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A Practical and Historical Guide to Johann Sebastian Bach's Solo in A Minor BWV 1013

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Today's flute publications often limit texts which analyze our repertoire in depth. This online publication offers a more thorough treatment of one of the flute's most iconic works.

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**A Historical and
Practical Guide to
Johann Sebastian Bach's**

**Solo in A Minor
BWV 1013**

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All of us probably began our exposure to the works of Johann Sebastian Bach by playing some of his Menuets, Bourées or other dances in our elementary method books. Even from these first experiences, most of us responded to the beauty, integrity, and energy of Bach's compositions. The structure and organization of books for beginners is usually developmental, with laudably clear and defined goals of note reading, facility, range, dynamics, and rhythm. To augment this instruction, students can turn to resources such as Trevor Wye's excellent books on tone, scales, and other specific technical issues. These books contain technical goals with explanation, something conspicuously lacking in many other texts. However, the connection that must be made between these abstract exercises and the actual repertoire is not always clear. The following articles present Bach's works didactically, offering a methodical approach that attempts to bridge theory and practice.

Johann Sebastian Bach's works have unparalleled significance in the flute repertoire. No other primary common practice composer left works of such quality and quantity for this instrument. The scope of the proposed upcoming series of commentaries will include historical, theoretical, and practical information by which musicians, be they baroque or modern, amateur or professional, will be inspired to create new and informed interpretations woven from the warp of artifact and history and the weft of present performance convention and taste.

Bach was not seen as being particularly innovative in his own

time. Yet his interest in solving musical puzzles was not limited to his brilliant canons, fugues, and methodical investigation of temperament. Bach's works for flute challenge the flute's accepted range, agility in distant key modulations, articulation, and even dynamics and balance. Each work seems experimental in some parameter, and an interesting and effective interpretation will take advantage of Bach's interest in probing perceived limitations of the instrument.

Thanks to Christoph Wolff's Chronology of Bach's works included in Grove's¹, the flute repertoire has come into clearer focus, and at least three rather distinct periods of activity have emerged. The first, 1723 to 1724, includes his Partita for flute alone, BWV 1013, and the Sonata in E minor, BWV 1034. The second, his Sonata in A, BWV 1032 and the great Sonata in B minor, BWV 1030, both written c. 1735-1736. Finally, the Sonata in E major, BWV 1035, c. 1741 as well as the Musical Offering, BWV 1079, c. 1747, are clearly in their own more Gallant style.

Though they are not confirmed to be from Bach's hand, The Eb Major Sonata, BWV 1031 and the G Minor Sonata BWV 1020 have remarkable similarities and are certainly wonderful music. Christoph Wolff's chronology in Grove's lists the Eb Major as c.1730-1734, and suggests that the G minor sonata was written by C. P. E. Bach, though there is no evidence as to the date of its origin. The C Major Sonata, dated c.1736, seems radically different than the B Minor or the A major, and was not

included in the Neue Bach-Ausgabe, indicating that it too may be spurious. It nonetheless bears a closer look, and adds to a progressive approach when learning the sonatas based on chronology. The two G Major Trio Sonatas, BWV 1038 for fl. Vln. and B.C. in the early part of the fourth decade of the Eighteenth Century, and BWV1039 for two fl. and B.C., written later in the decade, make for an interesting comparison and fall within the second period, during which we have other works in a three-voice texture.

Introducing and studying this repertoire in the aforementioned chronology has the advantage of beginning with one and then moving to two and then three voices, as well as moving from High Baroque to Gallant style. Each period of activity has two principal authenticated works. Once the reader has a clearer picture of Bach's compositional styles based on a chronology, attributed works can be more accurately appraised.

The Partita for flute alone, BWV 1013

Historical Context

The Partita was likely Bach's first solo piece for flute¹. Although this work is usually referenced by its Baroque *Partita* form, its original title was *Solo p[our une] flûte traversière par J. S. Bach*, and the four movements, *Allemande*, *Corrente*, *Sarabande*, and *Bourée anglaise*, are French spellings of these dance movements. The Partita's first movement is in the hand of two different copyists. No extant

autograph survives from either this or the E minor, however both have been authenticated.

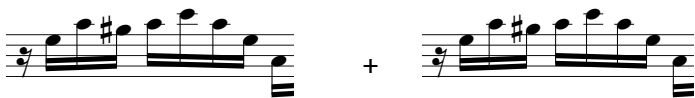
There is evidence that the Solo was written as early as 1717 in Cöthen, however its style suggests that it could have been written as late as 1723-24, after he arrived in Leipzig. This would make it contemporary to the E minor Sonata, and during a period when Bach composed cantatas in which the flute played a prominent role. Later, Bach chose more unusual keys (E Major and even modulating to B major!) for his flute sonatas, exploring the varied affects of these tonalities. Some musicologists assert that Bach knew little of the flute's limitations, citing phrases which offer no obvious breathing points. Yet similar compositions by flutists Blockwitz and Blavet have very similar perpetual motion, suggesting that such breathing demands were common. Bach must have known to avoid the third register high F even in a logical arpeggiation (see Partita Allemande, M. 5 and 6), and knew that a high A would in fact be possible, providing a spectacular end to the Allemande movement of the Solo.

Unlike the modern instrument, many of the Baroque *traverso's* pitches must be produced by weaker, fork fingerings. For this reason, scale collections have radically different properties and are associated with specific emotional *Affects*. The Partita and E Minor Sonata favor a "strong" tonality, meaning that most of the notes, and specifically the tonic and 5th, are not forked fingerings. In the case of the A minor Partita, the tonic A is strong, and the 5th (E) makes a strong lower dominant. The Low D works well for a strong subdominant,

however the third (C), is a bit veiled.

STRUCTURES

An important advantage of looking at Bach's works chronologically is that he wrote first for one, then two and finally three voice textures. The harmonies implied in the Partita are presented monophonically, and the rhythm of those changing harmonies is a primary topic of the discourse. Although the basic harmonic movement will be discussed later, it is advisable for the student to go through the piece and make his or her own harmonic analysis first, keeping



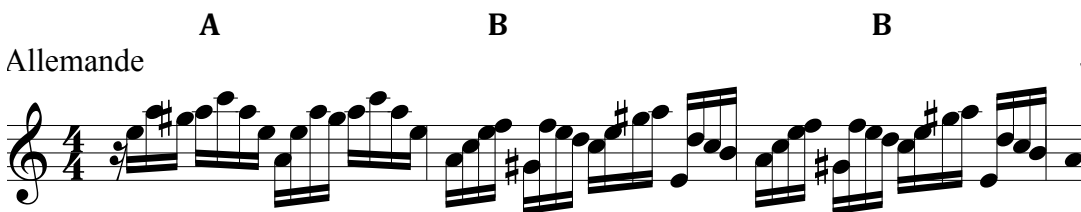
This first unit establishes the tonality of A Minor, and is repeated, propelling the piece forward to the second measure. Already in measure two, Bach presents five-notes that foreshadow the opening of the third movement, as well as important material to follow.² Measure three,

track of the number of voices implied by the texture. Like many suggestions below, this process is intended to set in motion a methodology by which all repertoire might be studied.

Allemande:

A superficial scan of the structure shows a piece in binary form: A:||B:|| with a coda beginning half way through M. 34. The Allemande topic is suggested by the typical upbeat (anacrusis) of three or seven sixteenths. The last note in the first example falls on a strong beat (thesis), and should feel like an arrival. (see below)

being a repeat of measure two, is heard as an echo only when performed softer but with the identical inflections as measure two. So far, we have a first measure composed of 2 identical halves, and a second measure repeated in its entirety:



Instead of practicing the movement from the beginning to the end, as is traditionally done, I propose studying segments of similar length. Later, when deciding where to breathe in performance, some phrases will be prepended with the three or seven

note *allemande* anacrusis. This gesture will help propel the phrases forward, and create more subtle connections from one phrase to the next. The performer may choose whether or not to breathe before the anacrusis based

on his or her individual intention and taste.

To begin, we will start with phrases of three measures, and then move to two measures and less. In the above example, the phrase is three measures long.

Those who are accustomed to breathing after only two measures are

encouraged to practice the passage faster, thereby becoming comfortable with the phrase length, and then gradually slow the tempo to the desired speed. Bar 9 to the first sixteenth of bar 12 are similarly in three measures, with a breath after final low "D".

A A¹

C

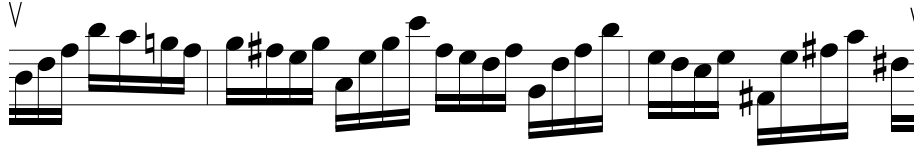
Sequences that transport the tonality by half bars are two measures long, for example bars 7 and 8. The double stems indicate a two voice texture.

then 12 and 13:

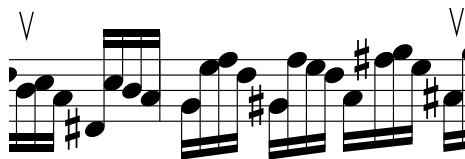
Note that in bars 32 and 33, as in bars 7 and 8 above, the half bar harmonic rhythm is emphasized by the leading tone (half step) immediately preceding the strong beat, indicated by the double stem.

Bars 32 and 33:

As the harmony changes more and more rapidly, and the phrases and breaths move from three to two measures in length, the sense of urgency and intensity grows. Moving to measures where the harmony changes on every beat, a falling fifth progression follows in bars 13 through 15:



End of bar 15 and bar 16:

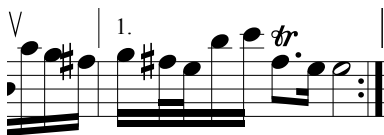


The last bars before the first ending and again at the coda slow down the harmonic rhythm and utilize the three sixteenth allemande prefix.

Bars 18 and 19:



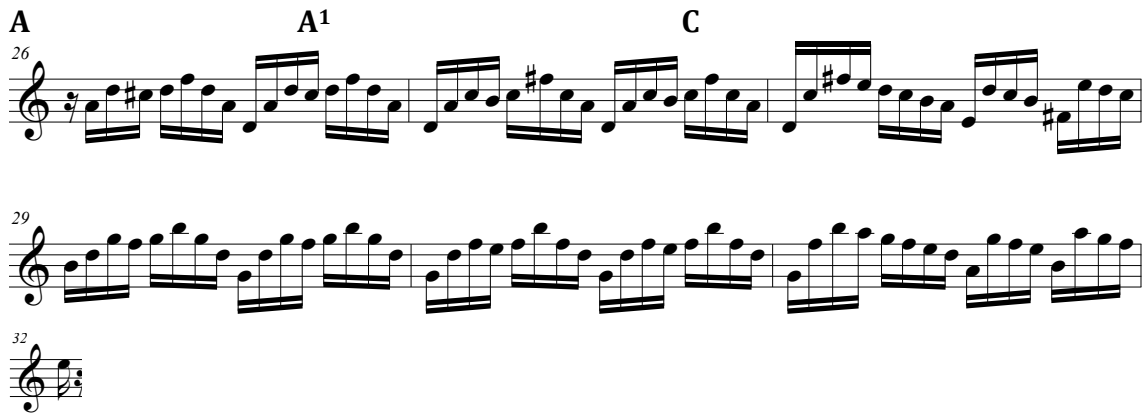
The section is brought to a close with an authentic cadence of three consecutive quarters as indicated below:



Opening the second half of the movement, Measures 20-23 follow the same model as the opening transposed down a fifth, in E Minor.



Measures 9 to 11 are found transposed to D minor (M.26) modulating to G major in bar 29, and from there arriving in C major in bar 32.

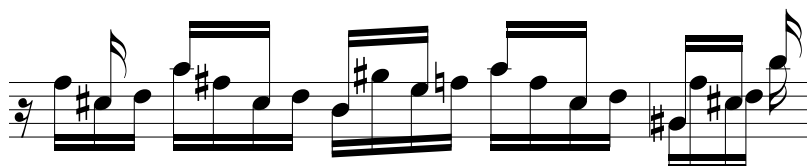


Segments that are a single bar in length have a number of harmonic designs. Some occur after a high degree of harmonic activity, and serve to slow down the harmonic rhythm. Though the harmony in measures 24 to 25 moves by the half bar, accents are created by half-step appoggiaturas on the second, fourth, and sixth

eighth-note beats, as was seen in bar 4. The same structure appears again in bar 39.

The asymmetry of five iterations of the figure in bar 36 into 37 entirely obliterates the common time meter, creating a sense of cadenza-like freedom:

M. 36-37



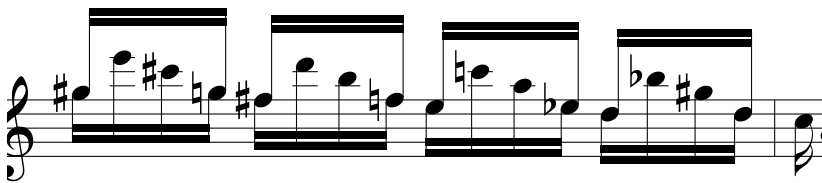
The scales and arpeggios, beginning on the second beat of bar 37 continue the quasi-cadenza, using common conventions borrowed from Italian string writing of the period. (A breath after the first note (G#) reinforces the Allemande gesture and preserves the intriguing ambiguity created by overlapping phrases). Bar 40 is an example in this style, utilizing a dominant E pedal point.

The most complex and sometimes controversial measures of the piece are bars 17 and 42. At this point the listener perceives two voices, the upper voice in falling thirds and the lower voice in seconds. The pitch of the third to last sixteenth has been often questioned, however the choice of allowing the diminished third to stand is clearly more interesting in performance.

M. 17



M.42



As the movement draws to a close with a coda beginning half way through bar 44, the *allemande* seven note figure returns, and the intervals become suddenly more extreme. The leaps of a tenth naturally bring back the tempo, and the added half bar of the coda is never returned, allowing the performer to play the highest A for two full beats.

each, we can begin to compare the function, key, and gesture that might be associated with them. It is advisable to go through the segments slurring all the notes and playing them in precise rhythm, focusing on an even and consistent air pressure and minimum finger motion.

Further Practice of the Allemande

Whether using a Baroque *traverso* or a modern instrument, the following suggestions should be equally valuable. By first grouping the phrases by the number of measures of

First, practice all of the three measure segments. The measures marked **A** arpeggiate the tonality by repetition, whereas the measures marked **B** use the cadential chord progression $i - V^7 \text{ } ^6/3 - i \text{ } ^6/3 - V$ reinforcing the tonality. Their declamatory nature allows the performer to play without haste. Not all the three measure segments are

transpositions of the same material, and so vary in their respective gestural meanings. Some are indeed modulatory, for instance bars 9-11 (which has a different gesture and meaning when the unexpected C# is introduced), 26 -28, and 29-31. The two bar segments should be subsequently evaluated and practiced. They often move sequentially on every beat, and imply direction and drive. Their intervals are often unexpected, and include augmented fourths. Since the range is not as large in these measures, singing them will help the performer direct the sound of each note to its center. The one bar segments have yet more variants, and include chromatic and rhythmic energy. As you play through these segments, notice their individual characteristics.

In order to create a smooth and consistent air stream, practice slurring the entire piece, observing the new breath marks in the text below, which incorporate the prepended anacrusis. In order to focus the tone, try flutter-tonguing (with the tip of the tongue) the entire movement, again always observing the breaths and phrases. Repeat, this time playing the movement up an octave. Now repeat the entire process, *pianissimo*, to develop control over the loudness. As the piece is stitched together, continue to consider various ways of

expressing and differentiating each phrase unit, no matter what the articulation or loudness. Working with a metronome, but taking as much time as is necessary for each breath, make sure the finger movements are relaxed and close to the keys or holes. Fingers should be comfortable and move evenly whether on *traverso* or the modern instrument. Other variants can include changing the rhythm to dotted sixteenths or an eighth with a sixteenth triplet. Practicing each segment in retrograde reveals how often Bach uses a reverse order of pitches in his writing.

Now that a substantial amount of technical work has been done, turn off the metronome and play the piece using as much *rubato* and dynamic change as you can possibly muster. Exaggerating the gesture is always the test of fire. If the gesture does not fit the text, it will seem completely wrong when exaggerated, but will still be tolerable if the gesture matches the text. Now, bringing the gestures back to scale, record a performance of the movement. You will notice that if you are making a point by *tenuto*, only half as much gesture is needed to make the same effect in analogous moments.

Suggested breath marks added to the score may be seen below:

Solo pour une Flute Traversiere

Johann Sebastian Bach

Allemande

The image shows a musical score for a flute solo, titled "Allemande" by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written in 4/4 time and D major. It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a 4/4 time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by a steady eighth-note pattern. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed below the first staff. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. A first ending bracket is present between measures 19 and 21, with a second ending starting at measure 22. The piece concludes with a final *p* dynamic marking.

2

[Title]

25

28

31

34

37

40

43

46

Corrente

The Corrente is the Italian version of the French Courant, and Bach wrote many such movements in his suites for solo strings and for keyboard. Some courants were danced even slower than the Sarabande, however the technical demands of this fast Corrente are formidable. Of the four movements of this suite, this is clearly the most virtuosic, imitating Italian string writing in brilliant *bariolage* style. It is therefore surprising that this fiery and brilliant work is not heard more often as an encore piece. The texture quickly moves to two voices in measure two, and then three voices in measure 13. It is fruitful work to go through the entire movement and mark the voices using double stems, as has been indicated in the previous examples. Like the first movement, the Corrente gives prominence to the interval of a 10th, and the performer is well advised to scan the text for these intervals. Sometimes the interval is used to define the compass or range of the phrase, as seen in the first two measures. Later in the piece, on the first beats of measures 52, 53, and 54 for example, the 10th defines the harmonic space of the three-part texture. When seen so often as well as seen in the context of the first movement, the interval becomes topical. In Measure 41, the cadenza is announced by the D# diminished 7th harmony.

One of the hardest things to do on a flute is to keep the airstream at a constant velocity and pressure while tonguing. This movement is an ideal vehicle to practice slurring three and

tonguing one in a set of four sixteenths. Sometimes the figure may be reversed, tonguing the first sixteenth followed by the three slurred notes. There is a great deal of evidence that Bach preferred asymmetrical groupings, as evidenced by the slurs that he included in his manuscripts. In the execution of this figure, there is a tendency to clip the last note of a slur before an articulated pitch, so that one has more time to set up the articulation, but this stops the otherwise continuous flow of air. After marking the phrases and breaths following the model of the first movement, proceed to slurring each phrase in its entirety. Then continue by practicing one phrase at a time, slurring either one and three sixteenths or three and one. Of course, there are some moments where this cannot be done due to the eighth note motion, but these moments are few and far between.

The treatises of the eighteenth century devote most of their text to articulation and ornamentation, while very little material is presented about tone production. Might this be because the acoustical spaces of the period were so reverberant that clear diction was imperative? Did the acoustics generally favor the sound of the *traverso*, similar to today's pop musician having the advantage of amplification and artificial reverberation? Seen as "flute speech", we can well imagine that the words that were spoken into the flute relied heavily on a variety of consonants of tonguing as well as vowels of tone.

Sarabande:

Baroque dance style is in large part determined by the appropriate succession of strong and weak beats of each measure. In this movement, the Sarabande emphasizes the second beat in the first measure, followed by emphasis on the downbeat of the second measure. Still, moments where Bach foils such expectations account for much of the interest and variety in this movement.

Assuming that the movement's first two measures fit the above model of a strong second beat in the first measure followed by a strong first beat in the second, and that this pattern is repeated in measures three and four, the four bar phrase structure is clear. Still a major question does remain. Does the E natural in the second bar feel like a resolution of the half note F? If so, a breath after the F would break the suspension, and should be avoided. If the F is heard as the last note of the motif, then it would at least soften, even if a breath is not needed. The latter solution is probably more in keeping with the style of Bach's early works, however both solutions can make sense. Although the Sarabande was considered a slow dance at this point in time, the work still moves quickly enough that a four bar phrase is easily attainable.

Measures five through eight all clearly have a strong first beat. The short trill marked on the second beats of both measures six and eight are often played from the note above on the beat, however Frederick Neumann's interpretation is also worthy of consideration. This would

call for a weaker appoggiatura before the beat, making the figure smoother and less accentuated.

Bourée Angloise

This Bourée contrasts a "low" style, or folk-like character with the former "high" style movements. Examples of the Bourée and English style are common in the early Eighteenth century, and generally have a quarter anacrusis followed by a strongly accented downbeat. It is unusual to end a suite with such a movement; a concluding Gigue is most typical. Hence, performers often find this more rustic movement anticlimactic, and tend to either rush the tempo or exaggerate features of the work. I suggest using the baroque ti-ri-ti articulation in most of the iterations of two sixteenths followed by an eighth. It sounds well on both baroque and modern instruments, and can help with the natural stress of the dance movement.

¹ Although the Brandenburg Concertos predate these works, the flute was acting in a subordinate role to the violin or keyboard.

² These five notes, transposed to C Minor, are the first notes of the Musical Offering theme as well. It is remarkable that Bach both began and ended his writing for flute with this famous motif.
