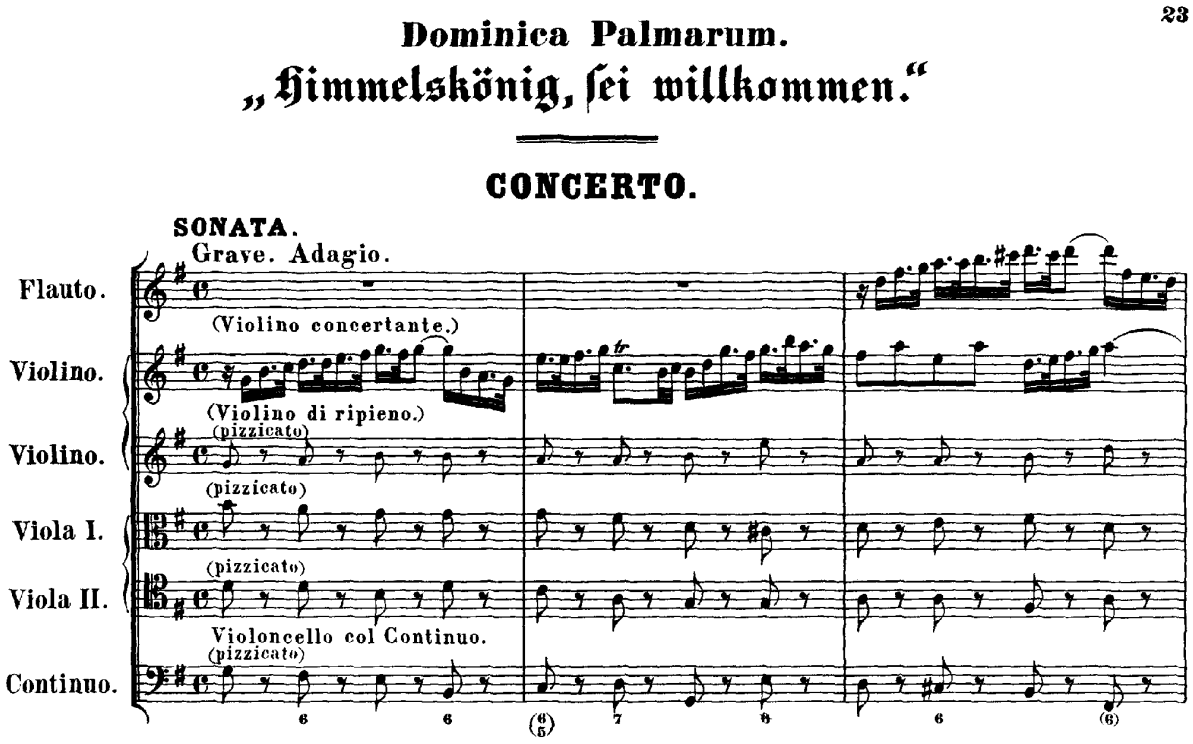

Fig. 7: BWV 182/1, bars 1-3.[37]

Symbolically, one is tempted to see the steps of a (career-)ladder leading upwards in the graphic representation of this melodic line.

[36] This beginning serves as a good example for an affection like joy or hopefulness (see section 3.2).
[37] *Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe*, Band 26 (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1894).

Recent research tends to support the hypothesis that Bach began to compose the *Sei Solo* during his Weimar period. This means that Bach was now searching for opportunities to practice and develop his violin-playing. He was undoubtedly a self-taught composer, and it is entirely plausible that he would have wanted to develop his own methods on the violin in order to improve his technique.

2.2.3 The Creative Origin of the *Soli*

The working conditions changed again for Bach when he took the post of *Capellmeister* in Köthen in 1717. What do we know about Bach's activities in the first half of his Köthen period? What did he work on and what was his compositional process like? Which pieces were performed? What was the role of the violin?

The Köthen ensemble was – unlike the Weimar *Kapelle* – an almost exclusively instrumental ensemble.[38] The rehearsals took place regularly, at least once a week.[39] One can thus conclude that the ensemble played at least once a week for the prince – or perhaps with the prince. As at other comparable courts, musical soirees formed part of the nobles' fixed programme of entertainment. Unfortunately, there is no precise information about programmes and scores from this period. However, one can assume that the works which were definitely composed in the Köthen period, such as the Brandenburg Concertos, the Well-Tempered Clavier, the French Suites and the Sonatas for Violin and Harpsichord, were performed at courtly events. Did Spieß, the concertmaster, play the unaccompanied violin solos? Or did Bach himself play them? And did the *Kammermusiker* Christian Bernhard Lienicke perform the unaccompanied cello suites? We will never know for sure.

Could the prince have enjoyed performances of complicated pieces for the unaccompanied violin? One may perhaps imagine that, sporadically, particularly 'catchy' movements were included in the programme. However, it is extremely unlikely that an entire sonata or partita

---

[38] The *Premier Cammer Musicus* was Joseph Spieß and one of the *Kammermusiker* was the violinist and viola player Christian Ferdinand Abel (whose most famous son, Carl Friedrich, founded the Bach-Abel concert series in London in 1765 together with Bach's youngest son Johann Christian). Both were friends of Bach, who was the godfather of their children.

[39] The rehearsals took place in Bach's own house, for which Bach received a rent allowance.

on the unaccompanied violin would have been performed in the context of courtly entertainment. Thus, Bach's motivation to compose the *Sei Solo* was not connected to his obligation to provide entertainment for the prince's soirées.

Nevertheless, the compositions were probably performed, but perhaps not as unaccompanied violin solos. Some contemporary testimonies suggest that Bach may have performed the *Soli* on the clavier. His student Johann Friedrich Agricola gives the following account:

> Their author often played them on the clavichord himself, adding as much harmony as he deemed necessary. Here, too, he acknowledged the need for a resonant harmony of the sort that he could not wholly attain in the original composition.[40]

Another source goes as far as to list the violin solos as piano pieces: 'They are actually violin solos without a bass part, 3 sonatas and 3 partitas, but are very well suited for performance on the keyboard.'[41]

These circumstances suggest a different motivation for the composition of the *Sei Solo*. By moving from Weimar to the court in Köthen, Bach suddenly found himself in an environment that was very conducive to his creative work. In his new position 'the demands of the office left him considerable time to pursue his own interests. But most important of all, he found himself under the patronage of a supportive and understanding prince.'[42]

Bach evidently felt highly content in his new position. His employer recognised his genius and provided him with enough opportunities to exert his talent for composition. In this sense one ought to view the *Sei Solo* as part of a large-scale, long-term, systematic programme of education and practice which Bach started to realise at this time. This programme was not limited to keyboard instruments, and it would go on to follow him for the rest of his creative

---

[40] Dok. III Nr. 808, cited in J. S. Bach, *Drei Sonaten und drei Partiten für Violine solo*, ed. Günter Haußwald, revised edition by Peter Wollny (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006), IX.

[41] Dok. III. Nr. 695, cited in Wollny, ibid., IX. In addition, there are a number of adaptations of the *Soli* for other instruments. This proves that the *Soli* were indeed performed – on occasion undoubtedly in front of an audience – but not on the violin.

[42] Wolff, ibid., 202. As Bach later wrote in a letter: 'There I had a gracious Prince, who both loved and knew music, and in his service I intended to spend the rest of my life' (NBR 151).

life. The following pieces, composed in Köthen, testify to the existence of this 'programme':

1) the *Clavier-Büchlein* for his son Wilhelm Friedemann and his second wife Anna Magdalena (the latter includes early versions of the *French Suites*) and the *Orgel-Büchlein*

2) the first part of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*

3) the *Aufrichtige Anleitung* with the two- and three-part inventions

4) the violin solos, the cello solos, and the flute solo (BWV 1013).

The 'programme' was then continued in Leipzig with the four *Clavier-Übungen* and the second part of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Finally, one must include *The Musical Offering* and *The Art of the Fugue.* All of these works are stages on Bach's way towards a *musicalische Vollkommenheit* (musical perfection), an idea which was central to Johann Sebastian Bach's entire oeuvre, and which was the motivation for his musical production.[43]

Bach's Opus 1, self-published in 1731, is entitled 'Keyboard Practice' (*Clavir-Übung* [...] *Denen Liebhabern zur Gemüths Ergoetzung verfertiget / von / Johann Sebastian Bach*). In much the same style, one could give the *Sei Solo* the subtitle 'Violin-Übung', although this 'üben' is not limited to 'practice' on the instrument; instead, one could think of it as the much broader German concept of 'ausüben', in the sense of a set of musical and instrumental exercises to be carried out regularly (daily?) for the purpose of attaining a *musicalische Vollkommenheit.*

One can thus identify a set of features of Bach's life and creative work in Köthen which, taken together, shed light on why it was a meaningful – and, accordingly, plausible – challenge for him to compose the *Sei Solo* at that time. These features can be summarised as follows.

---

[43] For more on this, see Wolff, ibid., 465-72.

1) Since Bach now had to lead an instrumental assemble both in Weimar and in Köthen Bach's work with the violin grew more important to his professional development, and became a focus of his musical practice.

2) Bach's encounter with Westhoff's *Suites* revealed to him that unaccompanied violin music could produce a certain kind of 'complete' music through advanced chord work. By studying Vivaldi's violin concertos, Bach's composition skills had developed to the point that the musical form of his next works appears to be a synthesis of German polyphony in Buxtehude's and Reincken's style, and the new, concertante Italian violin music. The third influence – the development of the French dance suite as a genre in the Partitas – is less relevant to our purposes here.

3) Bach's oeuvre is pervaded by a utopian idea that goes beyond a musical 'day to day routine'. This idea is to locate and to plumb the depths of what is possible and meaningful in music, as well as to order and to systematise it for the purposes of a hoped-for '*musicalische Vollkommenheit'* (musical perfection).[44] The *Sei Solo* are, in this sense, Bach's answer to his own question as to whether it is possible to represent the full range of the musical imagination when limited to a four-string instrument tuned in fifths, without a bass foundation. With his self-imposed limitations in *Sei Solo*, Bach contrasted a maximum of musical content with a minimum of instrumental and tonal potential, and thus designated, in a utopian fashion, the common ground between the possible and the real.

A violinist of our time should be conscious of the fact that he is exactly at this intersection when playing Bach's *Soli*. On the one hand, they offer him the privilege of producing complete music without any kind of accompaniment on a single-voice instrument. On the other hand, their utopian character prevents a complete internalisation or identification on the part of the musician. One must always attempt to approach the *Soli* anew, and an awareness of the fact that it is impossible to produce a 'valid' performance which satisfies every requirement may even inform the performer's interpretation. To attempt to recreate an

---

[44] Think of the genesis of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, which took place at the same time. With that project, Bach aimed to show that it could be musically productive to use all of the keys available in the circle of fifths in the most diverse way possible.

authentic musical experience of Bach's timeless music with every single performance – without any claim to a definitive interpretation – may perhaps be a goal that is both ambitious and humble enough to succeed.

2.3 The Performance History of the *Soli*

Every performer of Bach's violin solos today participates in a long tradition of reception and performance. A deeper knowledge of this tradition and an analysis of one's own role in the history of the interpretation of the *Sei Solo* can help one find a responsible and meaningful approach to performing them. The MS-orientated performer in particular will be interested in dealing with this issue.[45] In principle, one can differentiate the following three phases of reception:

1) violinists play the pieces for their own use;

2) violinists play the works in concert in order to bring them to a larger audience;

3) via the medium of technical reproduction, the works are recorded and an even larger audience is able to listen to them.

2.3.1 The Early Reception of the *Soli*

In order to understand the conditions of reception when the solos were composed, one must keep in mind that there was no 'concert culture' of the kind we have today in Central Germany at the time. There were no travelling violin virtuosos who could have performed such works. In the great European musical metropolis cities of London and Paris the first attempts to establish commercial concert series for a paying audience did indeed emerge around the middle of the eighteenth century, but there were no such performances in Central

[45] The divergent approach to tradition of HIP and MS has been mentioned in the introduction. Since we do not know about performances of the *Sei Solo* during Bach's lifetime, it is questionable whether, or to what extent, HIP principles should be applied to these compositions.

Germany during Bach's Köthen period. The hypothesis that Bach could have written the solos for a travelling virtuoso, to be played in front of a courtly or even a bourgeois audience, is thus certainly unfounded. A solo performance by an unaccompanied violinist is similarly unthinkable in the programs which Bach put together as the leader of the Collegium Musicum during his Leipzig period. If Bach anticipated that others would be interested in his violin solos, then in the form indicated by the title of his *Clavier-Übungen*: *Denen Liebhabern zur Gemüths Ergoetzung verfertiget* (Teil I), or, even better, in the title of the third organ *Übung*: *Denen Liebhabern, und besonders denen Kennern / von dergleichen Arbeit, zur Gemüths Ergezung,* that is, for the musician's private use.

The first, strikingly early written appraisal of one of the violin solos is to be found in a thoroughly unexpected context. It refers to the Fugue in C Major from the Sonata BWV 1005, and it is in the *Große General-Baß-Schule* by Johann Mattheson[46] (1681-1764) published in 1731. This fugue is mentioned as an example without Bach being named. The question is whether his 'familiarity with the fugue subjects of the *A minor* and *C major Sonatas* dates from Bach's visit to Hamburg in November 1720, and whether these were among the works Bach played there when he played on the organ at the Jacobikirche.'[47]

Mattheson cites a theme in G major (Figure 8) which is strikingly similar to that of the C major Fugue,[48] and gives the following instructions: 'that a chromatic counterpart be introduced so that the fugue can be doubled [...] and so that the main theme can be turned around in two different ways' and 'that rectum and contrarium should be brought together and harmonise.'[49]

---

[46] Johann Mattheson, *Große General-Baß-Schule* (Hamburg: Herold, 1731).

[47] Wollny, ibid., IX. However, as Bach did not take part in the auditions at the Jacobikirche, Mattheson is more likely to have heard the fugue at Bach's legendary organ concert in the Katharinenkirche, which made such a great impression on Reincken.

[48] Dominik Sackmann, *Triumph des Geistes über die Materie* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2008), 21f.

[49] Mattheson (1731), ibid., 36 f. (‚Daß ein chromatischer Gegensatz füglich eingeführet, und also die Fuge verdoppelt werden kann [...], dass sich der Haupt Satz auf zweyerley Art verkehren läst [und] daß rectum & contrarium allhier zusammengebracht werden, und harmonieren können.').

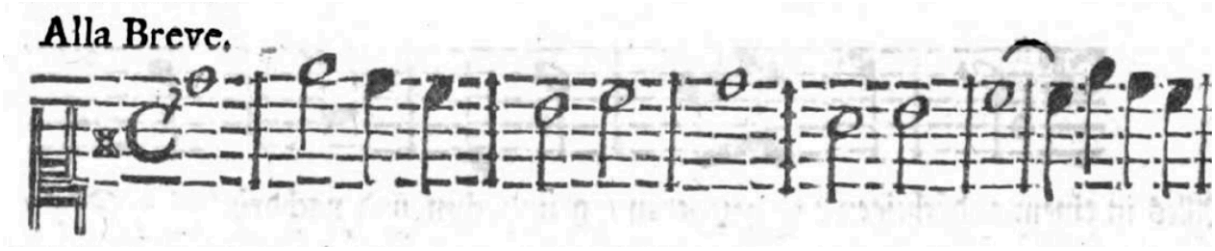

Fig. 8: Matthesson: Große General-Baß-Schule.[50]

This is a fairly precise description of the structure of the C major Fugue, which indicates a clear knowledge of the piece. The same fugue theme (again in G major) is also cited in the *Vollkommenen Capell-Meister of* 1739 with the addition of the above-mentioned chromatic counterpoint.[51]

However, Mattheson only describes the musical content of this fugue. Is it possible that he did not know of the original version of the piece in C major for unaccompanied violin? There are certainly no references here to its reception or even to a performance on the violin. How well-known were the *Sei Solo* among violinists? The evidence is contradictory.

An oft-cited passage from a letter by Bach's second oldest son Carl Philipp Emanuel (1714-88) to Johann Nikolaus Forkel, implies that the *Sei Solo* were widely known early on:

> He understood to perfection the possibilities of all instruments. This is evidenced by his solos for the violin and for the violoncello without (accompanying) bass. One of the greatest violinists told me once that he had seen nothing more perfect for learning to be a good violinist, and could suggest nothing better to anyone eager to learn, than the said violin solos without bass.[52]

Forkel emphasises this point in the following sentence:

> For a long series of years, the violin solos were universally considered by the

---

[50] Figure drawn from David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 150.
[51] Johann Mattheson, *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, trans. by E.C. Harriss (Ann Arbor Mi: UMI Research Press, 1981), 696.
[52] NBR, 397.

> greatest performers on the violin as the best means to make an ambitious student a perfect master of his instrument.[53]

Regrettably, this claim is not corroborated by the music and violin textbooks of the time. The solos are not mentioned by either L'Abbé le Fils (1761) or Geminiani (1751). Leopold Mozart's *Gründliche Violinschule*, first published in 1756, also makes no mention of the *Sei Solo* – not even in the third, expanded edition published in 1787. This despite the fact that his son Wolfgang Amadeus gave the fugues of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* a great deal of attention starting in 1782, and produced a series of adaptations.

The set of early hand-written copies of the violin solos[54] do suggest that they were played. However, more than half a century elapsed from their composition to the first surviving record of a violin performance. This record is dated 1774, and was written by the composer and music writer Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814):

> The most interesting artist I met this time (Carnival 1774) was the admirable violinist Salomon, who led the orchestra of Prince Henry as the concertmaster. He acquainted me with the magnificent violin solos without accompaniment by Seb. Bach, in which the movement is often executed in two or three voices, but even the single voice is so wonderfully devised that any further accompaniment appears superfluous. The great strength and confidence with which Salomon performed these masterpieces gave me the impetus again to work on perfecting the polyphony on the violin, which I had long practiced with pleasure.[55]

Johann Peter Salomon (1745-1815) was the concertmaster of Prince Henry of Prussia, the brother of Frederick the Great. In this capacity he was in direct contact with Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel.

The first printing of a violin solo occurred in France in 1798, as part of Jean-Baptiste

---

[53] NBR, 472.

[54] We know of thirteen copies in total (Glüxam).

[55] Sackmann, ibid., 19 ('Die interessanteste Künstlerbekanntschaft war für mich diesmal (Karneval 1774) die des vortrefflichen Violinisten Salomon, der als Concertmeister dem Orchester des Prinzen Heinrich vorstand. Durch ihn lernte ich zuerst die herrlichen Violinsolo's ohne Begleitung von Seb. Bach kennen, in welchen der Satz oft zwei- und dreistimmig durchgeführt und auch einstimmig so köstlich erfunden ist, daß jedes weitere Accompagment überflüssig erscheint. Die große Kraft und Sicherheit, mit welcher Salomon diese Meisterwerke vortrug, war auch mir ein neuer Antrieb, das Vielstimmige auf der Violine, das ich schon längst mit Vorliebe geübt hatte, immer mehr zu vervollkommnen.').

Cartier's (1765-1841) *L'Art du Violon.* Item number 154 among the *Pièces à violon seul* consists of the entire C Major Fugue from BWV 1005. It was published with the following comment: 'FUGA de la SONATE III^{e} Par JOH. SEB. BACH le Manuscrit apartient au C.^{en} GAVINIES'. Pierre Gaviniès (1728-1800), an important violinist and the composer of 24 Matinées and Études that are still part of the standard étude literature, apparently owned a copy of the violin solos. It is unclear how Gaviniès, the most important French violinist of his era, came to possess this copy, as he did not leave Paris often after his family moved there in 1734. However, as he played a significant role in the Paris music world for decades (the young Mozart is reputed to have heard him play[56]), one can assume that Bach's *Soli* were fairly widely known there, at least among experts. Gaviniès's twenty-fourth étude displays an advanced chord technique consistent with that of the C Major Fugue, but the demands it makes on the violinist barely surpass Bach's piece in a few places. There is one four-note E-flat major chord with suspension F6 in the fifth position and a three-note chord in close position in the fourth/fifth position. Gaviniès may have got, or copied, Johann Peter Salomon's manuscript, as the latter was in Paris in 1780-81, and he may have performed the solos during his stay there.[57]

The first complete print copy of the solos was published four years later, in 1802, by Simrock under the following title: *Tre Sonate per il Violino solo Del Sig^{re} Seb. Bach*. All three sonatas have their respective partitas attached in an appendix, thus forming an interesting parallel to Reincken's sequence of movements in the *Hortus musicus,* as mentioned above (footnote 22). The publication of the *Sei Solo* was a milestone in their dissemination, making the text generally available. They were, incidentally, published nearly simultaneously with *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (1801), which shows that the publishers could now count on a sufficiently large group of potential consumers, via the subscription system typical of the period. Although this edition was reprinted several times, it took nearly forty years for the first documented concert performance of the Ciaccona and the Preludio of the *E major Partita* to take place. That performance was by Ferdinand David (1810-73), a violinist and concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

---

[56] The New Grove (2001), Art. *Gaviniès*, *Pierre***,** Vol. 9, 589**.**
[57] Fanselau, ibid., 331.

2.3.2 The Solos in Concert (Ferdinand David and Joseph Joachim)

The performance by Ferdinand David took place at Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's (1809-47) instigation. He had been the *Kapellmeister* of the Leipzig Gewandhaus since 1835, and wanted to present contemporary compositions in a historical context in his concert series. This initiative was extremely successful, and the concerts in Leipzig flourished with him at the helm (and thus, so did Bach's legacy).

Robert Schumann (1810-56) wrote the following about this 'first' performance in the *Neue Zeitung für Musik* on May 15, 1840:

> [At an evening of entertainment hosted by the *Gewandhaus* concert organisers] accompanied by Mendelssohn, Concertmaster David gave us, in the most admirable manner, two pieces priceless as compositions [...] of which it has been said that 'no other part could even be imagined to it', a declaration which Mendelssohn contradicted in the finest manner by surrounding the original with many parts, so that it was a delight to listen.[58]

Thus, paradoxically, the first documented performance of an 'unaccompanied violin solo' in front of a sizable audience took place with a piano accompaniment. However, complementing the solo violin with a piano accompaniment was not Mendelssohn's idea. As Moser adds:

> When Schumann wrote these words, he could not have known that David had absolutely refused to get up on stage all alone with a violin. He only agreed to perform when, one day, Mendelssohn surprised him with the accompaniment to the Chaconne that he had written.[59]

In addition to Mendelssohn's version, Schumann later added a piano part to the entire cycle. It is impossible to say what the decisive factor was here – the violinist's aversion to an

---

[58] Rudolf Gähler. *Der Rundbogen für die Violine - ein Phantom?* (Regensburg: ConBrio, 1997), 85 ('In einer von der Direktion der Gewandhauskonzerte veranstalteten Abendunterhaltung spielte Hr. Konzertmeister David in ausgezeichneter Weise und von Mendelssohn begleitet, zwei als Compositionen unschätzbare Stücke, von denen früher behauptet worden ist, 'es ließe sich dazu keine andere Stimme denken' – was denn Mendelssohn in schönster Art widerlegte, indem er das Original mit allerhand Stimmen umspielte, daß es eine Lust war zu hören.').

[59] Ibid. ('Als Schumann diesen Satz schrieb, wußte er freilich nicht, daß David vorher um keinen Preis zu bewegen gewesen war, mit einer Geige ganz mutterseelenallein vor die Rampe zu treten. Erst als Mendelssohn ihn eines Tages mit dem von ihm angefertigten Akkompagnement zur Chaconne überraschte, erklärte er sich in dessen Gesellschaft zur Vorführung bereit.'). .

unaccompanied performance or the listener's need for supplementary sounds. In any case, both accompanied and unaccompanied performances appear to have taken place in the ensuing period.[60] At the Leipzig Conservatory, founded in 1843, individual Bach movements with Mendelssohn's accompaniment were soon used as mandatory examination pieces,[61] which contributed to the long-term dissemination of the solos. Fifty years later, the composer Salomon Jadassohn (1831-1902) was still of the opinion that the violin solos supposedly had a 'bass-weakness' which could be 'healed' by a piano accompaniment. As he wrote in his *Lehrbuch der Instrumentation*:

> We cannot abstain from noting that – with all due respect to Bach – in the performance of such a solo violin movement, as even for example the magnificent Chaconne from the second Partita, we miss at length the deeper voices, an accompaniment which rests on a solid bass. Such a movement, the deepest tone of which must be the small g, appears to float in the air [...]. Frankly, we prefer the performance of the piece with the piano accompaniment provided by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy to the original version.[62]

These arrangements undoubtedly increased the popularity of the *Sei Solo* and opened the way for their performance in concert. However, the concerts proved to be a temporary phenomenon, closely associated with the Romantic Bach renaissance, which started with Mendelssohn's legendary St Matthew Passion concert in Berlin in 1829.

The desire to accompany the violin solos on the piano is based on a misunderstanding. If one attempts to 'facilitate' the reception of the piece by adding bass-supported harmonisation, one ends up eliminating the essential element of the solo composition. Their particular virtue is, beyond simply the compositional idea, that they transcend the apparent limits of reduction and, out of a self-imposed limitation, develop the whole range of the musical imagination. The attempt to offer the listener supposedly hard-to-digest delicacies in pretty packaging,

---

[60] Cf. Anselm Hartinger, Introduction to the *Edition Breitkopf 8046* (Leipzig: Breitkopf, 2007).

[61] Ibid.

[62] Fanselau, ibid., 365 (‚Auch können wir – bei aller Verehrung Bach's – dennoch die Bemerkung nicht unterdrücken, daß wir beim Vortrage eines derartigen Violin-Solo-Satzes, als z. B. selbst bei der herrlichen Chaconne aus der zweiten Partita, auf die Länge tiefere Stimmen, eine auf sicherem Basse ruhende ausgeführte Begleitung vermissen. Ein derartiger Satz, dessen tiefster Ton das kleine g sein muß, scheint gleichsam in der Luft zu schweben [...]. Wir ziehen – aufrichtig gesprochen – die Vorführung mit der von Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy durchweg angemessen beigefügten Klavierbegleitung dem Vortrage des Stückes in der ursprünglichen Fassung vor.').

denies him, the opportunity to carry out the necessary work of listening, without which no adequate experience of listening can be achieved.

The fact that neither Mendelssohn's nor Schumann's versions with a piano accompaniment became standard concert pieces is not surprising. Joseph Joachim, to whom Schumann dedicated the piano edition published by Breitkopf & Härtel (1854), considered it superfluous, although with regret. Joachim was also the first violinist who strove from an early age to perform Bach's solos in their original form on the concert stage.[63] As the thirteen-year-old Joseph wrote in a letter to Leipzig in 1844: 'I also play a fair bit of Paganini, as well as old Bach, whose Adagio and Fugue for solo violin I played publicly in London.'[64]

The first public performance of the *Ciaccona* in the original version, without a piano accompaniment, probably took place barely three years later, on 25 February 1848 in Bremen. The performer was Joachim, who was not yet sixteen years old.[65] G. B. Shaw mentioned a later concert in a review from 1888/89, cited above. He gave a vivid description of the then sixty-year-old Joachim's performance of the C major fugue, considering it a fascinating phenomenon, but also an instrumentally problematic violin performance.

Joachim's accomplishments with regard to the dissemination of the *Soli* cannot be overestimated. Moreover, he was successful in being the first person to record an original piece by Bach (the G minor Adagio from BWV 1001 and Tempo di Borea from BWV 1002) in 1903, over the age of seventy. And finally, he brought the first score to publication which relied on Bach's original autograph.

2.3.3 Early Print Editions

Ferdinand David published the first printed score for practical use in 1843. Even though he himself did not want to perform the solos in public without a piano accompaniment, the

---

[63] Gähler, ibid., 87.
[64] Sackmann, ibid., 23 ('Auch Paganini spiele ich ziemlich viel, sowie den alten Bach, von dem ich ein Adagio und Fuge für die Violine allein in London öffentlich spielte.').
[65] Ibid.

authenticity of the edition was important to him. It was not considered a problem that Bach's 1720 fair copy had not yet been found. He used the Simrock edition, which had been reissued several times in the meantime.

Bach's score often does not specify how exactly certain chords or combinations of chords are to be played, which means that the performer must make his own decisions about each particular case. It thus made sense to produce an edition for practical use, to help the violinist in the process of executing the pieces. Ferdinand David's edition contains two versions of the score (Figure 9). The bottom row shows Bach's score, while the top row contains David's version. In this manner, the user of the edition is given the possibility to select the ideas from the practical version that he finds necessary or useful. At the same time, the editor is transparent about the changes made with respect to the original.

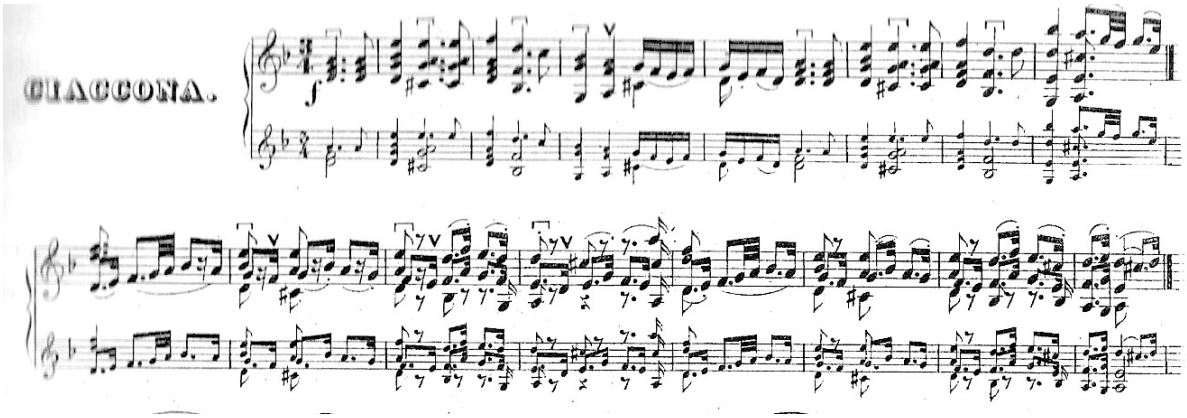

Fig. 9: Ferdinand David's version of the score.[66]

Today, one finds that David's version contains a large number of rather arbitrary interpretations and deviations from the text. It can be seen as a historical document which reveals how the solos were played at the time of their 'rediscovery'.

Further print editions were published in the following period, which were also based on the Simrock first edition, or on less reliable secondary sources. They were edited by, for instance,

---

[66] Figure drawn from Martin Elste, *Meilensteine der Bach-Interpretation 1750-2000* (Stuttgart/Weimar/Kassel: Metzler/Bärenreiter, 2000), 293.

Joseph Hellmesberger (1865), Hans Sitt (1889) and Friedrich Hermann (1896).[67] They included numerous performance details and suggestions in an attempt to save the performer the necessity of working with Bach's original score. The editor of the first complete edition of Bach's works, Alfred Dörffel (1876), did not have access to a reliable textual source either. As noted above, Bach's autograph was, strangely enough, found among the papers of his co-editor, Wilhelm Rust.

The first reliable score based on Bach's autograph was edited by Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser and published in 1908. It enabled every violinist who wished to do so to grapple with the original.[68]

2.3.4 The Medium of the Record: An Overview

The mechanical reproduction of musical events made it possible to really examine the performance history of the violin solos. A handful of very early individual recordings have survived. Joachim's recording of the G minor Adagio in 1903 was mentioned above. Despite his considerable age – he was seventy years old at the time – Joachim reveals a resolute, powerful approach; his ornamentation sounds confidently improvised. This is clearly the result of his lifelong concert experience and reflects his relationship with the sonatas and partitas, which was productive and probably unique in comparison with his contemporaries. Despite his reservations, G. B. Shaw expressed this clearly in the review cited above.

One cannot say the same of Sarasate's recording of the Preludio from the *E major Partita*, which was produced around the same time. Sarasate plays the piece with frantic speed, but he does not seem to attempt either to perform the score precisely or to represent its polyphonic structure. His Preludio thus appears to be a virtuoso showpiece (an aspect of the piece which also has some truth to it), but the essential compositional qualities of the movement are lost.

Initially, there were only isolated recordings by Adolph Busch (*D minor Partita* in 1929) and

---

[67] Cf. Stowell (1987), ibid.
[68] With regard to the reliability of the text, see Appendix 3.

Joseph Szigeti (*G minor Sonata* in 1931 and *A minor Sonata* in 1933) when the seventeen-year-old Yehudi Menuhin produced the first complete recording of the work cycle in 1936 (in 1929, the then thirteen-year-old had already recorded the *C major Sonata*). In the following years, the number of recordings began to increase, and by the 1960s, there were about ten different complete recordings on the market. Today there are at least sixty, probably a lot more.

A large variety of performance styles and approaches to performance have since developed, and it is often not easy to identify clear trends. After Menuhin, it was mainly Heifetz and Milstein who produced exemplary complete recordings. With regard to their interpretations (in contrast to other contemporary recordings), an exhaustive academic study is available: Fabian/Ornoy (2009) *Identity in Violin Playing on Records*.[69] In this study, the authors meticulously – or even microscopically – examine violin playing by numerous performers using scientific methodology. Here are a few examples:

1) Technical characteristics are presented in tabulated form for comparison:

[69] Dorottya Fabian and Eitan Ornoy, Identity in Violin Playing on Records: *Interpretation Profiles in Recordings of Solo Bach by Early Twentieth-˘Century Violinists*. (Claremont Graduate University, 2009). https://unsw.academia.edu/.work-more-11986615 (retrieved, 11/09/2015).

Measure	Heifetz		Milstein	
	1935	1952	1954	1975
1-10	mf, *détaché*, light	mf, shorter strokes	mf, *portato* (legato)	soft, legato
60-63	slurred as score	slurred as score	detached with leaned-on notes	broad but even
66-92	*spiccato*; some grouping of beats; even dynamics	*spiccato*; more literal rhythm; shifting dynamics	fluctuating dynamics; lightly detached; emphasized melody notes	lightly detached; shorter strokes; prolonged bass notes
92-115	wider bow strokes, chopped chords	wider bow strokes, chopped chords	*tenuto*, semi-detached; shorter strokes for chords	shorter bow strokes; melody broader
115-121	*subito* p; long slurs; legato	*subito* p; long slurs, legato	gradual dynamic change; legato	gradual dynamic change; legato
137-142	soft; lighter, shorter strokes;	soft; lighter, semi-detached strokes;	firm dynamics	firm dynamics
141-142	legato; tide notes highlighted	legato; tide notes highlighted	no change	no change
147-151	semi-legato, softer	firm dynamics; semi-detached	slows down; legato, softer	slows down; broader, firm dynamics
152-158	several top to bottom chords	several top to bottom chords	several top to bottom chords	several semi-arpeggiated chords
165-186	light strokes	light strokes	broad *détaché*	broad *détaché*
172-174, 180-186	light, even;	light, even; shifting dynamics	slurred down-beat; bass leaned-on	light *detaché*; lightly accented downbeats

Table 1: Fuga (BWV 1005/2) in C major: comparison of Heifetz's and Milstein's recordings.[70]

Hence, we are presented with a collection of facts, which are devoid however of any direct evaluation.

2) Rhythm and tempo of individual recordings are likewise measured and presented in tabulated form. The attempt to observe significant trends appears rather fruitless. Nevertheless, with growing influence of HIP, a tendency towards playing certain slower dance movements at a quicker pace can be observed. Let us take a look at the Loure of the *E major Partita* (Table 2):

[70] Ibid., 15.

Artist, date	Average bpm for dotted half note
Szigeti 1949	15
Szigeti 1955	16
Heifetz 1952	23
Milstein 1975	23
Zehetmair 1983	29
Luca 1977	28
Grumiaux 1962	26
Huggett 1995	26
Mintz 1983-4	13
Poulet 1996	13
Overall Average	21
Mainstream Average	20
HIP Average	24

Table 2: Loure (BWV 1006/2) in E major: average tempos in recordings.[71]

The survey shows an average tempo of BWV 1006/2. Here, a certain trend becomes apparent when MS and HIP are compared with each other. HIP performers tend to take a faster tempo in this (slow) movement. Other than this, general observations regarding tendencies towards the use of tempo cannot be discerned.

3) Special rhythms are measured in individual movements and juxtaposed. Table 3 shows how several violinists play the dotted rhythm in the D minor Corrente:

[71] Ibid., 24.

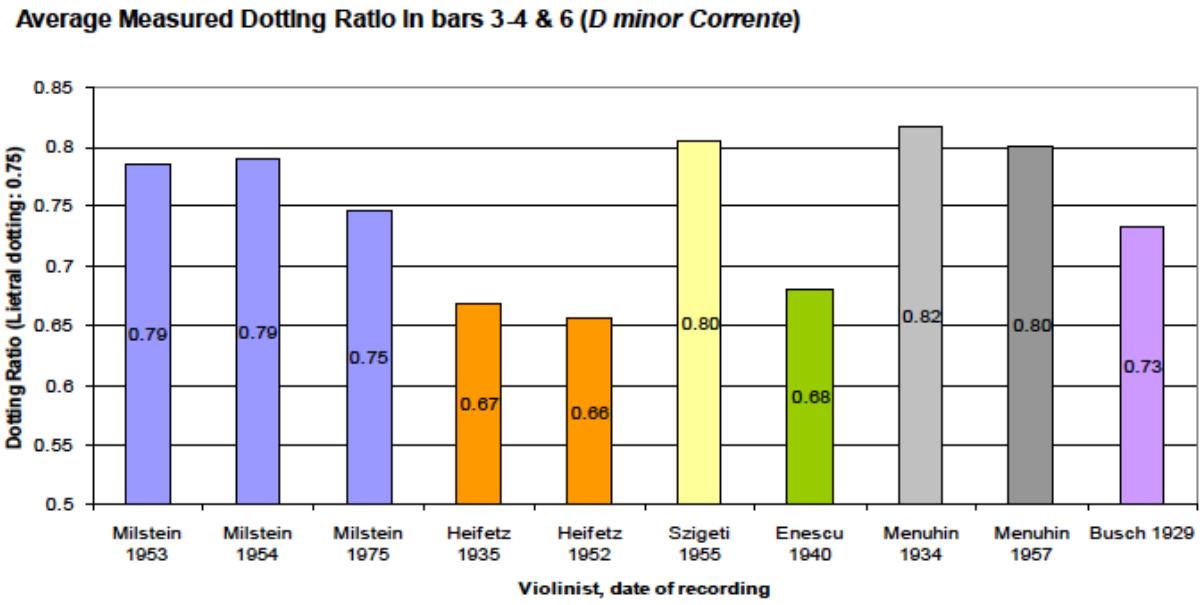

Table 3: Corrente (BWV 1004/2) in D minor: characteristics of dotted rhythm.[72]

From the chart it becomes clear that treatment of the 'dotted rhythm' was very different in the generation of the first recordings (those performers who, in my view, did not have an easy way to evaluate and compare different interpretations due to the lack of prior recordings).

4) Using a spectrogram to visualise the speed and the amplitude of vibrato applied by the violinist can reveal the performance characteristics of the player. However, these phenomena cannot be related to stylistic considerations. In all events, teachers and direct paragons might have influenced the tonal style.

In my view, such research is of little importance to the violinist-performer when it comes to understanding an interpretation from an artistic point of view. Descriptions of physical processes will hardly lead to a deeper understanding of an artistic-interpretative approach.

As a result, I have decided to describe the interpretations by Heifetz, Milstein and Szeryng mainly from an artistic point of view. I will analyse their recordings in the next chapter.

---

[72] Ibid., 22.

The different approaches to interpretation can be seen through the study of articulation, tempos, tone quality, chordal play, etc. The recordings, which bridge the first generation of violinists with the release of the first HIP recording in 1977, show a combination of influences from different teachers, colleagues and 'national schools', which are then assimilated and reproduced according to highly individual and personal taste.

Interestingly, a noticeable difference is seen in other areas of specialisation of Bach performance practice and interpretation, such as concerning Bach's orchestra or keyboard music, both of which are also documented in detail by Dorottya Fabian. In these areas, the influence of the early music movement on the general style of interpretation began much earlier, whereas regarding the *Sei Solo*, the virtuoso violinists only applied the findings of HIP much later (when compared to MS), and with greater reluctance.

2.3.5 Influence of Historically Informed Performances

A remarkable development in the interpretation and reception of the *Sei Solo* can only be observed in the last quarter of the twentieth century through the growing influence of the so-called 'historically informed performance' (HIP). In general, this term attempts to link the performance of early music (in our case, Baroque) with authentic musical instruments, historical playing techniques and contemporary aesthetic issues. In addition, iconographical sources, historical archives, literary sources (letters, reviews, etc.), practical and theoretical treatises, knowledge about the Baroque Affective Theory, just to name a few, are all considered for a successful HIP interpretation.[73] Initially, the focus was on the use of period instruments and on topics such as ornamentation and execution of grace notes (trills and appoggiaturas), but in later years it shifted towards aspects of rhythm (such as dotted rhythms) and eventually questions of baroque rhetoric, all of which became significant points of interest.[74]

It is pertinent to ask: to what extent did this movement influence the interpretation of the *Sei*

---

[73] Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell, *The Historical Performance of Music: an Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
[74] Fabian (2013), ibid., 1.

Solo? As their findings have at least been acknowledged by mainstream' (MS) performers, and often also adopted by them, in the following discussion only those violinists associated with HIP, and who mainly play on period instruments, will be referred to.

The first complete HIP recording of the *Sei Solo* was made comparatively late by Sergiu Luca (1943-2010) in 1977, at a time when the HIP approach had already achieved a solid position in other areas of concert life. Following this recording, the influence of HIP on the performers of the *Sei Solo* is beyond doubt. Table 4 (below) shows how the three most important criteria of a historically informed performance, namely (i) the addition of grace notes (trills and appogiaturas), (ii) the addition of embellishments, and (iii) the improvisational delivery in general, are strongly reflected by recordings of the last thirty-five years.

Among the performers who are recognised as being the most progressive regarding these criteria (Faust, Mullova, Gringolts, Podger and Tognetti), only Podger can be associated with the HIP scene. The other four violinists belong more or less to MS, and have released their recordings after the year 2000. Podger's recording, on the contrary, was produced in 1998, and the recordings by Luca (1977) and Huggett (1995), both of whom are known to be 'period' players who also show a high rating in the abovementioned criteria, are even older than that. Thus, it becomes apparent that, initially, it was HIP-related violinists who incorporated HIP-relevant elements in their recordings, which were then later adopted by MS violinists and even intensified by these performers.

Performer; Recording date	Added Graces	Added Embellishments	Improvisational delivery
Shumsky 1983	1		1
Ricci 1981†			1
Schroeder 1985	5		3
Poulet 1996	1		2
Luca 1977	7	5	7
Kuijken 1982	3		2
Kuijken 2001	3	1	2
Perlman 1986			
Van Dael 1996	4	2	9
Kremer 1980			1
Kremer 2005			1
Wallfisch 1997	2	1	6
Holloway 2004	2		8
Huggett 1995	4	7	9
Mintz 1984			
Lev 2001†			1
Mullova 1987*			
Mullova 2008	8	8	9
Zehetmair 1983			8
Brooks 2001	1		7
Tognetti 2005	8	7	6
Tetzlaff 1994	4		5
Tetzlaff 2005	4	1	6
Schmid 2000	1	1	8
Podger 1998	7	8	8
Faust 2010†	9	8	9
Barton Pine 1999	3		2
Barton Pine 2004†	2		3
Barton Pine 2007	1		5
Ehnes 1999			
Hahn 1997†			
Gringolts 2001†	8	9	8
Fischer 2005			1
Khatchatryan 2010			1
Ibragimova 2008			8

* In 1987, Mullova only recorded the B minor partita.
† Only three or fewer works recorded by these violinists. For detail, refer to Discography

Table 4: Summary of subjectively-rated level of ornamentation (1 = least; 10 = most). Period orientated players are given in italics.[75]

It is also legitimate to ask: to what extent is the criterion of 'embellishment' reflected in the individual recordings? The different approaches taken, evident in the recordings, can be observed in the following example (Figure 10) from the Gavotte en Rondeau of the partita in E major (BWV 1006/3).

[75] Figure drawn from Fabian (2013), ibid., 5.

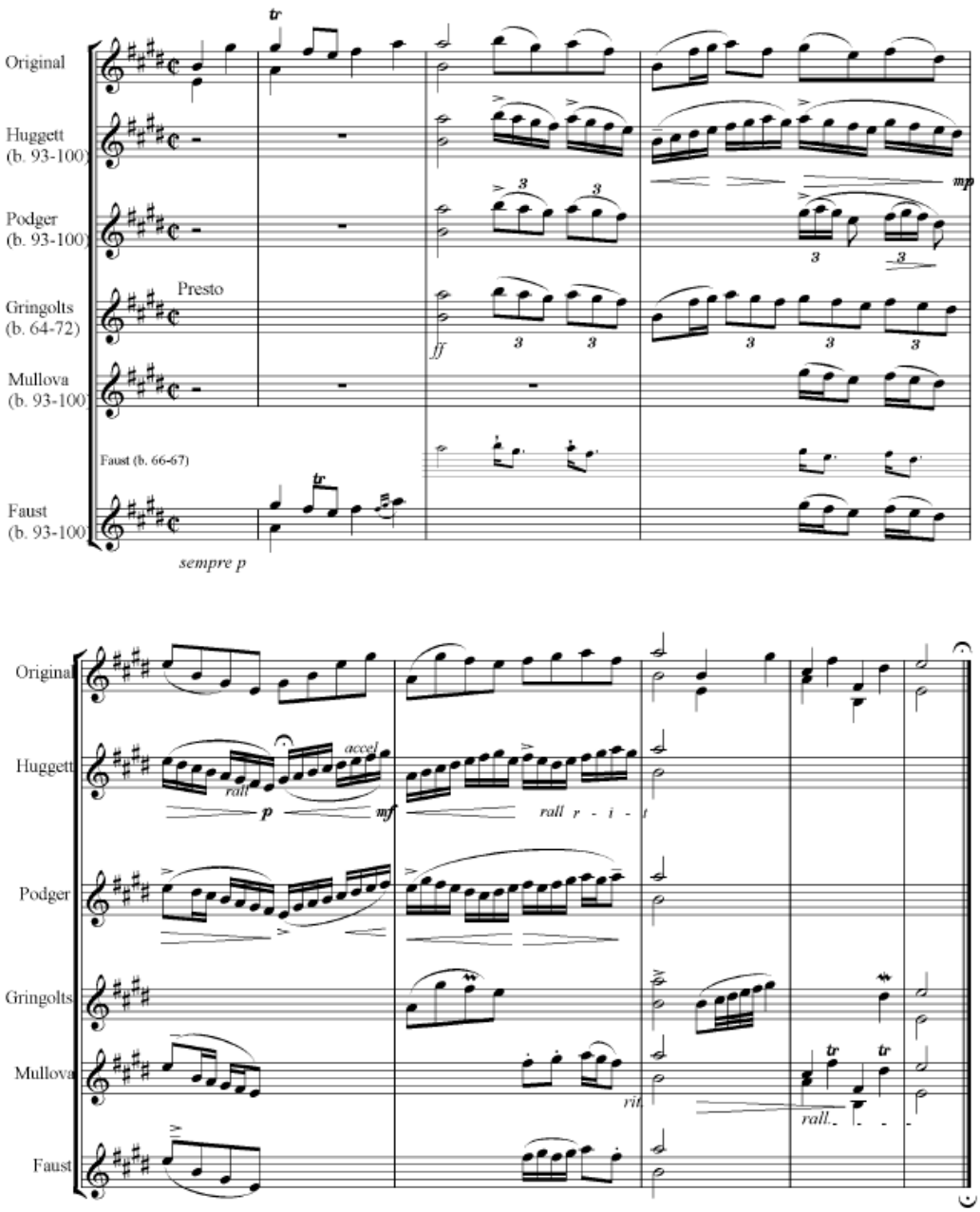

Fig. 10: BWV 1006/3, bars 92-100.[76]

As we can see, the 'courage' of the performers, quoted above, is so enormous that they do not hold back from adding massive interventions, at least in parts, when compared to Bach's original. Such an approach would have never been possible with performers of the first (MS)

[76] Ibid., 11.

generation; to the contrary, it would have been considered ‘sacrilegious’.

Nevertheless, it has been recognised for a long time that it was common practice for performers of baroque music to add embellishments, at least, to slower movements. Yet, it most certainly is a question of personal taste as to whether – and to what extent – the modern performer of the *Sei Solo* has to add embellishments. We do not have any evidence of such approach prior to Huggett’s recording, released in 1995 (even the pioneering recording by Luca is, with regard to embellishments, only of average rate). But from this point onwards a trend was clearly being established to treat certain movements of the *Sei Solo* more freely.

Interestingly, Table 4 also establishes that this trend was paralleled by performers from the MS scene. It becomes obvious that, in particular, violinists with a strong market profile from the older generation (Perlman, Kremer), as well as those from the later generation (Hahn, Fischer), clearly opt for a ‘literal’, conventional approach. Whether this comparison can be seen as representative of the musical public, could only be substantiated by evaluating sales figures of different recordings.

3 Sonata No. 1 and Partitas No 1 and 2: Practical Performance Considerations

One task of this study is to place the modern, contemporary performer within a historical context, and to discuss examples of specific performance-related problems from this perspective. I would like to raise awareness for some of the key issues, but would also like to propose specific solutions which seem plausible in light of the historical circumstances presented above. Naturally, there are no absolute truths here; personal experiences and subjective preferences will always play a role in performance-related decisions.

Bach's *Sei Solo* is divided into two sections each comprising three works: three sonatas and three partitas. All three sonatas follow the structure of the *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata) in four movements: slow introduction – fugue – slow movement – fast final movement. The partitas, however, follow the structure of the *sonata da camera*, and contain a collection of dance movements. The first partita exemplifies the standard sequence of the Baroque Suite, comprising an Allemanda, a Corrente, a Sarabande and a Tempo di Borea (instead of the most frequently used Gigue); each movement is further accompanied by a related variation movement – the Double. The second partita has an almost identical structure (with a Giga as a fourth movement) but with an additional monumental Ciaccona, whereas the third partita contains a different sequence of movements: a Preludio (instead of the more common Allemande), a Loure, a Gavotte en Rondeau, two Menuets, a Bourée and a Gigue.

The programme of my final recital will comprise one sonata (BWV 1001) as well as two partitas (BWV 1002 and 1004). The following reflections refer mainly to the works presented for this programme; I will begin with the Ciaccona.

3.1 The Ciaccona – A Mainstream Approach (BWV 1004/5)

Numerous aspects of performance-practice problems regarding the solos can be shown

through a detailed study of the Ciaccona (BWV 1004/5), particularly its first part, which is the final movement of the *D minor Partita*.[77] I have specifically chosen three important recordings of the piece by Jascha Heifetz (1952), Henryk Szeryng (1965) and Nathan Milstein (1975). This selection is representative of the first generation of 'great violinists' who used the medium of the record, and who thus could not rely on earlier recordings themselves. No violinist today can claim not to have been influenced one way or another by, at least, one of these recordings. The other great violinists of this generation (David Oistrakh, Isaac Stern), for whatever reason, did not record the complete *Soli.* The choice of these three recordings may be very limited in contrast to the huge number of recordings available today. Nevertheless, my aim here is not to provide a scientific analysis[78] of them, but to refer to them for the purpose of validating my MS approach.

Many of the following considerations, questions and conclusions draw on my personal experience with the work.

3.1.1 The Chaconne as Long-Form Music

What is the formal problem of the Chaconne? Johann Gottfried Walther offers the following definition in his lexicon:

> Ciacona (Italian) Chaconne (French) is a dance and an instrumental piece in which the bass subject or theme is generally composed of four bars in ¾, and as long as the variations or couplets continue, it remains obligat, that is, unchanged.[79]

Walther also describes the 'dangers' of this form, and refers to Mattheson:

---

[77] The aspects of the performance of the Ciaccona, which I will focus on in the following, are grounded on the reflections and the experiences of a MS performer (as stated already in my introduction). Nevertheless, some of these aspects might be of interest to HIP related performers, since they deal with the structure of the compositions. The subsequent attempt, to gain practical input from the Baroque Affective Theory for one's own interpretation, by far exceeds the MS approach; it is almost exclusively HIP based.

[78] Such can be found for instance in Carmelo de los Santos, *Performance-Practice Issues of the Chaconne from partita II, BWV 1004, by Johann Sebastian Bach.* https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/delossantos_carmelo_200405_dma.pdf (retrieved, 11/09/2015). There are also many articles by Dorottya Fabian: http://unsw.academia.edu/DorottyaFabian.

[79] Walther, ibid., 164 ('Ciacona (ital.) Chaconne (gall.) ist eigentlich ein Tanz und eine Instrumental-piece, dessen Baß-Subjectum oder thema gemeiniglich aus vier Tacten in ¾ bestehet, und, so lange als die darüber gesetzte Variationes oder Couplets währen, immer obligat, d.i. unverändert bleibet.').

> The Chaconne is sung and danced, occasionally at the same time, and when such diversion is well varied it yields considerable pleasure; yet it is always more satiating than tasteful. I do not hesitate in expressing its actual character with the first mentioned quality. One knows how easily satiation gives birth to aversion and disgust, and whoever wants to produce these affections in many, need only provide a few chaconnes for it, then it would be done all right.[80]

As one can see, the Chaconne was not a favorite of Mattheson's, as he considered the form of four-bar phrase variations to tire the listener quickly. Even if the variations are diverse and imaginative, the predictability of the process can lead to boredom.

Bach was, naturally, aware of this problem. The fact that he chose the Chaconne form to be the central and most extensive movement of his violin cycle, should be seen as an additional challenge that he set himself. It seems as though Bach wanted to reach the outer limits of what was feasible, outdoing the handicap of writing for the unaccompanied violin by the even greater 'impossibility' of the musical form. In the following discussion I will examine how Bach attempted to achieve this.

We can identify the Ciaccona's '64x4' bar basic structure at first sight. The tripartite nature of the piece is also clearly identifiable: bars 132-208 form the middle part in D major, while the final part modulates back to D minor.

There are numerous analyses of the piece, the results of which are, in part, widely divergent.[81] There is even disagreement concerning the number of bars that make up the theme. If one assumes that the theme is composed of 8 bars – the second half of which is clearly a repetition of the first part, differing somewhat in the final bar – one must concede that this pattern is modified in several places.[82] In this case, one would find a few free-standing couplets of four bars in length. It thus makes more sense to say that the theme is composed of four bars, particularly as we can often identify groups of variations which contain more than two couplets. Examples are bars 89-120 (eight couplets) or 185-100 (four

---

[80] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 465.

[81] Larry Solomon provides a useful analysis: http://solomonsmusic.net/bachacon.htm (retrieved, 07/21/2014). He differentiates between theme (the first four bars) and subject (the Romanesca) and is thus not too far removed from Walther's lexicon article.

[82] See, for instance, Hans Vogt, *Johann Sebastian Bachs Kammermusik* (Stuttgart 1981), 185ff.

couplets).

The harmonic idea which pervades the entire piece is based on the bass line of the descending tetrachord: D4-C4-B-flat3-A3.

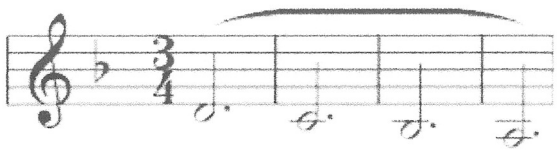

Fig. 11: The Romanesca (quoted passage in D minor)

This corresponds to the melodic and harmonic form called the Romanesca (Figure 11), which was a schema used extensively in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which is still in use today in popular music as a variation model. It makes sense that when such a four-bar passage is repeated 64 times – the Ciaccona is made up of 256 (or 257), that is, 64x4 bars – it becomes quite difficult to prevent the listener from becoming 'exhausted' of the repetition. As suggested above, Bach avoids this danger by creating larger structural units, combining several couplets in groups of variations.

The unusual and surprising strategy here is that the piece starts on the second beat rather than the first, making the listener perceive the piece to begin on the first beat instead (Figure 12).

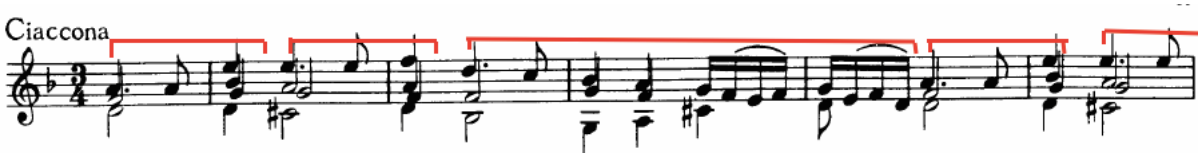

Fig. 12: BWV 1004/5, bars 1-5.

The basic rhythmic structure – that of a Sarabande with an emphasised dotted crotchet on the second beat – only emerges in bar 9. Let us note that the function of this strategy has not been generally understood. This is reflected in the rather strange circumstance that the various

scores and analyses are not in agreement as to whether the first, 'incomplete', bar counts as the first bar, or if one considers the piece to start with an upbeat.[83] The Ciaccona is composed of 257 bars in the former case and 256 in the latter. Thus, in Flesch's (Edition Peters) and Szeryng's (Schott Verlag) versions the piece begins with beat zero, in Haußwald's (Bärenreiter), Glüxams (Universal Edition) and Galamian's (International) with beat one. In any case, the basic rhythmic pattern is generally perceived as 2-3-1 rather than 1-2-3. It would thus make sense to have the first bar begin with a crotchet rest. But if this pattern were repeated throughout the entire work, that is, sixty-four times, it would be very uniform and make larger-scale divisions difficult. However, there is a most interesting phenomenon which deserves to be properly examined by the performer: Bach has some of the variations start on the first beat, and others on the upbeat with the previous variation ending on first beat of that bar. Further, many variations are ambivalent in this regard, because the first beat is oriented both forwards and backwards. The performer should examine each of these cases individually.

The Romanesca tetrachord also appears in many different forms within the variability of the rhythmic pattern. We have the following pattern (Figure 13, notes encircled) in bars 1 to 16:

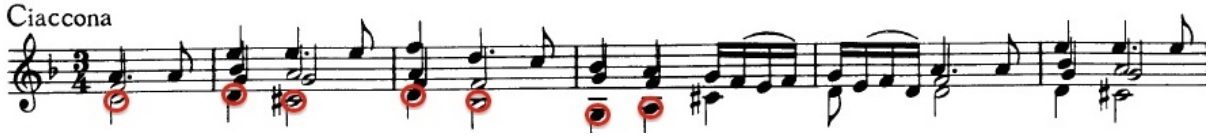

Fig. 13: BWV 1004/5, bars 1-6.

C is replaced by C-sharp for melodic reasons. The prohibited interval of the augmented second C-sharp/B-flat is avoided by the return of the bass line to the key note D before moving on to the B-flat. In bars 17 to 24 the Romanesca is repeated an octave higher in a chromatic manner (Figure 14). This prevents an early return to the tonic:

[83] It goes against the 'upbeat' idea that Bach wrote the final bar as a dotted minim, which would not be consistent with a minim long upbeat.

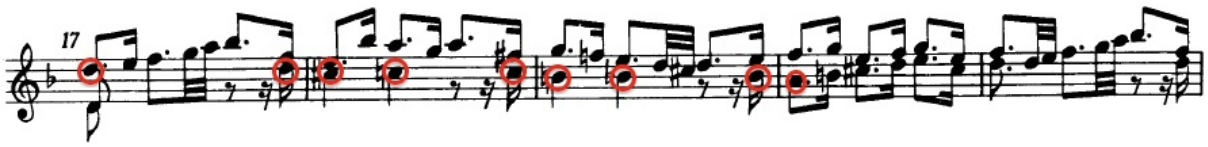

Fig. 14: BWV 1004/5, bars 17-21.

Bach returns to the first model in the next two couplets (bars 25 to 32), in the second of which (bars 29 ff.) the Romanesca appears as a rhythmic variation. The chromatic form of the descending bass appears again with multiple variations from bars 33 to 48. Bach uses the typical harmonic form of the Romanesca (with a C instead of a C-sharp in the second bar) for the first time in the following variation (Figure 15), which starts in bar 49; however, it appears in the soprano voice rather than in the bass line until it can finally appear as a bass figure in the inversion of this couplet (bars 53 to 56):

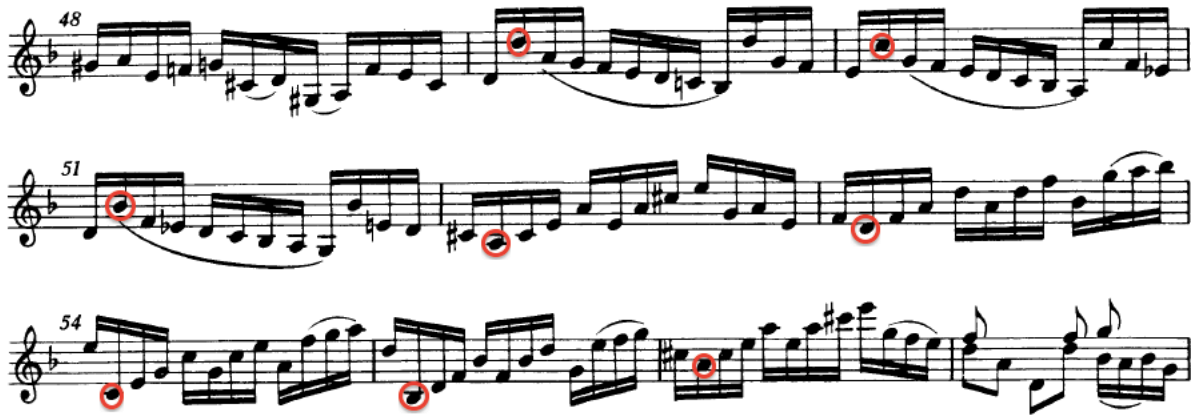

Fig. 15: BWV 1004/5, bars 48-57.

Here we see how Bach varies both the treatment of the upper voice and the bass foundation, all without violating the form of the Ciaccona.

Two different formal problems have been discussed thus far: the complicated question of phrasing in connection with the individual couplets, and the basic thematic structure of the Ciaccona, which is by no means easy to identify. But the performer is faced with another

thought-provoking decision in the very first bar: should the dotted rhythm be played only in the upper voice, or should one repeat the entire chord (Figure 16)?[84]

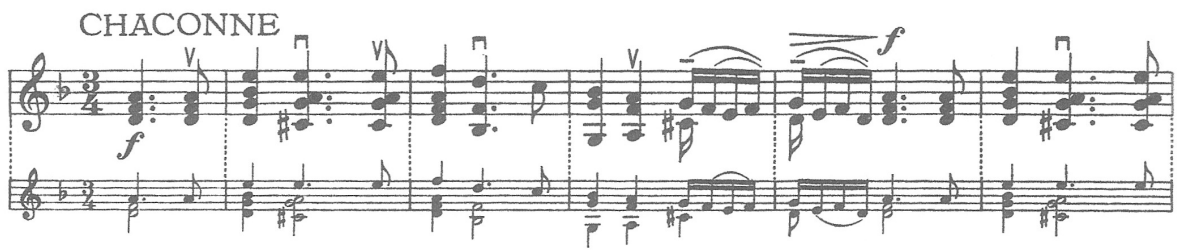

Fig. 16: BWV 1004/5, bars 1-6, Flesch edition with chordal dotting[85]

The three recordings that will serve as my references are not in agreement on this point. Heifetz and Szeryng play the quavers in bars 1-2 as chords, while Milstein only plays the upper voice (here: bottom stave). A certain inconsistency emerges in the first case, because the quaver cannot be repeated in the third bar, as this would result in a chord of superimposed fifths (which is uncharacteristic of Bach).[86] One argument in favour of Milstein's solution, which was already proposed in the Joachim/Moser edition of 1908, is that Bach could have chosen to use a chordal notation if he had intended it to be performed that way. However, it is questionable whether this argument is convincing, considering that there are strange inconsistencies in the notation further on in the score that are difficult to explain. The bass note sustains throughout bars 186 and 187, even though this is in contradiction to the notation of the entire passage from bar 185 to 200 (Figure 17).[87]

---

[84] See also: Joseph Szigeti, ‚Differing Interpretations of the Opening and Closing Bars', Jon Eiche, ed., *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views* (Bloomington, IN: Frangipani Press, 1985), 126-29.

[85] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sonaten und Partiten,* Carl Flesch, ed. (New York: C.F.Peters, 1930), 58.

[86] Incidentally, Brahms (Appendix 4) chooses a third solution in his piano adaptation: he repeats the first chord, whereas in the second bar he only repeats the top three voices, and in the third bar he plays the quaver without a chord.

[87] This issue was also raised by Eduard Melkus in 1985, but he was not interested in the reasons for these inconsistencies: Eduard Melkus, 'The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: Some Thoughts on the History of its Interpretation', in Eiche, ibid., 145.

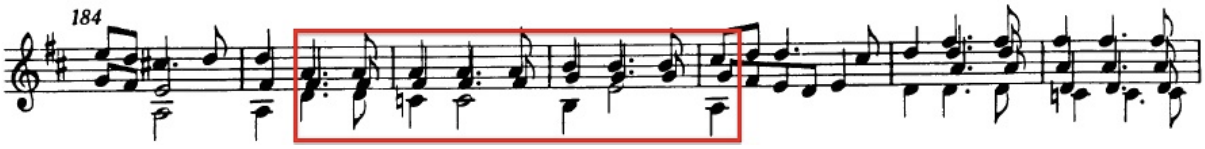

Fig. 17: BWV 1004/5, bars 184-90.

Bar 209 is similarly inconsistent. The lower voices are sustained here, even though the quavers have a chordal notation in bars 210-11 (Figure 18):

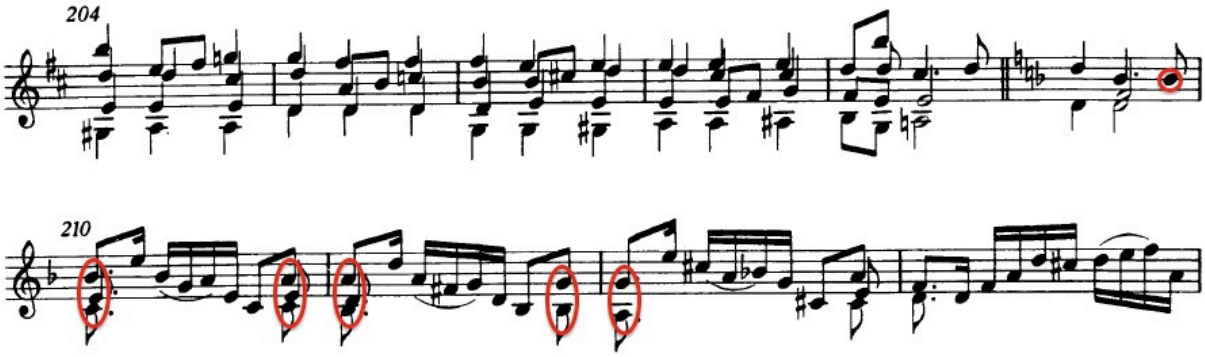

Fig. 18: BWV 1004/5, bars 204-213.

In my opinion, the notation of bars 185-86 and 209 does not necessarily imply that the other voices are not to be repeated. For an explanation of this, I propose studying Helga Thoene's hypothesis of number symbolism in Bach's work (see Appendix 5). This issue can be applied to the execution of the opening chords of the Ciaccona.

3.1.2 Chord Technique

After the repetition of the 'theme' is over, a four-couplet variation begins in bar 9 on the first beat with flowing dotted quavers (Figure 19).[88]

[88] The following discussion is based on a lecture held by Max Rostal in 1973 in Leipzig, published in: Reinhard Seiffert, Ed., *Sei Solo* (Berlin: Edition Praxis & Hintergrund, 1991), 30ff. I first encountered Rostal's chord technique for Bach's *Soli* during my time as his student in Berne and Cologne in 1967-72.

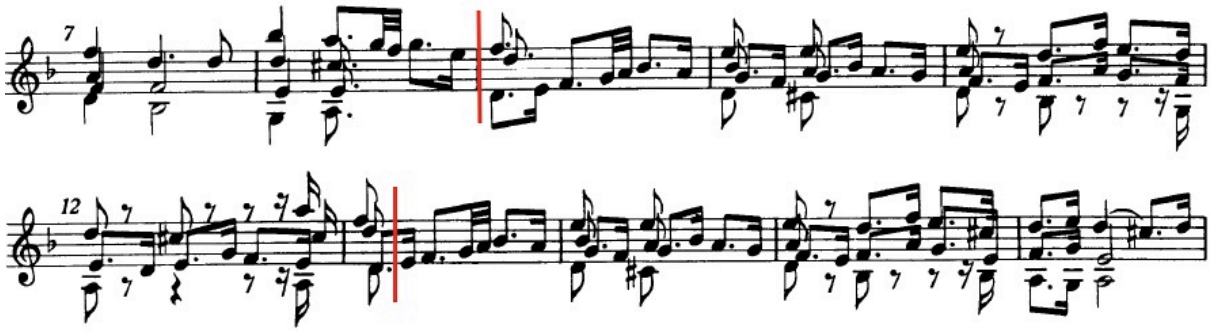

Fig. 19: BWV 1004/5, bars 7-16.

Ferdinand David probably performed the passage in the following manner (Figure 20):

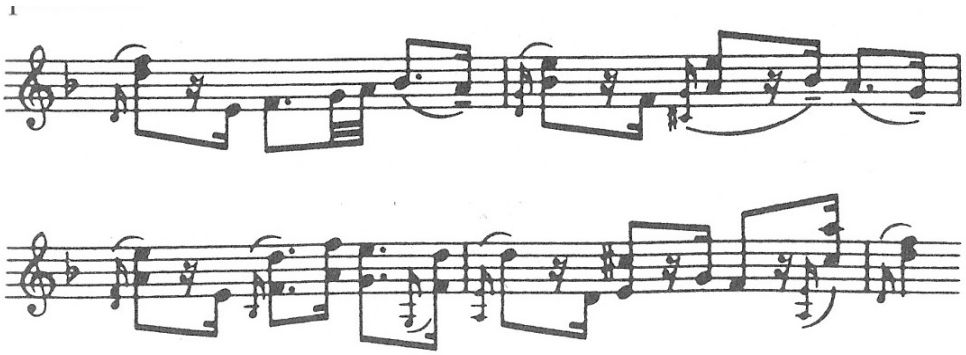

Fig. 20: BWV 1004/5, bars 9-12: Traditional broken chords.[89]

As the main voice initially goes over into a middle voice, it is accompanied by three- and four-note chords in the Sarabande rhythm (Figure 21):

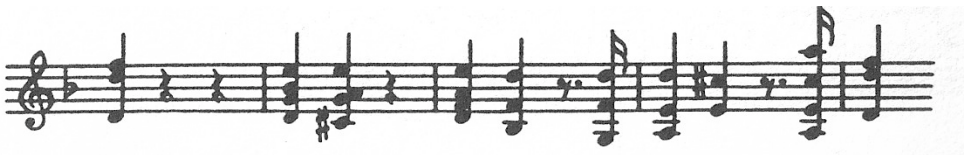

Fig. 21: BWV 1004/5, bars 9-12: The chordal structure.[90]

The voice leading with the 'normal' broken chords upwards cannot be represented

[89] Figure based on Seiffert, ibid., 31.
[90] Ibid., 32.

meaningfully. This problem was noted by the earliest performers.

Andreas Moser describes a meeting between the Polish violinist Karol Lipinski (1790-1861) and the fifteen-year-old Joseph Joachim. The two discussed the passage, bars 9 to 16, of the Ciaccona. Lipinski advised the young Joachim to perform the passage using a 'zurückschlagende Bogen'. He referred to the violinist Johann Peter Salomon, mentioned above, who played the passage in the same way. In practice, this results in the following interpretation (Figure 22):

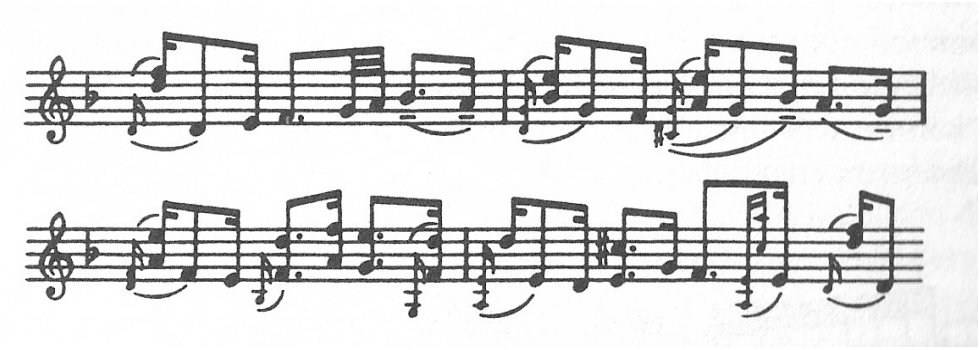

Fig. 22: BWV 1004/5, bars 9-12 : 'Zurückschlagender Bogen'.[91]

This is indeed how the passage was, and is, often played. It gives the main voice – to use Rostal's term – a slightly 'Hungarian' character (Figure 23):

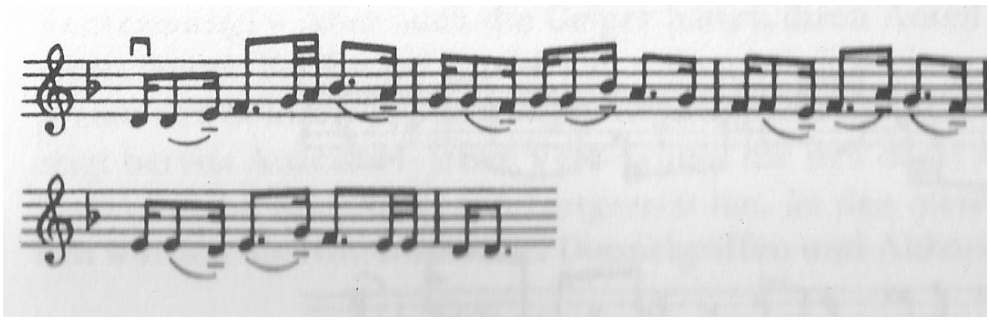

Fig. 23: BWV 1004/5, bars 9-12: The resulting 'Hungarian' rhythm.[92]

Young Joachim was clearly convinced that this manner of playing was correct, and he

[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

performed the same passage in an identical manner to his mentor, Mendelssohn. Moser describes Mendelssohn's agitated reaction:

> How could you have let yourself get into such an artificial maneuvre? Play the Bach pieces confidently in your previous, healthy manner and, most importantly, remember: intelligent, truly musical people hear with the inner as well as the outer ear, and always know where a motif is coming from and where it is headed; and there is no cure for being unmusical, whether you play the passages according to the advice of David, Lipinski, or anyone else![93]

As modern bowing techniques allow one to sustain three-note chords in *forte* for a certain amount of time, as well as to play a chord in three notes while sustaining any one of the strings (be it the lower, the middle or the upper), it should still be possible to play the passage as Bach wrote it. As it is impossible to play four strings simultaneously, one must play the three lower strings together, followed by the three upper strings together, and finally sustain one of the three upper strings (Figure 24).

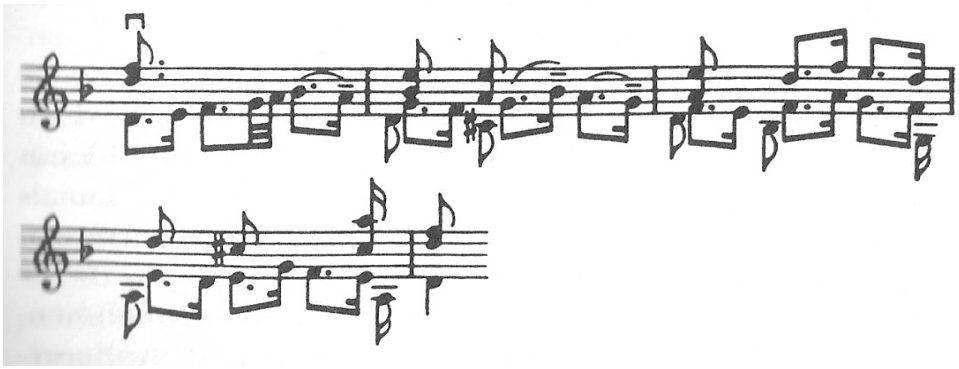

Fig. 24: BWV 1004/5, bars 9-12: The 'modern' version, which can only be played in *forte*.[94]

Among the three recordings considered here, Henryk Szeryng comes closest to this way of performing. Jascha Heifetz does not avoid the 'Hungarian' gesture entirely, and the chords also have a slightly violent character in Nathan Milstein's performance which is not

---

[93] Gähler, ibid., 85 ('Wie können Sie sich bloß auf solch verkünstelte Manöver einlassen? Spielen Sie die Bachschen Sachen getrost in Ihrer bisherigen gesunden Weise und lassen Sie sich vor allem sagen: Intelligente, wirklich musikalische Menschen hören nicht nur mit dem äußeren sondern auch mit dem inneren Ohr und wissen infolgedessen stets, wo ein Motiv herkommt und wohin es geht; für die unmusikalischen ist ohnehin kein Kraut gewachsen, Sie mögen die betreffenden Stellen nach den Ratschlägen Davids, Lipinskis oder irgendeines anderen ausführen!').

[94] Seiffert, ibid., 33.

necessarily justified by the nature of this variation. If one wanted to perform it in a more lyrical fashion, it would be impossible to avoid playing broken chords of some sort, or a gentle 'zurückschlagende Bogen'.

3.1.3 Excursus 1: Albert Schweitzer and the Curved Bow

As discussed above, the multi-note chords pose the most difficult technical problem in the execution of the violin solos. As we do not know how Bach wanted them to be played, performers have thought about it and experimented a great deal. An interesting proposal, first published in 1908, was put forth by the theologist, philosopher, doctor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965), who was also a renowned organist and Bach researcher. The argument was based on his dissatisfaction with the execution of the score:

> Each and every one of us has suffered from the fact that we never hear the magnificent polyphonic parts of the Chaconne and of other works for solo violin by Bach as they were written and as we perceive them in our thoughts. They are performed in such a way that the chords do not sound as such, but are executed using arpeggios. As the bass notes are not held, the harmony hangs in the air. And the violinist is always forced to play the polyphonic passages in forte, even if the logic of the piece demands a piano at the place in question. [...] The sounds which are the unavoidable byproducts of this arpeggio playing in forte are also unfortunate.[95]

An article by the musicologist Arnold Schering[96] convinced Schweitzer that it must have been possible to hold multi-note chords in Bach's day using a convex bow with reduced tension on the hair. The hair could thus supposedly nestle around the strings. The following picture (Figure 25) illustrates this principle clearly:

---

[95] Schweizerische Musikzeitung, Zürich, 15. März 1933, cited in: Gähler, ibid., 132 ('Jeder von und hat schon darunter gelitten, daß wir die herrlichen polyphonen Partien aus der Chaconne oder anderen Werken für Violine solo von Bach nie hören, wie sie auf dem Papier stehen und wie wir sie in Gedanken vernehmen. Sie werden uns so vorgetragen daß die Akkorde nicht als solche erklingen, sondern arpeggiert wiedergegeben sind. Da die Baßnote nicht ausgehalten wird, hängt die Harmonie in der Luft. Und immer, wenn polyphone Partien kommen, muß der Spieler im Forte spielen, auch wenn die Logik des Stückes an der betreffenden Stelle ein Piano verlangt. [...] Unerfreulich sind auch die Geräusche, die bei diesem Arpeggieren im Forte notwendig mit einhergehen.').

[96] Arnold Schering, 'Verschwundene Traditionen des Bach-Zeitalters', in *Bach-Jahrbuch 1904,* cited in Gähler, ibid., 114ff.

Fig. 25: Otto Büchner with a curved bow.[97]

In the ensuing years, a lively discussion regarding the historical accuracy of this approach broke out, fuelled by Schweitzer's popularity. Working with bow makers, some violinists attempted to reconstruct this 'curved bow' which was to resolve the problem of Bach's violin polyphony once and for all. I was a student of Otto Büchner (Figure 25) from 1965 to 67 at the Munich Musikhochschule, and I can recall very convincing concerts performed by this excellent violinist (for instance, of BWV 1005 in 1967). He was one of the few artists, along with Emil Telmányi, Rolph Schroeder and Tossy Spivakovsky, who had learned this technique and was able to demonstrate it convincingly in concert. However, Otto Büchner only discussed this 'specialty' with his students on request; in his normal lessons, he taught them to play Bach the traditional way.

The reconstruction of the curved bow went through various stages of development.[98] Arnold Schering had initially assumed that, before the invention of the set screw around 1740, the tension of the hair was regulated using the thumb, particularly in the French string school. By reducing the pressure of the thumb, the hair could have touched all four strings simultaneously. However, the surviving slightly-convex bows from Bach's time are not

---

[97] Figure drawn from Gähler, ibid., 167.
[98] Results summarised in Fanselau, ibid., 272ff.

curved enough. In addition, there is no historical evidence that the tension of the bow was ever regulated using the thumb. However, Schweitzer stuck to his demand for unbroken chords, and encouraged violinists and bow makers to find a solution. This is how Hermann Berkowski's 'polyphonic bow' was created, which employs a latch to relieve the thumb in the single-voice passages. However, this model was too cumbersome to use, despite several attempts to improve it (for instance, by Hans Baumgart in 1925).

Albert Schweitzer's collaboration with the Kassel concertmaster Rolph Schroeder received more attention. Giving up on the historical dimension of this style of playing, they argued in several articles that Bach may have composed with a bow in mind which – if not yet in existence – would be created in the future.

> According to reports from the time, we must picture the master as a person who was very interested in technical perfection, and even the creation of new instruments. Perhaps the solution to our question lies in our suspicion that he composed the sonatas while experimenting and going back to older modes of playing, or longing for and expecting improvements to the bow.[99]

This is a bold hypothesis, although it is, admittedly, difficult to refute. Once he had been freed from the necessity of a historical justification, the aging Albert Schweitzer was sympathetic to rather bizarre proposals. He writes:

> in 1949 I encountered Rudolf Gutmann's attempts in Konstanz to increase or decrease the tension on a straight bow (in which the hair is at a greater distance from the stick than usual) by placing a continuous row of celluloid rings between the hair and the stick. A mechanism built into the frog enables one to increase or decrease the tension on the hair.[100]

Otto Büchner's development of the Schroeder bow was a significantly more serious

---

[99] Rolph Schroeder, 'Über das Problem des mehrstimmigen Spiels in Johann Sebastian Bachs Violinsonaten. Bach-Probleme', in *Festschrift zur Deutschen Bach-Feier* Leipzig 1950, cited in Gähler, ibid., 123f. (‚Nach Zeitberichten müssen wir uns den Meister als sehr warm interessiert an technischer Vervollkommnung, ja Neuschaffung von Instrumenten [...] vorstellen. Vielleicht haben wir hier die Lösung unserer Frage vor uns, indem wir vermuten, daß er selbst experimentierend und auf ältere Spielweisen zurückgreifend oder Verbesserungen des Bogens wünschend und vorausahnend die Sonaten komponiert hat.').

[100] Gähler, ibid., 143 ('[…] 1949 wurde ich mit Versuchen von Rudolf Gutmann in Konstanz bekannt, einen geraden Bogen [bei dem sich das Haar in größerer Entfernung von der Stange befindet als bei dem gewöhnlichen] für die Spannung und Entspannung dadurch geeignet zu machen, daß zwischen dem Haar und der Stange eine kontinuierliche Reihe von Zelluloidringen liegt. Eine in den Frosch eingebaute Mechanik erlaubt das Spannen und Entspannen des Haares.').

endeavour. Interestingly, he claimed that the real difficulty, if not impossibility, of a perfect execution was not due to the mechanics of the bow, but to the complexity of the positions of the left hand (my personal memory from 1967). Büchner's recording of a single piece and Emil Telmányi's recording of the entire work with the patented Vega bow,[101] prove that it is truly possible to play four-note chords on the violin flawlessly. However, this performance never reached an audience beyond that of well-informed experts who followed it out of professional interest. More recent attempts to perform Bach with violin bows that differ from the modern norm,[102] did not win much recognition. It will be impossible to form a conclusive judgment about the curved bow until the greatest violinists consider it worth their while to use it.

Albert Schweitzer's preference for long, sustained violin chords may perhaps be explained by the fact that he was originally an organist, and read Bach's score with the eyes of an organist. In that context, the chords produced using a curved bow do, indeed, evoke the chords of an organ. On the other hand, the letter by the pianist Johannes Brahms (cited in Appendix 5), shows that he – as a friend and admirer of Joseph Joachim's – clearly had no reservations regarding the latter's chord playing. Otherwise, in his piano version of the Chaconne, he would not have forced the pianist to perform an arpeggiation of the chords by only using the left hand.

3.1.4 The Rhythm of the 'Theme'

Let us continue with some further remarks regarding the basic rhythm of the Ciaccona. Bach's notation of the first three chords as a dotted crotchet-quaver-crotchet initially appears unambiguous, and the manner in which they were performed was, for a long time, not discussed. Not only in the recordings cited here, but in general, the rhythm was played 'as written', that is, with a 3:1 ratio of the dotting. It was only when public interest in historically informed performance practices increased – roughly in the last third of the last century – that a series of performers decided (with reference to contemporary sources) to employ a sharper dotting and thus give greater attention to the dance-like aspects of the piece, derived from the

[101] Constructed by the Danish bow makers Arne Hjorth and Knud Vestergaard.
[102] Gähler, ibid., 34ff.

title Ciaccona. An instruction from the *Flötenschule* by Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773), published in 1752, serves as an important reference for this manner of playing: 'in three-four time, the quavers that follow the dotted crotchets in the loure, sarabande, courante, and chaconne must not be played with their literal value, but must be executed in a very short and sharp manner.'[103] This would mean that it should be performed in double dotting, using current notation.

As no direct statement by Bach regarding this issue survives, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' solution. However, let us name a series of arguments which speak against such a double dotting of the Chaconne theme.

A double dotting of the theme would mean that the upbeats of both 'thematic' couplets (bars 1-9) would have to be performed as semiquavers starting right from the very beginning. However, this would clearly limit the possibilities of rhythmic variation, which is one of the distinctive qualities of the composition. Bach uses – depending on the character of the variation – quaver up beats (for instance, bars 33-36), semiquaver up beats (for instance, bars 17-24), or even up beats composed of multiple semiquavers or demisemiquavers (for instance, bars 73-76, 81-84 or 65-68). The couplet of bars 57-60 is of particular interest to us. Here, the Chaconne rhythm – in energetic quavers – is cited, and moved one beat ahead. This is the counterpart to the strategy described above according to which Bach has the piece start on the second beat, and only enables the listener to grasp this fact later on in the course of the theme.

Deciding to use the double dotting also leads to conflicts in the major section, where the Chaconne theme is accompanied by running quavers (bars 141ff.). The basic rhythm of the theme is so easily identifiable here that, to be consistent, one would have to separate the final ostinato-accompanying quaver and the theme quaver, which should be played as a semiquaver – a mannerism which is hardly to be recommended. The same is also true of the variations in bars 177ff.

---

[103] Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute* (New York: Schirmer, 1975), 290.

At bar 125 – which introduces the transition to the major section that returns to the initial theme – the upbeat consists of quavers rather than semiquavers. Although the entire bar is structured by running semiquavers, the repetition of the two B-flat4 gives one the impression of a quaver upbeat. As the previous variation (bars 121-124) is characterised by semiquaver up beats, bar 125 functions as a transition to the dotted quavers which follow. The beginning of the third section makes the double dotting problem particularly evident, as the quaver up beats in bars 211, 212 and 213 practically force one to use a 3:1 dotting in bar 209.

A performer who does not choose to use double dotting can also use the *Flötenschule* to justify his decision. Quantz writes elsewhere that the generally sharp double dotting only applies in the case of dotted quavers, dotted semiquavers and faster rhythms (*Flötenschule,* Chapter V, §21), but not for slower rhythms (*Flötenschule*, Chapter V, §20) (dotted minims, dotted crotchets):

> The white note with the dotting [...] is given six beats with the foot; and the following black note, two beats. The black note with the dotting [...] is given three beats; and the following only one beat. (Translation changed by the author)[104]

According to this direction, the beginning of the Ciaccona should be counted in quavers and the dotting should have a 3:1 ratio.

3.1.5 Structural Decisions. Connecting Several Variations

Once the performer has taken all the necessary decisions regarding the chord technique and rhythm of the first sixteen bars, he must solve problems of a very different nature in the further course of the piece. The beginning of a long, wide-ranging variation in bar 25 is technically challenging, but by no means unplayable. It starts with single voice passages in running quavers and semiquavers, and becomes gradually more difficult with virtuoso demisemiquaver runs. It then becomes calmer again and ends in a 32-bar long arpeggio part

[104] Quantz, ibid., 66 ff. ('Die weiße Note mit dem Puncte (...) bekömmt sechs Schläge mit dem Fuße; und die darauf folgende schwarze Note, zweene Schläge. Die schwarze Note mit dem Puncte (...) bekömmt drey Schläge; und die folgende nur einen Schlag.').

which prepares for the restatement of the theme in the form of the opening chords. This is exactly the architectonic middle section of the Ciaccona, followed by the middle section in a major tonality.

It is the performer's task to give an insight into the structure of the piece and to make it appear plausible. On the one hand, the differences between the individual variations and their characteristic forms need to be presented vividly. On the other hand, the connection between the different couplets must be performed in such a manner that one can perceive the coherence of the piece as well as the great developmental arc that constitutes the unique quality of this composition. I will now discuss the three widely different solutions proposed by Heifetz, Milstein and Szeryng, which represent three typical performance styles.

3.1.6 Szeryng and the Neue Sachlichkeit

Terms such as 'objectivity' or *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) can serve to describe Szeryng's style of playing Bach. The term *Neue Sachlichkeit* first appeared in the 1920s in the German-speaking world and referred to a style of painting which rejected the subjective and exalted attitude of Expressionism, preferring an objective, matter-of-fact approach. This term, which was more of a slogan than a precisely definable school, soon entered musical discourse as well. Following Mendelssohn, a romanticising performance style of Bach's works was widespread in the nineteenth century. Now – roughly parallel to the 'objective' composition style of Paul Hindemith – a musical-aesthetic movement developed which was defined by concepts such as 'being true to the work', the objective realisation of works of art, etc. A musical tradition was established, which – although it was not free of misunderstandings and contradictions – made a claim into the 'authority' and 'authenticity' of performances well into the second half of the last century, and was of seminal importance to the performance of Bach's works, particularly among devotees. For instance, 'terraced dynamics' were preferred to the dynamics of crescendo and diminuendo. Agogic flexibility was frowned upon as subjective and romantic, to be replaced by stability and reliability in the creation of the tempo. Although this style of playing was not unambiguously verified by research, it nevertheless had a very significant practical impact on the performance of music in the German-speaking world.

Theodor W. Adorno, an astute observer of the music world, was so bemused by it that he wrote an essay on the topic entitled *Bach Defended Against His Devotees*. Adorno is of the opinion that an 'objectivising' performance which claims to represent nothing but the score, without any subjective input, cannot do justice to the score. He claims that:

> today, however, under the unholy star of Historicism, the performance of Bach has assumed a sectarian aspect. Historicism has incited a fanatical interest that no longer concerns even the work itself. At times one can hardly avoid the suspicion that the sole concern of today's Bach devotees is to see that no inauthentic dynamics, modifications of tempo, oversize choirs and orchestras creep in; they seem to wait with potential fury lest any more humane impulse become audible in the rendition. The critique directed at the late Romantics' inflated and sentimentalised Bach image need not be challenged, even though the relation to Bach apparent in Schumann's work proved to be incomparably more productive than the present punctilious purity.[105]

To prove that Bach himself was not at all interested in a bland, objectivising representation of his works, Adorno refers to the following famous passage from Forkel's biography:

> He liked best to play upon the clavichord; the harpsichord, though certainly susceptible of a very great variety of expression, had not soul enough for him; […]. He therefore considered the clavichord as the best instrument for study, and, in general, for private musical entertainment. He found it the most convenient for the expression of his most refined thoughts, and did not believe it possible to produce from any harpsichord or pianoforte such a variety in the gradations of tone as on this instrument, which is, indeed, poor in tone, but on a small scale extremely flexible.[106]

Adorno's essay, written in 1951, reflects the predominant tastes of a German Bach reception at the time, and it is in line with my informed experiences dating from the beginning of the 1960s. As the member of a *Collegium Musicum* orchestra on the Bach model, I encountered exactly these stylistic requirements and was educated in this way.

Henryk Szeryng's 1965 recording of the Sonatas and Partitas corresponds almost ideally to the requirements of Neue Sachlichkeit. Professional journals and music enthusiasts both

---

[105] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 142-43.
[106] NBR, 436.

perceived it as exemplary and groundbreaking. In this recording of the Chaconne, Szeryng chooses a moderate, but by no means slow tempo of 'crotchet=56' for the opening chords, which he holds steady throughout all the variations, so modifications in the tempo can barely be felt until the beginning of the section in major. There are no great oscillations in the dynamics either; an aesthetically cultivated, beautiful sound prevails, which produces a very homogenous general impression. This makes it easy to follow all the compositional details. As Bach's text contains no dynamic or agogic instructions, it is difficult to find fault with Szeryng's performance. From the point of view of violin technique, the intonation and tonal realisation are both flawless. Interestingly, Szeryng chooses Carl Flesch's version of the variation (in bars 97ff.), in the long development of the arpeggio part. This makes the structure appear somewhat irregular and discontinuous. As Szeryng was Carl Flesch's student in Berlin until his emigration in 1934, he probably first studied the Chaconne with him. Regarding the characterisation of the individual couplets, Szeryng only differentiates them to a very limited degree. The performance lays emphasis on playing each individual note as precisely as possible according to the score. Thus, the recording makes a disciplined, controlled, but somewhat 'detached' overall impression. This gives the listener a great deal of space for his own interpretation of what has been heard, which has its advantages. However, even though I initially argued for the independence of the listener within a potential triangle of forces composer-performer-listener, this recording asks the listener to perform quite a feat of imagination. Szeryng's performance, while convincing enough in its own way, is in many senses the exact opposite of Jascha Heifetz's interpretation of the Chaconne.

3.1.7 Heifetz (1)

The great violin pedagogue Carl Flesch already considered Jascha Heifetz an absolutely exceptional phenomenon among the great violinists of the twentieth century, and a great number of Heifetz recordings are still considered impossible to top, or even to equal. However, professionals are also in agreement that Heifetz's art focuses on the romantic/virtuoso realm, while his performances of the First Viennese School are not uncontroversial, even though they are also brilliant. Regarding Bach's *Soli*, Heifetz worked on the Sonatas and Partitas his entire life. He recorded BWV 1001, 1004 and 1005 for HIS MASTERS VOICE in 1935, and RCA Victor published a new recording of the entire cycle in 1952. The version of the Chaconne contained in this collection is the one I will discuss here.

By comparison with Szeryng's performance, the immediacy of Heifetz's approach to Bach's composition is striking. There is no sign of distance or artistic detachment here. Heifetz plunges into the piece without reservations, and his unmistakable personal-idiomatic violin sound can be heard in every note. It is difficult for the listener to withdraw from the appeal of this performance, which is due to the fact that Heifetz surrenders emotionally to the inner logic of Bach's variation structure, and instinctively, or perhaps calculatedly, combines the individual couplets in a large-scale arc. Heifetz's art depends on two separate factors: a great rhythmic energy in the 'motoric' passages on the one hand, and a radiant *Gesanglichkeit* (singing mode) in the lyric parts. Whether the character of the sound of Heifetz's *bel canto* 'fits' Bach's music is certainly a question of aesthetic and taste, and will not be discussed here. However, the way in which this *Gesanglichkeit* is employed is important for the rigor of the performance.

In essence, two components contribute to Heifetz's unmistakeable sound: a very intensive fast vibrato used throughout, and a special portamento (glissando) technique, which 'slurs' the notes. The intensive and uninterrupted use of the vibrato has many opponents, as it was not commonly used in Bach's time (if at all). As it is impossible to establish what kind of sound Bach required from his singers, or what *Gesanglichkeit* might have meant to him, a discussion of this point is not helpful. However, the same is not true of the portamenti. Portamento (from the Latin portare, to carry, that is, to carry the sound from one note to the next) is historically attested to in both singing and string playing. Walther's lexicon of 1732 contains the following regarding the French term of the same meaning, *Port de Voix*:[107]

> To carry the voice [...] is a style that results when the first of two notes [...] which are next to one another, is subtly played again after the second note; it is pulled towards the second and carried along [...].[108]

The use of the portamento on the violin appears to have been a question of taste in the eighteenth century – as it is today. As Burney writes, regarding certain fingerings of

---

[107] Walther uses this term in the sense of 'portamento'. The term can also act as a synonym of pincé (Mordent).
[108] Walther, ibid., 488 ('Ein Fort-Tragen der Stimme [...] ist eine Manier, so entstehet, wenn zwischen zweyen um einen grad von einander stehenden Noten, die vorhergehende tiefere oder höhere bey der drauf folgenden noch einmahl schleichend gerühret, zur folgenden gezogen und fortgetragen wird [...].').

Geminiani:

> Geminiani, however, was certainly mistaken in laying it down as a rule that no two notes on the same string, in shifting, should be played with the same finger; as beautiful expressions and effects are produced by great players in shifting suddenly from a low note to a high, with the same finger on the same string.[109]

Either way – whether in the bel canto of the human voice or in the creation of a melodic passage on a string instrument – portamento serves to connect two notes particularly closely, and is thus an intensification of the normal phrasing slur. Let us consider the use of the portamento in the recording (Figure 26):

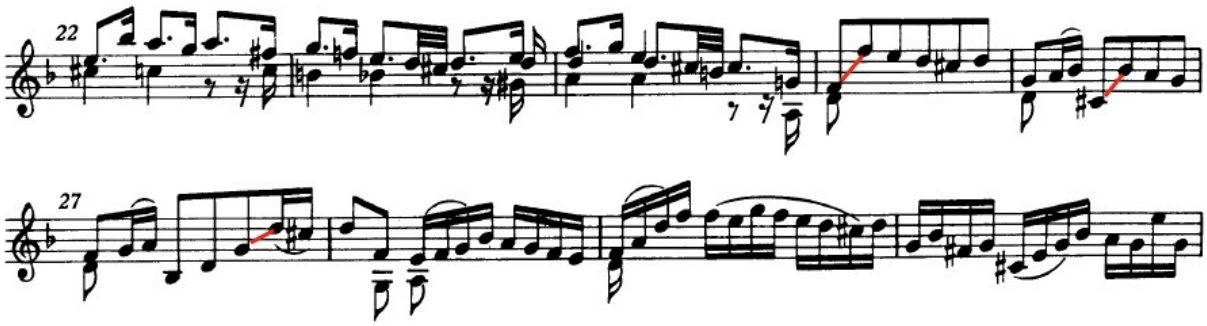

Fig. 26: BWV 1004/5, bars 22-30.

In the first monophonic couplet, Heifetz connects F4 and F5 (bar 25) immediately with a portamento of an octave. In the next bar (bar 26), C-sharp4 and B-flat4 are connected using a glissando. G4 and D5 are connected in bar 27, directly followed by a downward glissando linking D5 and F4. There is no doubt that this sounds extremely attractive on the violin. However, one wonders whether it makes musical sense, and whether it serves a better understanding of the composition. In order to answer this question, let us discuss Bach's compositional technique of his linear counterpoint.

---

[109] Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* (London, 1776-89), cited in David D. Boyden, *Die Geschichte des Violinspiels von seinen Anfängen bis 1761* (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1971), 433.

3.1.8 Excursus 2: Bach's Linear Counterpoint

In the book entitled *Grundlagen des Linearen Kontrapunkts – Bachs melodische Polyphonie* (The foundations of linear counterpoint – Bach's melodic polyphony), published in 1916, Ernst Kurth shows how Bach used the principle of polyphony in monophonic voice-leading as well as in polyphonic compositions. This proves to be meaningful, or even necessary, if longer pieces, potentially composed of several movements, are to be composed for unaccompanied melody instruments such as the violin or the cello. The complexity of linear counterpoint is what makes it possible for longer monophonic passages, or even entire monophonic movements to be interesting and varied.

The simplest example of such a technique is the breaking of chords into individual notes. Let us take for example the couplet in bars 53-56: the first eight semiquavers in all four bars are simply a broken version of the Romanesca chords: D minor, C major, B-flat major and A major. For this reason these monophonic passages have a harmonic quality in addition to their melodic character. But this is not all; two further components also play a role in this variation (Figure 27).

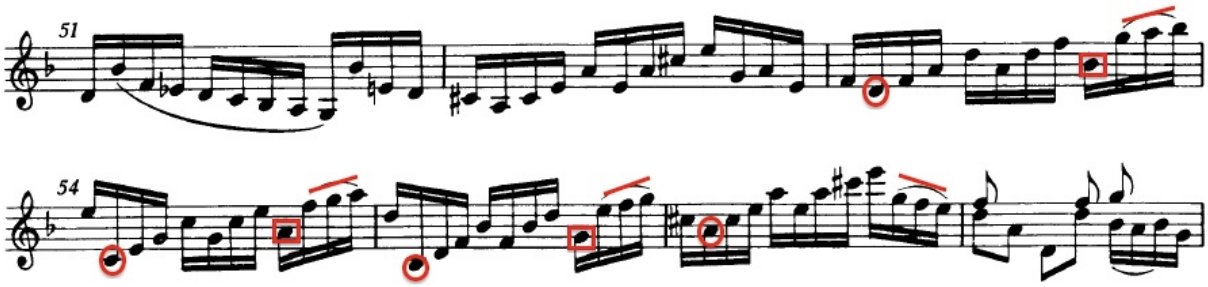

Fig. 27: BWV 1004/5, bars 51-57.

The last three semiquavers of every bar function as diatonic upbeats to the following chords, and the implied mediant, which drives the further harmonic development of the sequences, appears with the notes B-flat4, A4 and G4 on the third beat. In this variation, which contains 48 running semiquavers, a multi-layer musical process is transformed into a monophonic line.

The musical events are drawn apart in time, thus requiring a particularly attentive listener. One might call this compositional technique an asynchronous polyphony[110].

If the listener succeeds in connecting the disparate notes in a coherent line, and brings it out from a latent state into the light, then the composition will have an even more convincing effect due to the listener's own contribution.[111] This is exactly the point made above regarding the composer-performer-listener triangle of forces. An attentive and active listener is required in order to understand and enjoy the linear counterpoint.

By comparison, the polyphony is easier to follow if there is a greater distance between the two lines.[112] One can speak of a 'division of the voice'[113] in the variation, in bars 33-36. A 'vivid apparent polyphony' is created by 'distancing the bottom line (...D-C-sharp-C-B-B-flat-A) from the rest of the melodic line'.[114] The term 'asynchronous polyphony' is preferred to Kurth's term, 'apparent polyphony', as it is possible to perceive real polyphony here. I consider 'apparent polyphony' to be applicable to something like the 'pseudo-polyphonic' G minor Adagio BWV 1001/1, where the musical subject wanders through the various voices, staying for a shorter or longer amount of time and then moving on again to follow its melodic path.[115]

Kurth describes a set of compositional principles that Bach uses in his solo compositions for the violin and the cello, in order to give the monophonic melody greater complexity in terms of compositional content. He provides examples for 'implied polyphony in sequences', 'implied harmonic bass voices', 'the rounding of apparent voices using chordal outlines' and

---

[110] The modern recognised phrase would be: 'a compound melodic line'.
[111] Fanselau, ibid., 99 ('Gelingt es dem Hörer, die Verbindung verteilter Töne zu einer zusammenhängenden Linie herzustellen und diese aus der Latenz ans Licht zu holen, dann wird gerade durch den eigenen Beitrag die Wirkung der Komposition um so überzeugender sein.').
[112] Cf. Stacey Davis, *Stream Segregation and Perceived Syncopation: Analyzing the Rhythmic Effects of Implied Polyphony in Bach's Unaccompanied String Works*. http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.1/mto.11.17.1.davis.php (retrieved, 11/12/2015).
[113] Ernst Kurth, *Grundlagen des Linearen Kontrapunkts, 2. Auflage* (Berlin: Hesse, 1922), 279 ('eine Spaltung der Stimme').
[114] Ibid., ('Durch die Distanzierung der unteren Linie (...d-cis-c-h-b-a), vom übrigen melodischen Zug isoliert, [entsteht] plastisch eine Scheinzweistimmigkeit').
[115] See below, Chapter 3.3.

'implied pedal points'.[116] Bach's imagination in the creation of the individual voices appears simply inexhaustible.

Bach did not reserve the compositional technique of linear counterpoint for his solo works. A well-known, easily recognisable example for the polyphony of an accompanied single voice is the beginning of the D minor Double Concerto for two Violins (BWV 1043) (Figure 28).

Fig. 28: BWV 1043, bars 1-3, second violin.

Here, the first six encircled notes of the melody propose an independent descending chromatic line.

3.1.9 Heifetz (2)

Let us now return to the question whether Heifetz's use of the portamenti (glissandi) in the variation in bars 25 ff., is appropriate.

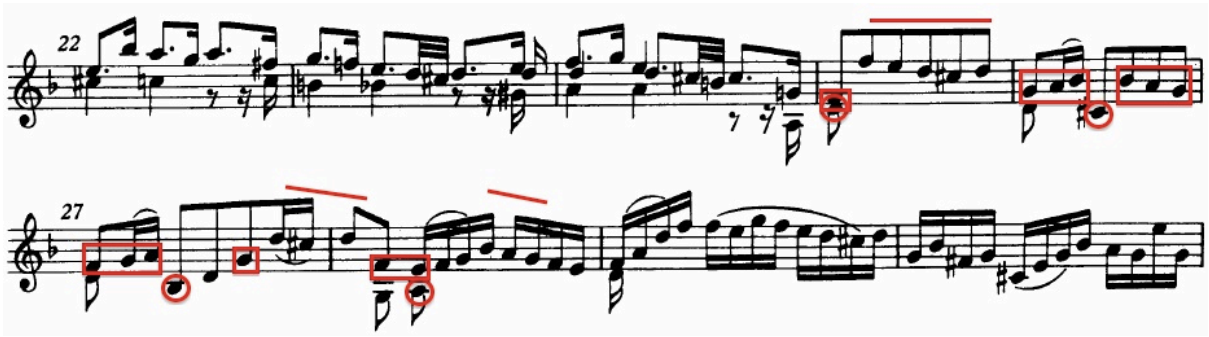

Fig. 29: BWV 1004/5, bars 22-30.

One can clearly identify three lines in the score (Figure 29). The bass line is defined by the

[116] Ibid., 283, 286, 289, 294 ('Mehrstimmigkeitsandeutungen in Sequenzen'; 'Rundung von Scheinstimmen über akkordliche Umrisse'; 'Andeutung von Harmonie-Baßstimmen'; 'Andeutung von Orgelpunktstimmen').

Romanesca (encircled), and the upper voice begins with F5 in bar 25 (pausing in bar 26, and returning only in the last two semiquavers of bar 27). The middle voice begins in bar 25 with F4, and is easy to follow (framed, above). This analysis shows that Heifetz connects the middle voice to the upper voice with the first glissando from F4 to F5 (Figure 26). The next glissando from C-sharp4 to B-flat4 (bar 26) connects the bass to the middle voice. In the next bar, the portamento from G4 to D5 fuses the middle and upper voices once again. This does not appear to make much sense. In order to help the listener recognise the disguised polyphony of the passage, one should perform the individual lines with *Gesanglichkeit*. If these voices are not continuously present (due to the fact that the violin is primarily used as a monophonic instrument), it becomes necessary to simulate the melodic connection within each voice. In our specific example, the performer should signal that the return of the upper voice at the end of bar 27 is connected to the final D5 of bar 25. The same is true of the middle voice in its entirety.

As noted above, the portamento serves to link two notes particularly closely through *Gesanglichkeit*. On the other hand, Heifetz's portamenti in this variation may cause some confusion. It is clear that creating a connection between separate musical lines which do not belong together, does not help to make the passage easier to understand. However, this criticism is directed only at the use of portamenti in this particular place, and not at Heifetz's use of portamento in general. Let us consider variation 33ff:

Fig. 30: BWV 1004/5, bars 31-34.

In Figure 30, Heifetz plays a glissando in ascending fourths from F5 to B-flat5 (bar 33) and from E5 to A5 (bar 34). Independently as to whether one 'likes' these glissandi, they occur within a single line, and thus illustrate the structure of this variation, rather than distract the listener from it.

Heifetz's performance of the development leading up to the great arpeggio passage (bar 89) is very convincing. His interpretation gains complexity especially with the clear increase in

tempo at the beginning of the variation (bar 57ff.). Later composers might have indicated this passage be played *deciso*. Thus, this point marks an increase in intensity which moves towards a first dramatic climax by way of rapid 'Motorik' and racing chains of demisemiquavers (bars 65ff.) which are, incidentally, slurred by Heifetz. Following that climax, the tempo is gradually decreased with added trills in the upbeats (bars 73ff.). After the pent up energy is released in flowing semiquavers (starting in bar 77), an unprecedented harmonic event occurs in bar 81ff. The Romanesca bass appears for the first time in D major. However, it can still be difficult to perceive it, due to the diminished chords above it.

In Heifetz's interpretation, this part is the 'inner' emotional peak of the entire first part in minor. Using his characteristic sound, which employs portamento and is enormously intensive even in the moderate dynamic ranges, he creates a centre of tension here which results very naturally in the long arc of the ensuing arpeggio passage (bars 89-120). It is much easier to recognise the structure of the piece here than in Szeryng's neo-classical, 'neutral' interpretation.

Introduced by a brilliant demisemiquaver variation (bars 85-88, which is, incidentally, one of the few couplets that do not follow the general 2x4 bar scheme), this part requires particular attention with regard to violin technique. While the first crotchet beat of bar 89 is written in demisemiquavers, the following bars (until bar 120) are written in chords with the instruction 'Arpeggio'. As three- and four-note chords alternate in irregular periods (starting in bar 103), the demisemiquaver scheme given by Bach cannot be sustained. As Walther's *Lexikon* says:

> Arpeggiare (Ital.): to play as if on a harp, that is, with broken chords, playing the notes in a chord one by one, and not all at once.[117]

The exact execution of arpeggios was – if not specified by the composer – always left to the performer. The various editions of the solos thus offer quite different variants.

The Joachim-Moser edition of 1908 suggests the use of double-stopping for the two lower

---

[117] Walther, ibid., 51 ('Arpeggiare (ital.) auf Harffen Art, d.i. gebrochen spielen, oder den vorkommenden Griff nicht zugleich, sondern die in selbigem enthaltene(n) Noten eintzeln, und nacheinander anschlagen.').

voices in the third and the first crotchet in bars 103-104, in order to keep the rhythm for the four-note chords (Figure 31).

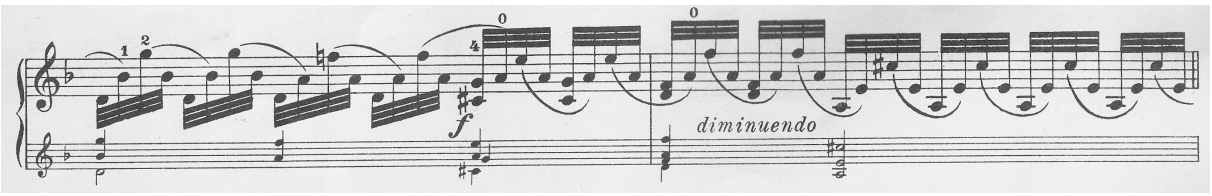

Fig. 31: BWV 1004/5, bars 103-104, Joachim/Moser edition.[118]

Starting in bar 105, the text switches to demisemiquaver sextuplets which make it possible to break both three- and four-note chords, breaking the three-note chords by playing the top and bottom strings twice (Figure 32).

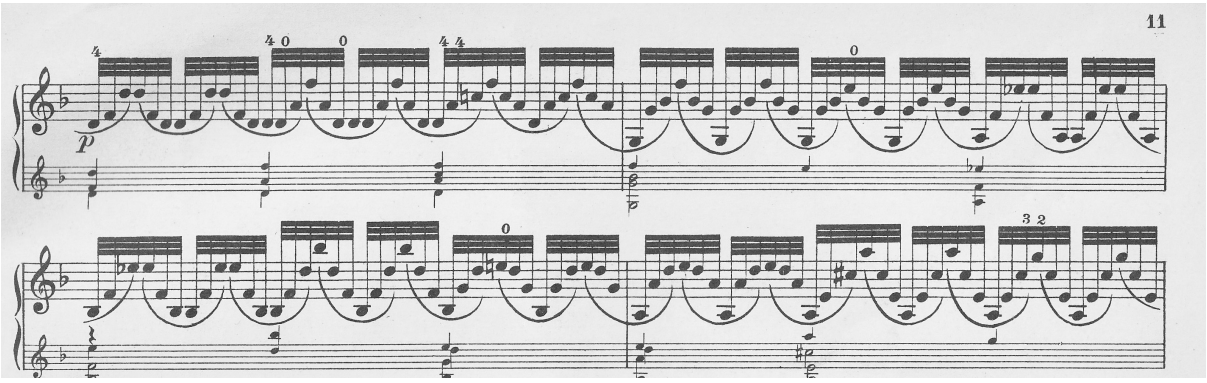

Fig. 32: BWV 1004/5, bars 105-108. [119]

Understandably, there is an attempt here to define a precise metric structure for the performance of the passage. However, in his own concerts, Joseph Joachim did not follow the instructions that he (later) published in his edition of the *Soli*, as we can see in the following letter, written in 1879 to one of the publishers of the Bach complete edition, Alfred Dörffel:

> For example, the effect of the arpeggios resides, to my mind, in a broadly planned **crescendo** to be performed in such a way that, as the volume increases

[118] Bach (Joachim and Moser), ibid., Vol. 1, 10.
[119] Ibid.

> towards the end, the four demisemiquavers gradually become 5 and then 6 notes, until the 6 notes dominate, and the bass appears more markedly. I myself do not really know when I start with the 5 or 6 notes: it depends on whether I start the **crescendo** earlier or later, which in turn depends on things in the moment, on my more or less excited mood, on better or worse bow hairs which are easier to play in **piano** or in **forte**, on thinner or thicker strings, and who knows what other random influences! But I do not believe that this can be written down. If one were to write it down one way or the other, it would portray Bach's text in an overly subjective fashion.[120]

However, one should not forget that Joachim made these claims regarding the improvisational character of this section a quarter of a century before making his first gramophone recording.

As suggested above, many interpretations including the three recordings cited here, follow Carl Flesch's suggestion to vary the character of the arpeggiation in the manner shown below (Figure 33).[121]

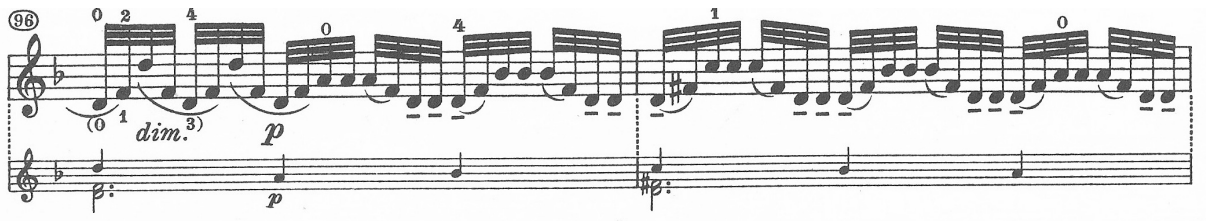

Fig. 33: BWV 1004/5, bars 97-98, Flesch Edition.[122]

Comparing the different violin edition versions with the form chosen by Brahms for his piano

---

[120] Fanselau, ibid., 125 ('Die Wirkung der Arpeggien z.B. liegt für mich darin, ein breit angelegtes **Crescendo** derartig auszuführen, daß mit der Steigerung der Tonstärke sich gegen Ende hin allmälig 5 und dann 6 Noten aus den vier 32steln entwickeln, bis die sechs Noten die Oberhand behalten, wo dann auch der Baß markirter hervortritt. Wann ich anfange mit den 5 oder 6 Noten, weiß ich wirklich selbst nicht: es wird je nachdem ich einmal früher oder später **crescendiere** wechseln, was wieder von momentanen Dingen abhängt, wie von minder oder mehr erregter Stimmung, besseren oder schlechteren Bogenhaaren, die leichter im **piano** oder im **forte** ansprechen, dünnern oder dickern Saiten, ja was weiß ich für Zufälligkeiten! Aber aufschreiben läßt sich's meines Erachtens nicht. Täte man's in der einen oder andern Manier, so würde der Bachsche Text zu subjektiv gefärbt dastehen.').

[121] Flesch does not count the opening bar of the Ciaccona as the first bar. The bar given here as bar 96 is, in reality, bar 97.

[122] Bach (Flesch), ibid., 63.

arrangement[123] reveals the diversity of the variations in this series of chords. The decision to choose a rhythmically relatively linear structure focused on the dynamic progressions, or to use a variety of figurations to make the development lively, depends on the overall concept. I prefer a more even performance in terms of figuration, which enables one to play extremely softly over an extended period of time. This is possible without a loss of tension if a necessary amount of restrained energy has been accumulated in the development. The only appearance of the Romanesca in ascending form follows (in bars 109-12, in chromatic motion), lending itself to a powerful increase in intensity as allowed by the instrument. The same Romanesca then leads downwards in the descant (starting in bar 113) and concludes with the first, surprising tonic major third in the final arpeggio couplet.

3.1.10 Milstein

Henryk Szeryng studied in Berlin with Carl Flesch, and in Paris, and his education was thus more or less 'European'; Jascha Heifetz and Nathan Milstein came from the Russian school of violin playing. Heifetz and Milstein had the same teacher, Leopold Auer, who demanded that his students make the violin 'sing'. Many of Auer's other students also had this ability, such as Mischa Elman, Efrem Zimbalist and Toscha Seidel. However, Milstein's 'cantilena' is fundamentally different from that of Heifetz's, even though the latter was only a little older. As his students reported, Heifetz's unmistakable personal bel canto turned the simplest melody, even if it was only a scale, into a violinistic event. By contrast, Milstein's creativity manifests itself in the 'creation' of musical lines. Using a very idiosyncratic, inimitable bowing technique (Milstein always used the entire bowing arm, never the right wrist or the fingers), he succeeded in creating long musical phrases without audible bow changes. This ability, when put to use in Bach's solo compositions, can help the listener perceive the sound of the unaccompanied violin, which sounded incomplete due to the lack of a bass foundation, to be appealing and exciting.

This may have been one of the reasons why a larger audience now listened enthusiastically to Bach's solos in concert. To the best of my knowledge, Milstein was the first great violinist to

[123] See Appendix 4

dedicate a large part of his concerts purely to Bach solos.[124] Concertgoers and critics were equally impressed. Joachim Kaiser, who was the most influential music critic in the German-speaking world in the last third of the twentieth century, wrote the following about a concert at the Salzburger Festspiele (August 1, 1966):

> Milstein plays the violin so well that he can permit himself to treat Bach's solo sonatas simply as good violin music. He plays a presto by Bach with so much fire as though it were by Tartini, a fugue by Bach with a dramatic tempo as though it were purely for fun, an adagio by Bach with a tone as though it were melodious. And it swiftly becomes apparent that the adagio is melodious, the fugue is fun and the presto is indeed a very good violin piece (a, may I use the horrible word, showpiece).[125]

As a student, I often had the opportunity to experience Milstein's Bach performances live, and I was fascinated by the fact that he seemed to combine two apparently entirely opposite approaches in a natural fashion. On the one hand, Milstein had musical verve: he was a virtuoso who could play the violin at the highest levels and employed this style for Bach's solos. However, his interpretations never seemed as though he were using Bach's score to show off his fabulous violin playing. Instead, his virtuosity appeared to have been charged by Bach's music itself. In this respect, Joachim Kaiser's review, cited above, is in line with my own opinion.

It is not easy to find the right words to describe Milstein's art. He plays the first eight bars of the Chaconne slower than Szeryng and Heifetz. Measurement reveals that the tempo is 'crotchet=46'. This gives the theme a monumental quality. Starting with bar 8, Milstein immediately starts to play in a swifter tempo (approx., crotchet=52), which becomes quicker in the ensuing semiquaver and quaver passages. The tempo of the 'deciso' section (bar 57) is already 'crotchet=70', and the next demisemiquaver variations are even quicker (approx., crotchet=80). This large increase in the tempo is always defined by *rubati*, which are

---

[124] He occasionally added a few Caprices by Paganini or his own *Paganiniana* to his Bach programmes.

[125] *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* August 4, 1966 ('Milstein kann so gut Geige spielen, dass er es sich gestatten darf, Bachs Solosonaten einfach als gute Violinmusik zu verstehen. Er spielt ein Bachsches Presto mit einem Feuer, als wäre es von Tartini, eine Bachsche Fuge mit dem dramatischen Tempo, als dürfe sie Spaß machen, ein Bachsches Adagio mit einem Ton, als wäre es melodiös. Und rasch erweist sich: das Adagio ist melodiös, die Fuge macht Spaß und das Presto ist tatsächlich ein sehr gutes Geigerstück (ein, ich wage das schreckliche Wort, Effektstück).').

introduced very naturally. As a result, both the flow of the music and its formal structure can be understood with much clarity. In my opinion, the outstanding quality of Milstein's interpretation is due to the fact that he 'hears out' the music, paying attention to the tiniest harmonic and figurative details; in other words, he transforms them into meaningful units for the listener. Arguably, it is impossible to state the reasons why a listener is persuaded, or perhaps even moved, by a particular interpretation.

3.2 The Dance Movements – Approached through the Baroque Affective Theory (BWV 1004/1-4 and BWV 1002)

The movements that precede the monumental Ciaccona would form – even without it – a complete suite in terms of Baroque music. These consist of: Allemanda (Allemande) – Corrente (Courante) – Sarabanda (Sarabande) – Giga (Gigue). Since the second partita to be examined here (BWV 1002) is structured in an almost identical way, namely Allemanda – Corrente – Sarabande – Tempo di Borea, for comparative reasons I have decided to examine various aspects of both works together. A central consideration that is quite useful in the attempt to understand compositions of the Baroque era is laid out in the Baroque Affective Theory (also called doctrine of the affections).[126]

The fundamental concept of Baroque music practice was to move the audience through a series of emotions. In doing so, the musician applied similar techniques common to the orator. Orators have 'the same aim in regard to both the preparation and the final execution of their productions, namely to make themselves masters of the hearts of their listeners, to arouse or still their passions, and to transport them now to this sentiment, now to that'.[127] It was not just the composer who had to compose his works in such a way, but the performer, likewise, had to act according to this fundamental concept: 'the best composition may be marred by poor execution, just as a mediocre composition may be improved and enhanced by

[126] See, for instance, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *Baroque music today: music as speech* (Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 1988).
[127] Quantz, ibid., 119.

a good execution'.[128] Thus, the competent interpreter had to act like a good orator: 'Now since instrumental music is nothing other than speech in tones or oratory in sound, it must actually be always based on a specific affection'.[129]

The best-known depiction of the aspects relevant in this context can be found in Johann Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, from 1739. Even though all dance forms are highly stylised in Bach's instrumental compositions (and were certainly not intended for dance), the title of each dance movement bears a programmatic function which claims the central character of the movement:

> Now the Allemande is a broken, serious, and well-constructed harmony, which is the image of a content (zufrieden) or **satisfied** (vergnügt) spirit, which enjoys good order and calm.[130]

To produce this 'good order' and tranquility for the B minor Allemanda, the violinist must avoid rendering the 'feeling' of quaver motion. Each bar has to be performed in a slow four, gaining momentum from an almost continuous motion of dotted semiquavers. The triplets employed on all upbeats and for the dotted rhythms will likely result in a 2:1 ratio. Yet, this 'source of energy' must not be pushed to the fore of the articulation as otherwise – figuratively speaking – the striding could turn to a stumbling. The variation of this movement – the Double – is notated in *alla breve* metre, and is to be played much faster than the main movement. However, it should not differ too excessively from the fundamental character of the primary movement as otherwise the 'affective' association to the Double will be compromised.

---

[128] Ibid., 120.
[129] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 208.
[130] Ibid., 464.

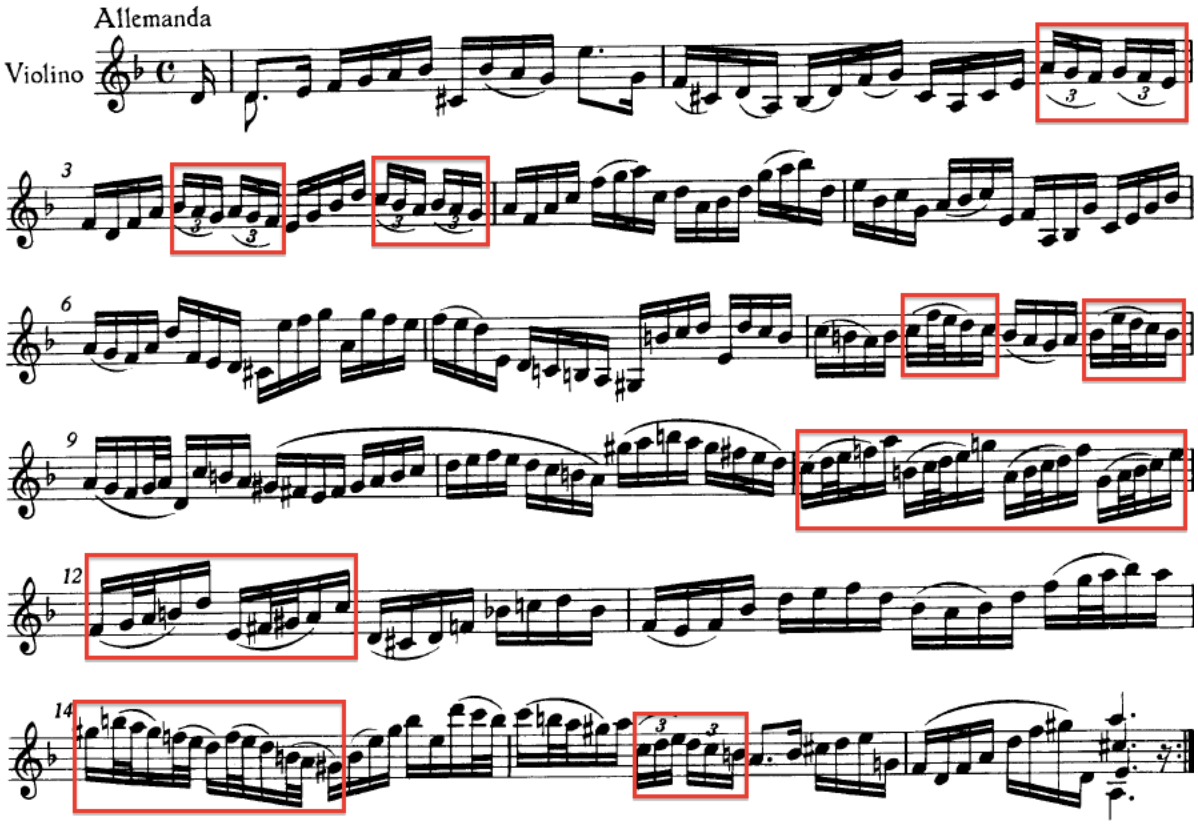

Fig. 34: BWV 1004/1, bars 1-16.

The D minor Allemanda complies even more with the 'contented' or 'satisfied' spirit implied by the main movement affect than does its sister movement in B minor. It is completely devoid of energetic dotted rhythms and contains instead slurred semiquaver-triplets and five-note figures comprising three semiquavers and two demisemiquavers (Figure 34, framed). The latter figure should not be articulated too capriciously as otherwise the well-balanced harmony might be affected. The tempo must rather be faster than that taken for the B minor movement, or else the slur in bars 9-10 would not be feasible.

> The passion or affection (Gemüths=Bewegung), which should be performed in a courante is a sweet **hopefulness**. For there is something of the hearty, something of the longing, and also something of the cheerful in this melody: only those things from which hope is composed.[131]

[131] Ibid., 462.

Mattheson presents a musical example for each of these three 'characteristics' of 'hopefulness', and is proud to be able to – allegedly – perceive them in all Courantes. I will apply this approach to the D minor Corrente (Figure 35).

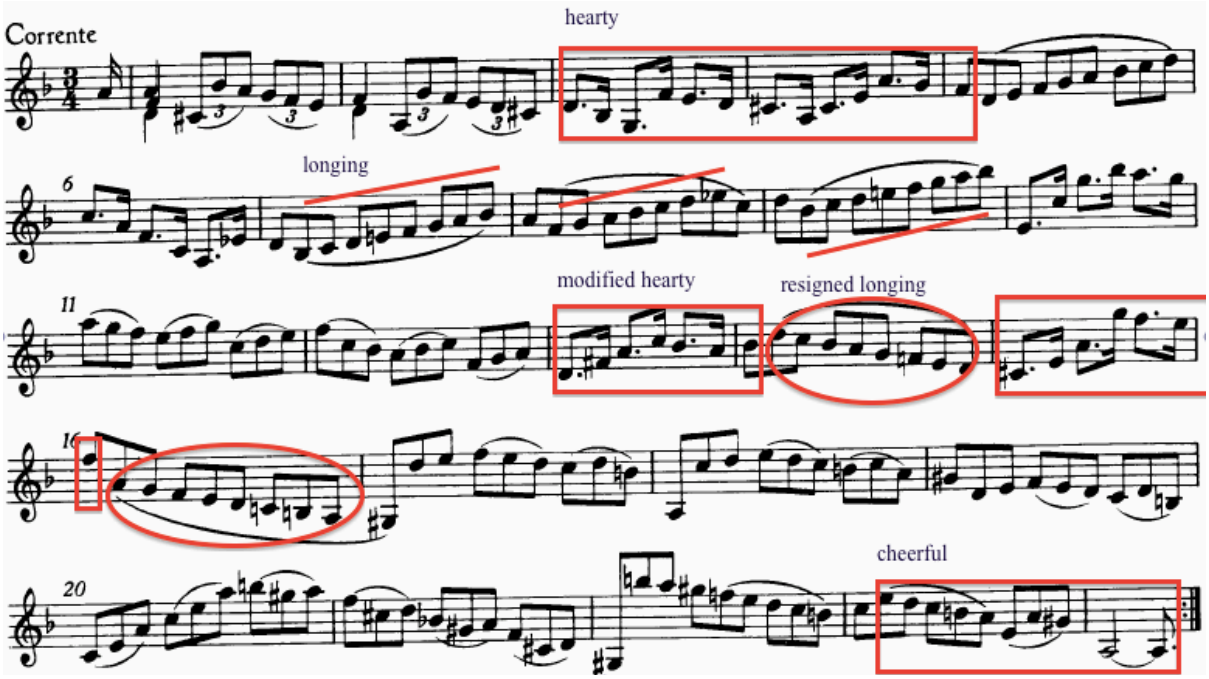

Fig. 35: BWV 1004/2, bars 1-24.

The first characteristic, 'hearty', can be associated with the figures encompassing bars 3-5 (first quaver) (see Figure 35, affects written above staves); the 'longing' could be expressed in bars 7-9 (rising triplet motion). Mattheson's 'hearty' would return in a modified form (bars 13 and 15), each time interrupted by the resigned instances of 'longing' (bars 14 and 16, shown as descending scales), to be finally implemented in a more 'modest' way towards the cadence, the last two bars resolving to the 'cheerful' (enclosed).

A tonally, as well as dynamically differentiated interpretation of these three affects, could contribute to a better understanding of this type of movement.

In the B minor Corrente, which consists solely of chains of quavers, the elements of 'hopefulness' are more difficult to discern, but are compensated by other criteria of affection. The characteristics of the key (B minor, see below) lessen the emotion of 'hope'; the same applies to the Double.

With reference to the Sarabande, Mattheson applies the term *Ehrsucht* (an old-fashioned term for 'ambition'). What is meant here is an attitude that, figuratively, takes itself seriously. As a standard third movement of the instrumental dance suite, the Sarabande had, over time, evolved into a serious slow movement in three-four or three-two time, often with emphasis on the second beat. There is a close affinity to the Chaconne and Passacaglia and also to the Folia. Thus, an interpretation of a Sarabande would ideally combine the affects 'ambition' and 'seriousness' in its expressive quality. The texture of both Sarabande movements under discussion here would suggest that the performer, symbolically, assumes the attitude of a person who is just about to say, to do, or to proclaim something that is significant.

The B minor Sarabande is identified through its French terminology (ending with 'e' instead of 'a'). This could imply that Bach intended to differentiate between the French and Italian styles to stress 'the Italians' unfettered, capricious, expressive and virtuoso approach to composition and performance, in contrast to the formal severity, refined precision and thoroughly ordered, mannered approach of the French'[132]. I personally do not believe that Bach wanted a different stylistic approach to performing this movement (owing to the use of French and Italian terms). In Ledbetter's words, it may be 'just a slip of the pen',[133] an opinion that I share.

Mattheson's definition of the Gigue is more useful to the performer:

> Finally the Italian Gige, which are not used for dancing, but for fiddling (Geige) (from which its name may also derive), force themselves to extreme speed or volatility; though frequently in a flowing and uninterrupted manner: perhaps like the smooth arrow-swift flow of a stream.[134]

The Gigue from the *D minor Partita* is certainly a virtuoso movement, and expects the performer to play rather smooth and 'polished' phrasing. The character of the corresponding fourth movement of the *B minor Partita* is quite different, written as Tempo di Borea, thus

---

[132] Robin Stowell, *The Early Violin and Viola: a Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83.
[133] Ledbetter, ibid., 115.
[134] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 457.

indicating a Bourée. It is characterised by a '**contentment** and **pleasantness**, as if it were somewhat **untroubled** (unbekümmert)**,** or **calm**, a little slow, easy-going and yet not unpleasant'.[135]

The term 'untroubled' (in German, 'unbekümmert', which also means careless) is perfectly suited to the Tempo di Borea. Here, the challenge for the performer is to appear as if he is untroubled while playing the four-voice chords technically correctly. The Double (just as the previous Double) enforces the character of the preceding main movement rather than contrasting with it.

One other criterion that helps define the fundamental character of a piece is the key in which it is written. Mattheson refers to B minor as 'bizarre, cheerless and melancholic'.[136] The terms 'bizarre' and 'cheerless' are certainly reflected in the Tempo di Borea, whereas in the Allemanda and the Sarabande*,* a melancholic attitude cannot be denied.

With regard to the key of D minor – a popular key in the Baroque and frequently used by Bach – the qualities listed by Mattheson include: humble, calm, greatness, pleasant, placid and satisfying. [137] Mattheson, moreover, states that the key is more fluent and jigging, which makes it especially suited for heroic motives. These qualities almost reflect the above-mentioned emotions of the individual dance movements literally. This might be one reason for the remarkable consistency that characterises the *D minor Partita* in spite of the complexity in the structure of the individual movements.

I would now like to suggest how four of the most central affections depicted in Mattheson could be applied to the movements of the partitas under discussion here. These are: 'joy'(*Freude*), 'sadness' (*Traurigkeit*), 'hope' (*Hoffnung*) and 'despair' (*Verzweiflung*). Since the two partitas were both written in a minor key, one cannot expect a lot of obvious joy. However, let us have a look at the D minor Sarabanda (BWV 1004/3), bars 27-29 (Figure 36):

---

[135] Ibid., 454.
[136] Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: B. Schiller, 1713), 250.
[137] Ibid., 236.

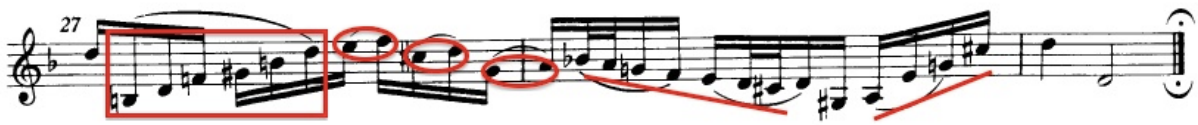

Fig. 36: BWV 1004/3, bars 27-29.

> If one knows that sadness is a **contraction** (of our soul) then it is easy to see that the **small** and **smallest** intervals are the most suitable for this passion.[138]

The dissonant, ascending and broken, diminished chord spanning over one-and-a-half octaves (bar 27, enclosed), and three minor second intervals (circled), suggest an affection associated with sadness, especially through the use of the chromatic second – an interval frequently associated with grief. The passage continues with a descending seven-note scale (indicated by the connecting line) containing no fewer than three other minor seconds stressing this 'unhappiness'.

> Since (…) joy is an **expansion (**of these subtle parts of our body), thus it follows reasonably and naturally that I could best express this affect by **large** and **expanded** intervals.[139]

The final ascending, arpeggiated dominant-seventh chord (shown in Figure 37 by the diagonal line) may be subjectively associated with moderate enjoyment.

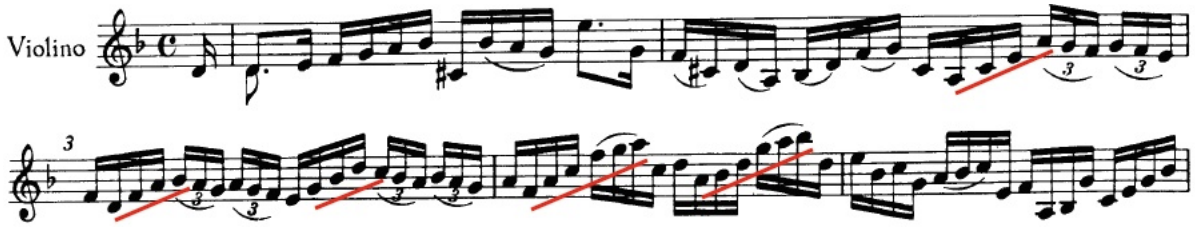

Fig. 37: BWV 1004/1, bars 1-5.

> Hope is an **elevation** of the soul or spirits; but despair is a **depression**[140] of this:

---

[138] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 105.
[139] Ibid., 104.
[140] German, 'Niedersturz', may be better translated as 'downfall'.

> all of which are things which can very naturally be represented with sound, especially when the other circumstances (tempo in particular) contribute their part. And in this way one can form a sensitive concept of all the emotions and compose accordingly.[141]

Figure 37 shows the beginning of the *D minor Partita*. Even in such a key (of D minor), the five steps of elevation (Figure 37, underlined) may be figuratively understood as a message of hope.

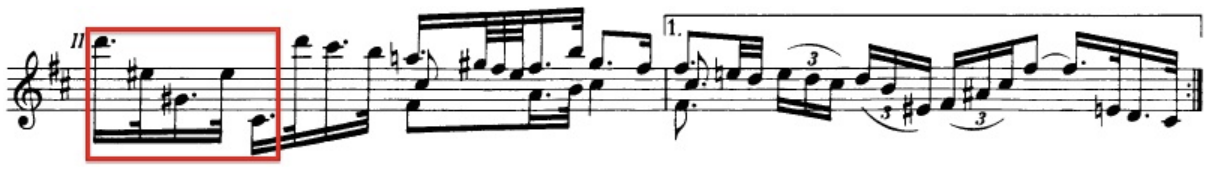

Fig. 38: BWV 1002/1, bars 11-12.

Figure 38 shows an unusually abrupt descending motion which one can interpret figuratively as 'disappointment of hope'. Note that Bach considered this figure so important that he used it resolutely in the Double as well.

3.3 Some additional Reflections on the *G minor Sonata* (BWV 1001)

In conclusion, I would like to share a few ideas for the interpretation of the *G minor Sonata* strictly from the view of an MS performer.

Concerning the Adagio, Dorottya Fabian writes:

> Among the recordings under examination here, Huggett, Wallfisch, Barton Pine, Ibragimova, Mullova and others provide variedly flexible interpretations that create the impression of free ornamentation, while Fischer, Khatchatryan, Ehnes, Mintz, Perlman and others provide much more literal and measured readings.[142]

[141] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 105.
[142] Fabian (2013), ibid., 8.

I will explain whether Bach's ornamentation is more than a simple embellishment of a melody.

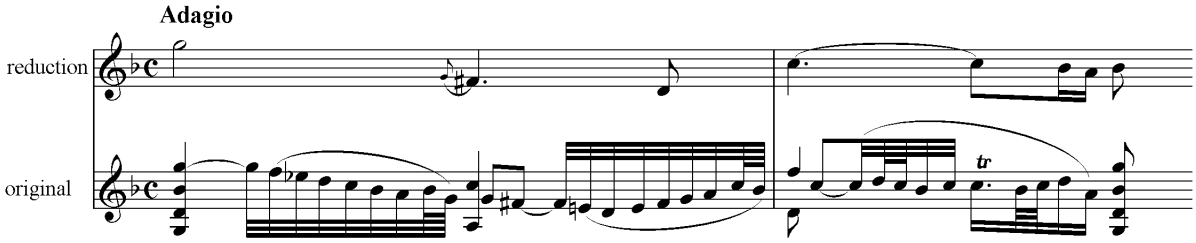

Fig. 39: BWV 1001/1, bars 1-2.[143]

Figure 39 shows the original version of Bach's Adagio on the lower stave, with the top stave reserved to depict a hypothetical version of how Corelli, for instance, would have noted down the performance of this piece. Bach's version is a clear display of ornamentation, leaving no space for improvisation or alternative embellishments. Without going into the well-known debate between Scheibe and Birnbaum,[144] Bach's original is certainly much more complex and surpasses a mere embellishment of the 'reduction' given in the top stave. In the reduction, the apparent polyphony of the piece is not taken into consideration. The four chords in the example are not simply accompaniment, but part of the 'polyphonic' structure of the piece. Bach's intent here is to give the impression of a polyphonic four-voice or, at least, a three-voice composition.[145] We can find a descriptive account of this compound line technique in Spitta's description of the Adagio:

> In the beautiful and impassioned introductory adagio of the first sonata in G minor, the melody first appears in the middle part; the upper part meanwhile is progressive in single notes and phrases and seem to vanish away; it is then lightly touched in the course of the melody, and so brought to sight again; but it is there all along for him who can hear it. From bar 14, where the melodic phrases of the opening are repeated in C minor, the upper part plays the principal role; the middle part is not on that account inactive, but often displays

[143] Figure drawn from ibid. (inaccurate rhythm in the reduction of bar 2 in the original).
[144] Cf., for instance, Wolff, ibid., 465-67.
[145] This issue is also neglected in Frederick Neumann, 'Some Performance Problems of Bach's unaccompanied Violin and Cello Works', in *Eighteenth-century music in theory and practice*, ed. M. A. Parker (Stuyvesand: Pendragon Press, 1994), 24.

> remarkable independence. The same method is of course pursued with the lower part; the melody has often to be interrupted for a moment in order to play a short bass note, and often the bass is vaguely heard through the ornamental figures. It is quite an exception when the treatment is in more than three parts, allowing of course for the single four-part chords occasionally thrown in for the sake of fulness.[146]

The F-sharp5 at the beginning of the second bar, thus, not only forms part of an accompanying harmonisation, but simultaneously a continuation of the G5 in the soprano voice which marks the beginning of the Adagio. The melody, in contrast, abandons the soprano line and shifts to the middle voice – an example of pseudo-polyphony. The piece certainly appears to be written in a polyphonic pattern, although it is not – it is a complex product of Bach's technique of writing compound lines (referred to above).

Whether one prefers Bach's embellishments to sound more improvised, or to be executed in a rather literal way, is what I believe to be a question of taste. More importantly, the wanderings of the musical subject across the different voices have to be performed in such a way that the corresponding horizontal relations of the apparent voices become clearly noticeable.

Concerning the second movement (Fuga), I will now present two very concrete suggestions for the performance of the fugue BWV 1001/2. On the second beat of bar 53, the autograph has a clearly written pause in the upper voice instead of a G5 (shown below in Figure 45), as one would strongly expect here. One may ask: did Bach do this for voice-leading reasons to avoid hidden fifths? In my final performance of the fugue, I will add the G5 to complete the subject. Interestingly, in Bach's version of the same work for lute, the G5 is actually written.

In addition, there is a second place where uncertainty arises with regard to the correctness of Bach's original text. In the two other Fugues (BWV 1003/2 and BWV 1005/2), the chromatic harmonisation of the subject is of central importance. Since a chromatic voice leading would be most plausible on the fourth beat of bar 83, for my final performance I will change the E-flat to E-natural. This way, a perfect chromatic voice can be accomplished. A similar

---

[146] Spitta, 78ff.

example of chromatic voice leading is encountered in, for instance, bars 30-31.[147]

When playing the third movement (Siciliana), one has to be very careful when choosing the appropriate tempo. Bearing in mind that this follows a *sonata da chiesa* structure, this movement must be considered slow in character. Quantz suggests a pulse of 80 crotchets (i.e. two quavers) per minute for the Siciliana,[148] which results in an approximate tempo of 53 for a dotted crotchet.[149] According to my judgement, a balanced approach is best suited here, which considers both the dance character and the *cantabile* quality implied by the text. Further, discussions on the possibility of embellishing the Siciliana are now common (see Figure 40).

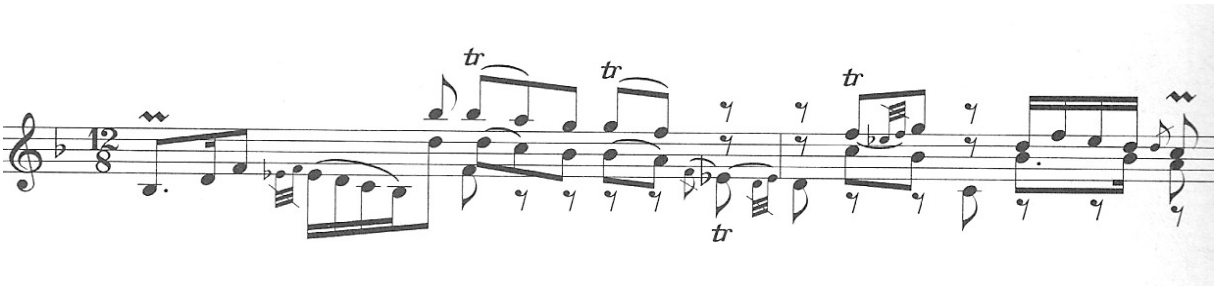

Fig. 40: BWV 1001/3, embellished by Lester.[150]

In my opinion, Joel Lester's proposal is already going a bit too far. According to Quantz, the Siciliana should 'be played very simply, not too slowly […], few graces may be introduced other than some slurred semiquavers and appoggiaturas'.[151] As a mainstream-orientated performer, I do not see the necessity of adding any embellishment to Bach's original version.

[147] See Jaap Schröder, *Bach's Solo Violin Works: a Performer's Guide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 63f., for a discussion of the subject.
[148] Quantz, ibid., 287.
[149] This is almost the tempo of a Viennese waltz!
[150] Joel Lester, *Bach's works for Solo Violin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 104.
[151] Quantz, ibid., 168.

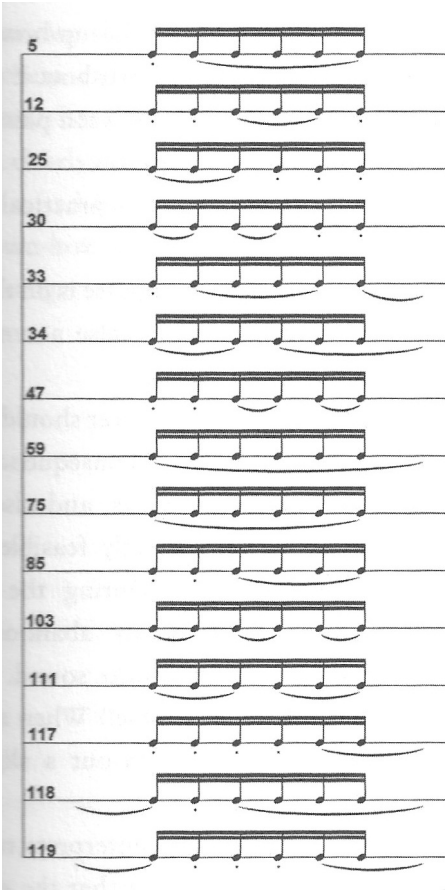

Fig. 41: BWV 1001/4, varied approaches to slurring.[152]

Figure 41 (above) looks like an extract from a textbook of modern violin technique with different bowing patterns. However, this is a list of the slurs in the final presto movement presented in the order in which they first occur. The wealth of different phrasing applications should of course be executed precisely. Violinists performing on period instruments have stated that this can be accomplished to the best advantage by using a Baroque bow. 'The non-legato bow stroke [...] not only has the advantage of offering a strong motoric presence but is also indispensable in making audible the contrast between slurs and separate notes'.[153]

The MS interpreter must endeavour to get an equivalent result using a modern bow. Since Bach explicitly demands a fast tempo (presto), the performer must work on a tempo that is

[152] Figure drawn from Schröder, ibid., 75.
[153] Ibid.

related to the pulse of 80 for a dotted crotchet. The notatation of half and full bar lines is also an indication for a rather fluent tempo.

Several issues of my personal interpretation decisions are technically difficult to achieve. In conjunction with this, I would like to quote Johann Abraham Birnbaum (1702-48) who, in his defence of Bach's compositional style, wrote (1738): 'I grant that the pieces written by the Hon. Court Composer are very difficult to play, but only for those who are not willing to train their finger to fluent motion and correct fingering.'[154] On this point, almost nothing has changed to this day.

[154] NBR, 345.

4 Conclusion: The Final Recital - Some Personal Observations about the Interpretation of BWV 1001,1002 and 1004)

Since the following observations are partly related to the reflections of the previous chapter, I will follow the same order and start with the Ciaccona, even though it will be the last movement to be performed in the recital.

4.1 The Ciaccona

During the opening bars of the Ciaccona, I will play all quavers as chords with the exception of the third bar. By doing so, I refer to analogous passages in the same movement, in which the theme is notated in a chordal manner (e.g., bars 185ff.). In addition, I do not consider the upper voice of the 'theme' as a melody but will instead interpret the character of the theme in a chordal fashion. In line with my argument presented above,[155] I will play the dotted rhythm of the theme in a 3-1 ratio. Together with the chordal approach, the theme assumes a monumental character, which I consider to be relevant for my interpretation.

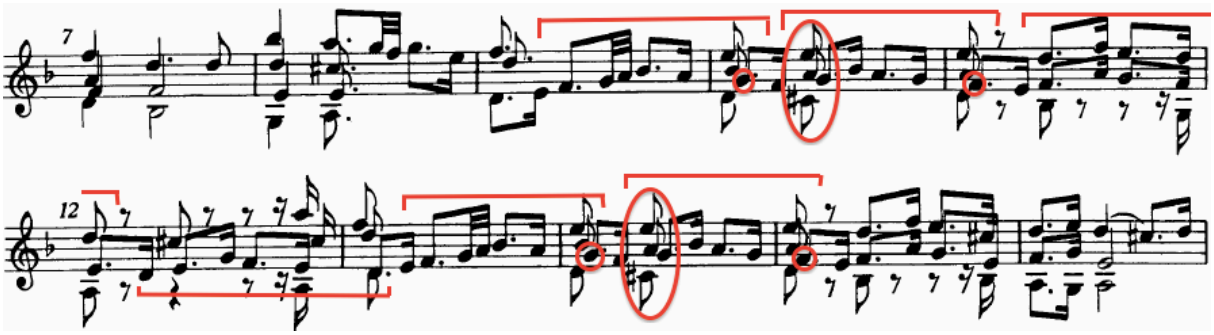

Fig. 42: BWV 1004/5, bars 7-16.

Towards the end of Chapter 3.1.2, I described how the section (bars 9-16) can be executed properly as long as it is played in *forte*. In my performance, the *forte* dynamic will be

[155] Chapter 3.1.4.

intentionally suppressed. This decision will force me to break the chords of bars 10 and 14 (Figure 42, elliptically marked) softly on the second beat, downwards, so that the G4 can be sustained as a melody note. This does not mean that the other four-note chords have to be broken up in a similar or corresponding manner. The resulting shortening of G4 (and F4, all circled) on the first beats has minimal effect on the interpretation – I use it to emphasise the phrasing in a 2-3-1-count pattern (indicated by the connecting line).

The issue of connecting several variations is very important but hard to describe. I often treat the first beat as a starting point as well as a 'destination' to create and propel larger units. Further, in the arpeggio section, I play the chords rhythmically accurately as demisemiquavers (up till the first beat of bar 97). Following this point, I play the chords as demisemiquaver sextuplets throughout until the end, irrespective as to whether there are three- or four-note chords. This helps to work out the crescendo systematically towards the climax.

4.2 The *G minor Sonata*

Finally I want to discuss a few of my personal interpretational thoughts for the fugue in G minor. Incidentally, when I am teaching it to my students, I explain this very process of decision making and how it can be accomplished.

Approaching the fugue is very much a matter of how to design or phrase the subject.

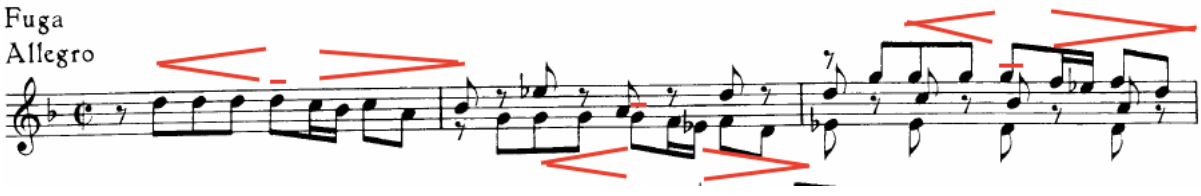

Fig. 43: BWV 1001/2, bars 1-3.

Figure 43 illustrates this concept. Since the movement sports an allegro tempo and is notated in *alla breve*, the speed translates into a rather quick pace. Consequently, the repeated quavers of the head motif have to be articulated, that is, slightly shortened (to make them

clearly distinctive), conforming to the interpretation of equal repeated notes in Baroque rhetoric, which emphasised this type of figure in particular. Therefore, a repetition of the first four quavers differentiated through dynamic nuance is recommended. In conjunction with 'tonal language', Mattheson quotes the dictum: *repetitio habet emphasin* (repetition means emphasis), and continues:

> ...words of importance might very well be effectively repeated three or four times, if the circumstances would otherwise permit it, in order to give the performance much more emphasis: for that must always be the most important reason.[156]

Further, I apply the desired emphasis to the first four notes of the fugue subject by applying a slight crescendo (Figure 43). Here, the question arises as to whether the preceding (D5) or the succeeding (C5) quavers form part of a dactylic (- v v) or an anapaestic (v v -) rhythm. Since the second half of the subject descends melodically ('katabasis'), an anapaeastic orientation of the semiquavers (v v -) would be faulty and unpleasant. Hence, a dactylic metre is preferred here. The inner motion of the fourth D5 with the two succeeding semiquavers can be nicely displayed by slightly lengthening the note. A slight decrescendo of the descending second half of the theme is then well-suited to accomplish a plausible rendition of the exposition, as can be observed in the figure above. This approach to articulating the fugue subject in this manner is kept consistently throughout the whole movement.

The discussion now turns to the technical use of the bow. The basic approach to modern chord playing is exhaustively explained in Galamian's classical textbook.[157] The way three- and four-note chords are broken depends on the character and dynamics of the musical context. I try to avoid sustained unbroken three-note chords in my Bach interpretation because they tend to sound strained.

---

[156] Mattheson (1981), ibid., 377.
[157] Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing&Teaching* (Englwood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 88-92.

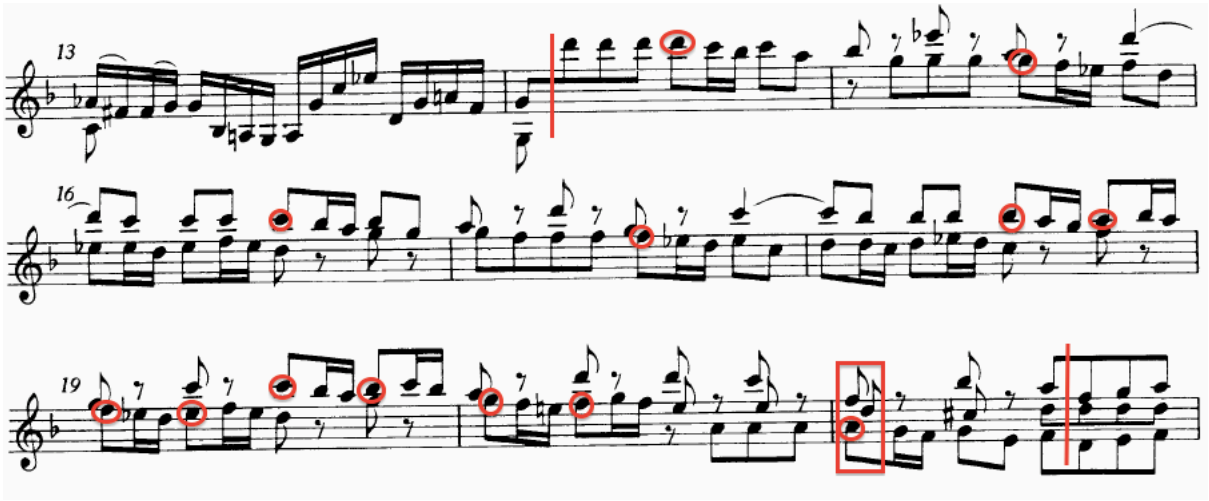

Fig. 44: BWV 1001/2, bars 13-21.

In Figure 44 (above), the dactyl quavers are encircled; they are to be played slightly longer in comparison to all the other quavers. The chord at the beginning of bar 21 contains a particular feature: to make the dactyl visible, I break the chord downwards in contrast to the preceding and the succeeding chords. A 'regular' breaking of these chords leads to the (desired) shortening of the thematic bass note, whereas breaking the indicated chord downwards results in an emphasis of the dactyl. Thus, the fugal theme can be executed correctly.

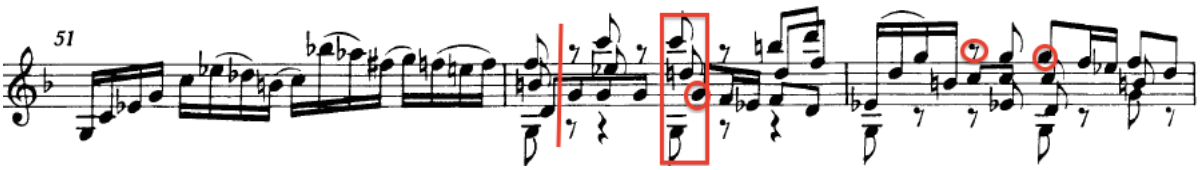

Fig. 45: BWV 1001/2, bars 51-53.

Figure 45 shows the fugal entries at bars 52 and 53. In bar 52, I break the indicated chord (enclosed) in the same way as in the previous example, from the top downwards, but I do not attempt the same approach to the preceding and succeeding chords. The semiquaver E-flat at the beginning of bar 53 will approximately have the same value as all the quavers of the preceding entry, with the exception of the encircled G4, which is emphasised.

Further, the encircled quaver rest (in the last bar of the example) marks the point at which I add the G5 (discussed above in more detail under 3.3).

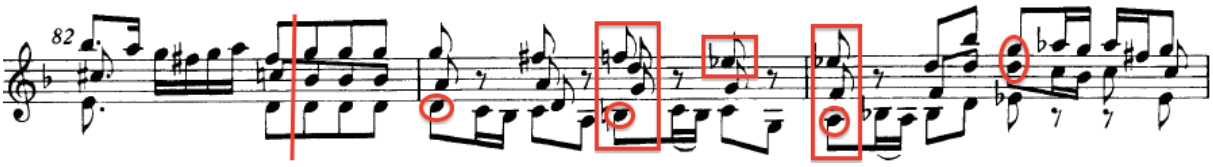

Fig. 46: BWV 1001/2, bars 82-84.

In Figure 46 (above), the subject appearing in the bass and all the voices must be performed consistently with maximum clarity. Since D4 at the beginning of bar 83 coincides with the open D string, a breaking downwards does not appear necessary because of the open string. In the enclosed chords, though, the characteristic dactyls can only be obtained by a breaking of the chords downwards. The E-flat5 (fourth beat of bar 83, framed) could possibly be transformed into an E-natural, which would result in a complete descending chromatic line (G-F-sharp-F-E-E-flat-D) (as mentioned above in chapter 3.3).

Another section also calls for particular attention: whether to execute bars 47, 48, 49 and 50 as an echo, even though this is not notated by Bach (Figure 47):

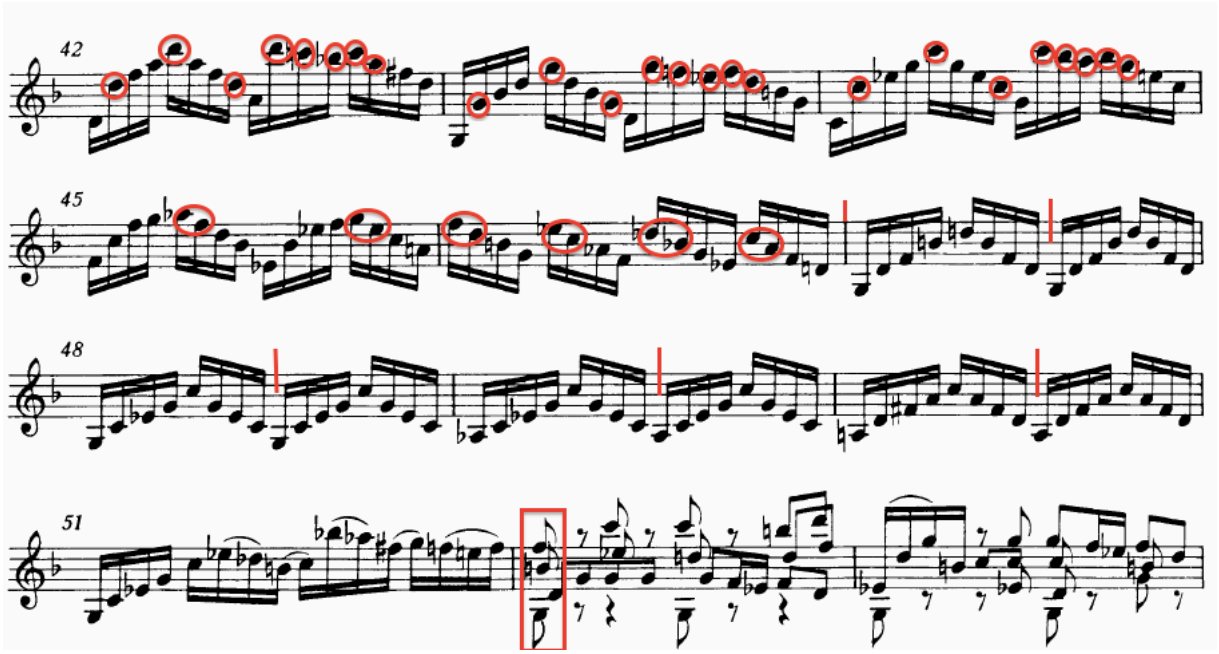

Fig. 47: BWV1001/2, bars 42-53.

There are numerous examples in the *Sei Solo* (BWV 1003/2 bars 45ff.; BWV 1003/4; BWV

1004/4; BWV 1006/6, BWV 1006/7) in which Bach explicitly demands an echo effect (by notating *forte* and *piano*) that lend support to play the second half of bars 47-50 virtually *piano*. There are very few instructions in the solos for dynamics that do not refer to an echo effect (such as the surprise *piano* at the end of BWV 1003/4). But since Bach abstains from such instructions in the entire sonata BWV 1001, one cannot deduce, from the omission of dynamic markings, that this is not an echo section. Thus, the performer has to make a sensible choice here, based on an educated decision-making process.

Taking the preceding semiquaver-figures marked in the figure above into consideration, one identifies the fugue theme (circled) as having been gradually broken down into chordal sequences. These lead directly into the repetition section in the form of a descending line. Here, at this moment, I have never felt comfortable with playing the section as an echo that repeats four times. I have opted for an interpretation that is based on a rhetorical approach. I perceive these repetitions as an element suggesting dialogue[158] between two violins. In my performance, this means that I will interpret each of the second half of bars 47 and 48 rather hesitantly, that is 'questioningly', the repetitions in bar 49 'comprehendingly', and bar 50 'affirmatively'. The ascending section that follows (bar 51) is one that I perceive in a similar way as a dialogue between two violins, now playing in unison and concluding with the fermata, that is explicitly notated in the version of the fugue for lute (BWV 1000).

4.3 Epilogue

In the preceding chapters I have investigated two main areas of knowledge regarding Bach's solos for the violin. In the first section – the historical – I have given an insight into the origin of the solos as well as into their reception up to this day, by both the audience and the performer. I have offered possible answers to such questions concerning the true purpose of Bach's composition of the solos; the influences that were important for him; and the 'logical' compositional transformation from an organ virtuoso to a violin composer. In the second section of the dissertation I discussed numerous practical and technical aspects related to the

[158] This concept was often used in Baroque rhetoric as well and, especially, in poetry.

performance of the chosen programme for my final recital. I have presented different possibilities of interpretation and have evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches to technical matters.

In conclusion, the study presented in this dissertation was motivated by my personal knowledge of the *Sei Solo*, and the aspects of my analytical discussions put forward here, are those aspects that I consider relevant to my performance. A synthesis of all my personal decisions, taken in connection with the interpretation of the three chosen works for my recital, will be demonstrated in performance.

5 Appendices

5.1 Appendix 1: Scordatura versus Tuning in Fifths

The first successful attempts to transform the violin into a polyphonic instrument are attributed to Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber.[159] He considered the problem to be that the common method of tuning the violin in fifths, which prevailed for linear voice-leading (not least because the left hand could thus reach the usual range of notes quite comfortably), was not equally suitable for playing chords. When the violin is tuned in fifths, only the chords in open position are easy to play. Triads in close position are almost impossible to play with four tones, and it quickly becomes uncomfortable, or even impossible, to play with three notes. Biber considered *scordatura* to be the solution. He used a large number of various tuning methods in order to enable the violinist to play different keys and sequences of chords. He ultimately took this principle so far that, at times, the violin was supposed to be specially tuned for each piece. In the cycle of the Mystery Sonatas (also known as the Rosary Sonatas), fourteen of the sixteen sonatas require special tuning. However, *scordatura* did not come to be widely used later on. It was too laborious to constantly re-tune the instrument, the new tuning caused intonation problems, and every special tuning required the violinist to rethink the relationship between the fingering and the resulting sounds. In sum, the purpose of the *scordatura* was to enable violinists to play more complex chords without asking too much of their left hand. Westhoff's approach was diametrically opposed to this principle. It was his historic achievement to consistently use a standard-tuned violin as a polyphonic instrument.

[159] He was, by no means, the only advocate of *scordatura*, but clearly he was the most important. For more on the long tradition of *scordatura* in Southern Germany, see Dagmar Glüxam, *Die Violinskordatur* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1999).

5.2 Appendix 2: Composed in Prison?

To understand the conditions and motives which led to the composition of the *Sei Solo* – with regard to both the musical substance and the challenges in violin technique – it is worth retracing the work changes that took place in Bach's career during his final years in Weimar and his first years in Köthen.

The official *Kapellmeister* of Weimar, Johann Samuel Drese, had died in 1716 (although he had probably not been active for a long time), and Bach may have hoped to succeed him (in vain). Tension may have arisen between the ruling Duke Wilhelm Ernst and his music-loving nephew Ernst August,[160] who was certainly more closely associated with Bach, which may have led to a dispute between the two regarding the position of the succeeding leader of the Kapelle. Ernst August may have even been the person who put Bach in contact with the royal house of Köthen. In any event, Bach was ready to leave. Many people have wondered why Bach decided to leave the relatively important city of Weimar for tiny, provincial Köthen at this time; this decision must be understood in the context of his development as a composer.

Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818), provides an apt description of his career as a composer:

> Johann Sebastian Bach's first attempts at composition were, like all first attempts, defective. Without any instruction to lead him into the way which might gradually have conducted him from step to step, he was obliged, like all those who enter on such a career without a guide, to do at first as well as he could. To run or leap up and down the instrument, to take both hands as full as all the five fingers will allow, and to proceed in this wild manner till they by chance find a resting place are the arts which all beginners have in common with each other. They can therefore be only 'finger composers' (or 'clavier hussars,' as Bach, in his riper years, used to call them); that is, they must let their fingers first play for them what they are to write, instead of writing for the fingers what

[160] The older half-brother of Prince Johann Ernst of Saxe-Weimar, Ernst August was a man of great musical talent who had died at the age of nineteen the year before. Bach adapted five of his pieces for cembalo: BWV 592, 595, 982, 984, 987.

they shall play.[161]

Bach's Toccata in D minor (BWV 565), by far his most popular organ piece, embodies exactly this style. Composed in Arnstadt (1703-07), it has retained its 'spontaneity', as a much-sought work, to this very day. Bach was nevertheless critical of it later, as he was conscious of its structural weaknesses and unresolved formal problems. But this period of wild improvisational composition did not last long. 'He soon began to feel that the eternal running and leaping led to nothing; that there must be order, connection, and proportion in the thoughts'.[162] Being a self-taught musician, Bach sought to achieve this by studying the violin concertos of Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741). The adaptation of five concertos from the *L'Estro armonico* (Op. 3) for the harpsichord demonstrates what a strong effect the Italian concerto style had on Bach. Forkel also recognises the influence which followed from this activity:

> He studied the chain of the ideas, their relation to each other, the variations of the modulations, and many other particulars. The change necessary to be made in the ideas and passages composed for the violin, but not suitable to the clavier, taught him to think musically; so that after his labor was completed, he no longer needed to expect his ideas from his fingers, but could derive them from his own fancy.[163]

During these years, Bach became more of an instrumental and ensemble composer by studying Vivaldi's concertos. The other activity that supported this change was his work as the leader of an ensemble, as this enabled him to perform his newly created compositions. This explains why Bach accepted Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen's offer to become his *Capell-Meister* and move from the illustrious Weimar court to such a provincial place. The potential of this newly founded little orchestra exceeded that of the Weimar *Hofkapelle* by far.

Prince Leopold had taken advantage of a timely opportunity. When Friedrich Wilhelm I (also known as the Soldier King) came to power, the Berlin *Hofkapelle* was disbanded and six

---

[161] NBR, 441.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ibid.

first-class virtuosos suddenly found themselves without a job. Prince Leopold was an enthusiastic art lover, as Hiller writes in his *Lebensbeschreibungen*: 'This Prince Leopold was a great connoisseur and supporter of music; he himself played the violin not badly, and sang a good bass.'[164] When Leopold saw the opportunity to engage a first-class concerto ensemble all of a sudden, he hired the entire group on the spot. By the time that Bach assumed the position of *Hofkapellmeister* in 1717, the Kapelle had grown to include sixteen musicians. Bach must have sensed how beneficial it would be to his development as a composer to have a first-class orchestra to work with. One can see how far Bach's identity as an artist had come if one considers that this organ virtuoso only had access to a rather modest instrument in Köthen. Until this point in Bach's life, we only had occasion to note that, despite his focus on the organ, he had not necessarily neglected the violin; now, however, the violin suddenly became central to his work. He directed the *Hofkapelle* from his position at the violinist's stand. Bach was now the violinist who set the tone in an orchestra which included first-class violinist colleagues in addition to all the other instruments that were typical for the orchestras of the time.

Further, Bach's musical activities were undergoing a process of secularisation. The Köthen court was reformed, i.e. Calvinist, following Leopold's takeover from his Lutheran mother in 1716. This meant that Bach was now expected to produce concertos according to the Italian model rather than ecclesiastical compositions (cantatas) for church services, in accordance with his new employer's wishes. This matched his new interests and skills in composition.[165]

Let me now entertain a conjecture with regard to Bach's composition of the *Soli*. The lexicographer Ernst Ludwig Gerber was the son of Bach's student Heinrich Nikolaus Gerber, making his published information more reliable. Gerber mentions in his historical-biographical lexicon of musicians, that the first part of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* was written 'in a place where ennui, boredom, and the absence of any kind of musical instrument

---

[164] Hiller, ibid., 135 ('Dieser Fürst Leopold war ein großer Kenner und Beförderer der Musik; er spielte selbst die Violin nicht schlecht, und sang einen guten Baß.').

[165] Bach was evidently so impatient to change his environment and to take the new position that he was unwilling to see his duties in Weimar through to the end. Bach's obstinacy annoyed Duke Wilhelm Ernst to such a degree that he sent him to prison for nearly four weeks before dismissing him with a dishonourable discharge.

forced him to resort to this pastime.'[166] Is it not conceivable that, during the four weeks spent in prison, Bach had access to his violin, at least? It would then be quite possible that he worked on unaccompanied violin pieces. The ambiguity of the title *Sei Solo* (You are alone) could also have occurred to him here. And even if he really did not have access to any instruments, the idea that he may have been occupied with composing for the unaccompanied violin is not implausible.

[166] NBR, 372.

5.3 Appendix 3: The Reliability of the Text

The following examples will show that even the most widely-used print editions should still be treated with some suspicion, as different readings to the original text could still be reproduced in the new editions. However arduous it may be to study Bach's autograph in detail, one should still do so conscientiously.

Fig. 48: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, Bach's autograph.

Figure 48 shows BWV 1003, Grave, bar 5, third and fourth crotchet. Bach clearly made a careless mistake here: the final crotchet only has seven demisemiquavers. This has been widely noted, but the solutions for this problem differ greatly.[167]

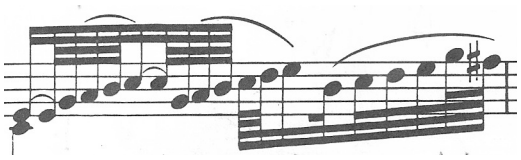

Fig. 49: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, Bärenreiter edition.[168]

This is the version which appears in Günter Haußwald's carefully prepared Bärenreiter Urtext edition (Figure 49). It is identical to the version in the *Neue Bach Ausgabe* VI/1. The metric notation is correct, and the dotted rhythm has been 'written out'. One thus assumes that a dotted semiquaver (here: E4 and C4) can only accommodate five hemidemisemiquavers; yet, the hemidemisemiquaver beam has been eliminated on the sixth-to-last note (B4) and the

[167] Strangely, source C also contains this 'anomaly'. Is it perhaps based on the original after all and not on a supposedly earlier version by Bach.

[168] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Drei Sonaten und drei Partiten,* ed. Günter Haußwald (Kassel/Basel/London: Bärenreiter, 1959), 18.

previous dotted demisemiquaver (E5) has accordingly turned into a semiquaver syncopation.

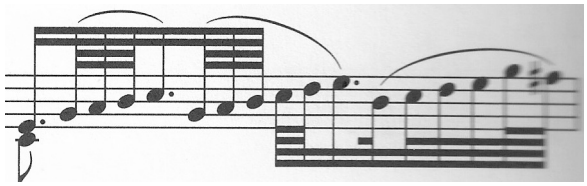

Fig. 50: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, Wiener Urtext Edition.[169]

This Figure (50) is an excerpt from the score by Dagmar Glüxam in her Wiener Urtext Edition (2009). One finds here a straight 'copy' from the original text. The note values of the seventh- and sixth-to-last notes (E5 and B4) have simply been doubled (by leaving out one beam each). Mathematically, this fourth crotchet thus has nine demisemiquavers; the problem has thus been changed, but not resolved. Further, no metrical help is offered for the third crotchet, which is metrically imprecise in the current form. Strangely, the otherwise thorough critical apparatus avoids mentioning the entire issue.

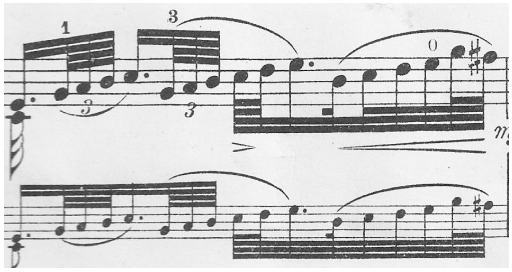

Fig. 51: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, Joachim-Moser edition of 1908.[170]

By comparison, the old Joachim/Moser edition of 1908 (Figure 51) provides a better solution to the problem. The original text has been transferred correctly to the lower stave and is readily available to the performer for comparison. The practical solution in the top stave suggests one group of triplets each for the two first dotted rhythms (which makes it metrically correct and acceptable from a performance-oriented point of view). However, there is a

[169] Bach (Glüxam), ibid., 20.
[170] Bach (Joachim and Moser), ibid., Vol. 1, 20.

mistake in the final crotchet of this version: the seventh-to-last note (E5) should not be dotted, which makes for nine demisemiquavers in a crotchet once again. However, the performer can put together his own solution using the bottom system.

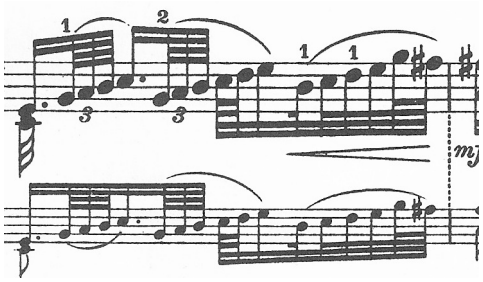

Fig. 52: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, Flesch Edition of 1930 (Edition Peters Nr. 4308).[171]

The Flesch edition of 1930 (Figure 52) has a rhythmically correct notation (top stave). However, Bach's original (bottom stave) is reproduced in a corrected form, which is thus identical with the one above it (on the fourth crotchet).

A correct version can be found in Szeryng's edition, published by Schott. Although the critical notes explain that it does not conform with the NBA, no justification for the 'correction' is provided.[172]

Eliminating just the demisemiquaver beam of the dotted E5 would be a relatively limited alteration of Bach's original. This would produce a metrically correct version without severe emendation (Figure 53):

[171] Bach (Flesch), ibid.
[172] Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo*, ed. Henryk Szeryng (Mainz: Schott, 1981), 85.

Fig. 53: BWV 1003/1, bar 5, a metrically correct version.

There is probably no unequivocally correct solution to Bach's careless mistake. However, the performer is always obliged to treat Bach's generally very carefully produced autograph responsibly.

5.4 Appendix 4: Brahms's Transcription of the Ciaccona for the Left Hand

The Ciaccona (French: Chaconne) is exceptional not only among the Partitas, but in the entire cycle. It is by far the longest movement that Bach wrote for solo violin, and its outstanding compositional significance was recognised early on. In addition to the piano accompaniments by Mendelssohn and Schumann (mentioned above), August Wilhelmj (1845-1908), a student of David's, even composed a version with an orchestral accompaniment.

Among the numerous transcriptions, two piano versions are worth mentioning which are still played in concerts nowadays: one by Brahms and one by Feruccio Busoni (1866-1924). The latter does not attempt to literally transfer the piece to the piano; it is an adaptation which aims to transfer Bach's ideas to the far greater possibilities of sound offered by a grand piano. Busoni's colleague, Eugen d'Albert (1864-1932), did not find it convincing:

> I find that the Chaconne is not suited to an adaptation for two hands. The only solution in my opinion is in Brahms's arrangement for the left hand alone. Every other adaptation necessarily becomes too modern, and that is what I find to be the case in your version.[173]

Johannes Brahms's approach is indeed noteworthy. He adapted the violin part for the left hand to be performed by Clara Schumann. Brahms wrote, in a letter to her dated June 1877:

> Dear Clara,
> I believe it has been a long time since I last sent you something as amusing as this today – if your fingers can stand the fun! For me, the Chaconne is one of the most wonderful, unfathomable pieces of music. On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. [...] If one does not have a great violinist nearby, the greatest pleasure is to let it resound simply in the mind.
> But the piece occupies me in every way. [...] one tries it this way and that. But whatever I take, the orchestra or the piano – my fun is always spoiled. Only in one way, I find, can I create a miniature, yet approximate and completely pure pleasure in the piece – if I play it only with my left hand! [...] A similar difficulty, the kind of technique, the arpeggiation, everything comes together to

[173] Cited in Bach-Busoni, *Chaconne.* (London: Edition Peters, 1997).

make me – feel like a violinist![174]

The self-imposed instrumental limitation referred to above, is an essential aesthetic attribute of Bach's *Sei Solo*. The fact that the efforts of the violinist become part of the mediating function of the triangle of forces, that might compensate the listener for the restricted tonal range of the unaccompanied violin, has been explained above. Most interestingly, Brahms clearly attached importance to this process and considered it an intrinsic quality of the Ciaccona. It is remarkable, thus, that Brahms is quite clearly aware of this, as he demands thoroughly awkward broken chords and arpeggios instead of bringing in the right hand, which would, naturally, let him 'realise' the score without any difficulty.

It is interesting that Brahms had previously written several piano variations: Variations on an Original Theme (Op. 21/1, 1861); on a Hungarian song (Op. 21/2, Op. 24, 1862); on a theme by Händel (Op. 24, 1863); and on a theme by Paganini (Op. 35, 1866). As the passage from the letter above indicates, Brahms clearly attempted to 'exploit' the Ciaccona either as a work for piano or for an orchestra. He finally left it in the version for one hand.

However, he took on the challenge once again much later (in 1885), and composed a symphonic movement based on the variation form of the Chaconne, in his fourth symphony.[175]

---

[174] Hans Gal (Ed.), *Brahms Briefe*. (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979), 99ff. ('Liebe Clara, ich würde glauben, Dir lange nichts so Amüsantes geschickt zu haben, wie heute – wenn Deine Finger das Vergnügen aushalten! Die Chaconne ist mir eines der wunderbarsten, unbegreiflichsten Musikstücke. Auf ein System, für ein kleines Instrument schreibt der Mann eine ganze Welt von tiefsten Gedanken und gewaltigsten Empfindungen. [...] Hat man nun keinen größten Geiger bei sich, so ist es wohl der schönste Genuß, sie sich einfach im Geist tönen zu lassen. Aber das Stück reizt, auf alle Weise sich damit zu beschäftigen. [...] man versucht's so und so. Was ich aber nehme, Orchester oder Klavier – mir wird der Genuß immer verdorben. Nur auf eine Weise, finde ich, schaffe ich mir einen sehr verkleinerten, aber annähernden und ganz reinen Genuß des Werkes – wenn ich es mit der linken Hand allein spiele! [...] Die ähnliche Schwierigkeit, die Art der Technik, das Arpeggieren, alles kommt zusammen, mich – wie ein Geiger zu fühlen!').

[175] http://www.schillerinstitute.org/fid_97-01/984_sub_moral_appen_pdfs/chapter8.pdf (retrieved, 7/18/2014).

5.5 Appendix 5: Number Symbolism

One frequently discussed, controversial problem in the research on Bach treats the issue of whether or not he made use of the gematric number system in his works. Gematria originated in the Jewish Kabbalah, and is based on the fact that the Greek and Hebrew alphabets did not have special symbols for numbers, but were expressed instead by using letters. A 'word' could thus be considered to be both a combination of letters and a group of numbers. This led to the development of many word/number theories, which were expressed as number symbolism, hidden meanings, etc. In its simplest form, the number system works by assigning every letter a number, as in A=1, B=2, C=3, etc.

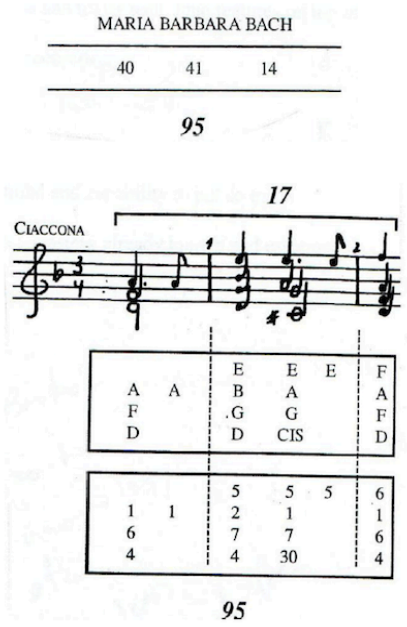

Fig. 54: The beginning of the Ciaccona as a gematric equivalent of Maria Barbara Bach's name.[176]

Knowledge of such number systems was common in Bach's time, and they were used for various purposes. It would be difficult to prove that Bach, who must have been familiar with gematria, used this technique to include coded messages in his works. However, Helga Thoene's analysis produced surprising results, which could be of significance to the

[176] Helga Thoene, Johann Sebastian Bach, *Ciaccona - Tanz oder Tombeau?* (Oschersleben: Ziethen, 2003).

performer. Nevertheless, it is doubtful as to whether they can be treated as scientific studies. A sample of Thoene's analysis is shown in Figure 54.

Helga Thoene assumes that Bach composed the Ciaccona to create a musical epitaph for his first wife Maria Barbara. From a biographical perspective, this could be possible. Bach spent several weeks during the summer of 1720 in Karlsbad as the musical companion of his Prince. Returning home, he received the unexpected news of his wife's death. As the autograph is dated 1720, this hypothesis could be possible. Thoene carries out a gematric interpretation of the first two bars of the Ciaccona, and reaches the result presented above. If one assigns every note in the example (Figure 54) a corresponding number (A=1, F=6, D=4, etc.) and adds them up, the sum is 95. If one adds up the numbers corresponding to the letters in the name 'Maria Barbara Bach' (M=12, A=1, R=17, etc.), the sum is also 95. Thus, the beginning of the Ciaccona serves as a musical representation of the name of Bach's dead wife.

It is not the aim of the present study to speculate on the legitimacy of such an interpretation, but it may be of interest to the performer. Let us assume that Bach knew the precise number of notes which were to be written down in the autograph, and wanted to include some kind of cipher in his score. He may then have used different ways to write down the same musical content, in order to be flexible with the number of notes. In the context of bars 186-87 (see figure 17, above), they contain sixteen notes. If Bach had also written the bass line with a dotted rhythm (there is hardly any reason not to play this passage that way) then one would count eighteen notes. Thus, Bach could have changed the number of notes without altering the musical idea. Regarding Thoene's example above, this would mean that the notation of the autograph did have to take that exact form to reach the number 95 associated with the name Maria Barbara Bach, independently of whether Bach wanted to repeat the chords or not. In this case, the notation of the autograph should not be seen as a reason not to make the bass and the harmonic notes of the chords correspond to the dotted rhythm of the upper voice.

6 Bibliography

BOOKS

Adorno, Theodor W. *'Bach gegen seine Liebhaber verteidigt'.* In *Prismen - Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,* ed. Theodor W. Adorno, 133-146. Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1963.

— *Prisms*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

Boyden, David D. *Die Geschichte des Violinspiels von seinen Anfängen bis 1761.* Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1971.

Bach-Dokumente, ed. vom Bach-Archiv Leipzig. Leipzig, 1963-1972 (abbreviated as Dok. I resp. Dok. III).

Butt, John. *Playing with History: the Historical Approach to Musical Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

David, Hans T., Arthur Mendel, eds. *The New Bach Reader. A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents.* New York: Norton, 1998 (abbreviated as NBR).

Eiche, Jon, ed. *The Bach Chaconne for Solo Violin: A Collection of Views*. Bloomington, IN: Frangipani Press, 1985.

Efrati, Richard R. *Die Sonaten, Partiten, Suiten von Johann Sebastian Bach.* Zürich: Atlantis, 1979.

Elste, Martin. *Meilensteine der Bach-Interpretation 1750-2000.* Stuttgart/Weimar/Kassel: Metzler/Bärenreiter, 2000.

Fabian, Dorottya. *Bach performance practice, 1945-1975.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

Fanselau, Clemens. *Mehrstimmigkeit in J. S. Bachs Werken für Melodieinstrumente ohne Begleitung.* Berlin: Berliner Musikstudien, Bd.22, 2000.

Fischer, Matthias. *Gehörgänge.* München: Kirchheim, 1986.

Forkel, Johann Nikolaus and Terry, Charles Sanford. *Johann Sebastian Bach*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920.

Forkel, Johann Nikolaus. *Ueber Johann Sebastian Bach's Leben.* Leipzig: Peters, 1802.

Gähler, Rudolf. *Der Rundbogen für die Violine - ein Phantom?* Regensburg: ConBrio, 1997.

Galamian, Ivan. *Principles of Violin Playing&Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:

Prentice-Hall, 1962.

Gal, Hans. *Brahms Briefe.* Ed. Hans Gal. Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979.

Gerber, Ernst Ludwig. *Historisch-Biographisches Lexicon der Tonkünstler. Ersther Teil.* Leipzig: Breitkopf, 1970.

Gould, Glenn. *The Glenn Gould Reader*. New York: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1984.

Glüxam, Dagmar. *Die Violinskordatur.* Tutzing: Schneider, 1999.

Harnoncourt, Nikolaus. *Baroque music today: music as speech.* Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 1988.

Hartinger, Anselm. *Einleitung zu Edition Breitkopf 8046.* Leipzig: Breitkopf, 2007.

Heydner, Jürg. *Johann Georg Pisendel.* München: Musikhochschule München, 1961.

Hiller, Johann Adam. *Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Musikgelehrten und Tonkünstler neuerer Zeit.* Leipzig: Peters, 1784.

Kurth, Ernst. *Grundlagen des Linearen Kontrapunkts.* 2. Auflage. Berlin: Hesse, 1922.

Ledbetter, David. *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Lawson, Colin and Robin Stowell. *The Historical Performance of Music: an Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Lester, Joel. *Bach's works for Solo Violin*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Mattheson, Johann. *Der Vollkommene Capellmeister.* Hamburg: Herold, 1739.

—. *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre*. Hamburg: B.Schiller, 1713.

—. *Große General-Baß-Schule.* Hamburg: Herold, 1731.

—. *Johann Mattheson's Der vollkommene Capellmeister*. Trans. E.C. Harriss. Ann Arbor Mi: UMI Research Press, 1981.

Melkus, Eduard. 'Gedanken zur Interpretationsgeschichte der Chaconne für Violine solo von J. S. Bach'. In *Österreichische Musik Zeitschrift*, 2-3, 1985, 100-108.

Moser, Andreas. *Geschichte des Violinspiels.* Bd. 1. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1966.

— *Geschichte des Violinspiels.* Bd. 2. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1967.

Mozart, Leopold. *Gründliche Violinschule,*. 3. Augsburg: Lotter, 1789.

Neumann, Frederick. 'Some Performance Problems of Bach's unaccompanied Violin and Cello Works.' In *Eighteenth-century music in theory and practice,* ed. M.A.Parker. Stuyvesand: Pendragon Press, 1994, 19-48.

Quantz, Johann Joachim. *Versuch einer Anweisung, die Flöte traversière zu spielen. Reprint der Ausgabe Berlin 1752.* Kassel/Basel/London: Bärenreiter, 1983.

—. *On Playing the Flute*. Trans. E.R. Reilly. New York: Schirmer, 1975.

Sackmann, Dominik. *Triumph des Geistes über die Materie.* Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2008.

Schröder, Jaap. *Bach's Solo Violin Works: a Performer's Guide.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Seiffert, Reinhard, ed. *Sei Solo.* Berlin: Edition Praxis & Hintergrund, 1991.

Shaw, Bernard. *London Music in 1888-89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto (later known as Bernard Shaw) with some further autobiographical particulars.* London: G. W Holt, 1937.

Siegele, Ulrich. *Kompositionsweise und Bearbeitungstechnik in der Instrumentalmusik Johann Sebastian Bachs.* Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1975.

Smend, Friedrich. *Bach in Köthen.* Berlin: Christlicher Zeitschriftenverlag Berlin, 1951.

—. *J. S. Bach bei seinem Namen gerufen.* Kassel und Basel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1950.

Spitta, Philipp. *Johann Sebastian Bach. In three volumes. Vol.2*. London: Novello, 1899.

Spitta, Philipp. *Johann Sebastian Bach.* 2 Vol. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1873 and 1880.

Stowell, Robin. *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

—. 'Building a library: Bach's violin sonatas and partitas'. In *Musical Times* 128/1731 (1987), 250-256.

—. *The Early Violin and Viola: a Practical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Taruskin, Richard. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Tatlow, Ruth. *Bach and the Riddle of the Number Alphabet.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Ed. Stanley Sadie. London: Macmillan, 2001.

Thoene, Helga. *Johann Sebastian Bach, Ciaccona - Tanz oder Tombeau?* Oschersleben:

Ziethen, 2003.

—. *Sonata C-Dur - BWV 1005.* Oschersleben: Ziethen, 2008.

Vogt, Hans. *Johann Sebastian Bachs Kammermusik.* Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981.

Walther, Johann Gottfried. *Musikalisches Lexicon.* Leipzig: Wolffgang Deer, 1732.

Wolff, Christoph. *Bach. Aktualisierte Neuausgabe.* Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005.

—. *J. S. Bach, The Learned Musician.* New York, London: Norton, 2001.

Wollny, Peter. *Vorwort zu J.S.Bach. Drei Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo.* Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006.

SCORES

Bach, J. S. *6 Sonatas and Partitas.* Edited by Ivan Galamian. New York: International Music Company, 1971.

Bach, J. S. *Sonaten und Partiten für Violine allein.* Edited by Joseph Joachim und Andreas Moser. Berlin: Ed. Bote & G. Bock, 1908.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Sonaten und Partiten.* Edited by Carl Flesch. New York: C. F. Peters, 1930.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Drei Sonaten und drei Partiten.* Edited by Günter Haußwald. Kassel/Basel/London: Bärenreiter, 1959.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Sonaten und Partiten.* Edited by Henryk Szeryng. Mainz: Schott, 1981.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo.* Edited by Dagmar Glüxam. Wien: Wiener Urtext Edition, 2009.

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Sonaten und Partiten. Faksimile-Ausgabe*. Leipzig: Insel-Verlag 1962.

Bach-Busoni. *Chaconne.* London: Edition Peters, 1997.

Telemann, Georg Philipp. *Zwölf Fantasien*. Edited by Günter Hausswald. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1955.

Pisendel, Johann Georg. *Sonate für Violine allein ohne Baß.* Edited by Günter Hausswald. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1952.

Westhoff, Jean Paul. *Six Suites pour Violon seul sans basse.* Edited by Péter P. Várnay. Winthertur: Amadeus Verlag, 1975.

INTERNET- SOURCES

De los Santos, Carmelo. *Performance-Practice Issues of the Chaconne from partita II, BWV 1004 by J.S. Bach*, 2005.
https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/delossantos_carmelo_200405_dma.pdf (retrieved, 11/09/2015).

Davis, Stacey. *Stream Segregation and Perceived Syncopation: Analyzing the Rhythmic Effects of Implied Polyphony in Bach's Unaccompanied String Works.* http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.1/mto.11.17.1.davis.php (retrieved, 12/11/2015).

Fabian, Dorottya and Ornoy, Eitan. *Identity in Violin Playing on Records: Interpretation Profiles in Recordings of Solo Bach by Early Twentieth-ˇCentury Violinists.* (Claremont Graduate University, 2009). https://unsw.academia.edu/.work-more-11986615 (retrieved, 11/09/2015).

Fabian, Dorottya. *Ornamentation in Recent Recordings of J.S. Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas for Violin* (Israel Studies in Musicology Online*,* Vol. 11, 2013/II.). https://unsw.academia.edu/Fabian (retrieved, 11/09/2015).

Forkel, Johann Nikolaus and Terry, Charles Sanford. *Johann Sebastian Bach*. www.gutenberg.org. 1920. http://www.gutenberg.org/license (retrieved, 11/09/2014).

Grychtolik, Alexander Ferdinand. *J.S.Bachs Wohnhaus in Weimar.* *www.bachhausweimar.de/media/pdf/Baugeschichte_Bachhaus.pdf* (retrieved, 06/10/2014).

Sackmann, Dominik. *Warum komponierte Bach die Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo BWV 1001 – 1006?* www.theaterforum.ch/uploads/media/Vortrag_Dominik_Sackmann.pdf. (retrieved, 06/25/2014).

Solomon, Larry. *Bach's Chaconne in D minor for solo violin* (2002).
www.solomonsmusic.net/bachacon.htm (retrieved, 07/21/2014).

http://imslp.org/wiki/Suites_for_Solo_Violin_(Westhoff,_Johann_Paul_von) (retrieved, 01/13/2015).