

Performing a Bach Suite

by Stanley Weldy

May 23rd, 1986

This paper,
along with a Senior Honors Recital
is in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
an Honors Degree.

Ball State University 1982-86

**BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

presents

STANLEY WELDY
viola

in a

SENIOR RECITAL

assisted by
Eri Nakagawa, piano
Daniel Hughes, percussion

Divertimento
Adagio
Menuet
Allegro di molto

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Suite No. 3 in C Major
for unaccompanied viola
Prelude
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Bourrée I and II
Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

. . . Intermission . . .

Variations for Four Drums and Viola
Introduction
Var. I, Adagio
Var. II, Allegro
Var. III, Lyrical
Var. IV, Andante agitato
Var. V, Scherzo
Finale

Michael Colgrass
(b.1932)

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 120 No. 1
Allegro appassionato
Andante un poco Adagio
Allegretto grazioso
Vivace

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Stanley Weldy is a student of Linda Gaidel.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Bachelor of Music.

UNIVERSITY HALL
Thursday, April 24, 1986
8:00 p.m.

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Number 148

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General consensus acknowledges Johann Sebastian Bach as the supreme composer of the Baroque Era and one of the greatest master craftsmen in the history of Western music. The key to his genius lay in his ability to balance two opposing elements. He combined immense powers of creativity and originality with intellectual control and technical craft, executing this balance with a perfection unparalleled by his peers and rarely matched in other eras.

Bach was the last of eight children born to a staunch Lutheran family in Eisenach, Germany. Only four of these children lived to adulthood. He attended the Lateinschule which provided humanistic and theological studies. Records report him as being a good student.

In 1694 J.S. Bach's mother died, and less than a year later his father also died. Bach was only nine years old at the time. He went to live with his brother at Ohrdruf. There he studied at the Lyceum. His curriculum included religion, reading, writing, arithmetic, history and natural science.

When he was 15, his brother's house became too crowded, as three children had been born to the family since Johann Sebastian's arrival. He left and was taken in at the Michaelkirche in Lüneburg. There he studied orthodox Lutheranism, Latin, arithmetic, history, geography, genealogy, heraldry, German poetry, and physics. He began to teach himself composition and organ playing.

At age 17 he went to Weimar and worked as a paid lackey. He had access to an organ which he practiced when he could. A year later he secured an appointment as organist in a small church in Arnstadt.

Bach became very skilled at the organ. When he was 22 he accepted an important post as organist in Muhlhausen. Here he married, and began to teach and compose in earnest. His ability became known throughout the region.

In the next year he accepted a higher paying post at the

court in Weimar, where he stayed for nine years. Six of his children were born there. He produced major organ works and cantatas.

His noble employers at Weimar had various running disputes among themselves during Bach's stay. When they finally began quibbling about the music at the court, Bach decided to leave. He demanded release from his contract in such bold terms that he was jailed. He was finally released from jail and from his position at court.

Bach took his family to the court at Cothen where he delighted in his new job as director of music and leader of the fine orchestra. Here he stayed for six years. During this time his wife died. A year later he married Anna Magdalena Wilcke, who was from a musical family.

Finally, in 1723, he accepted a prestigious position as Kantor in Leipzig. He stayed in Leipzig for the rest of his life, building fame as a virtuoso organist and composing masterpiece after masterpiece. In the last year of his life his health was very poor, and he eventually went blind from cataract trouble. He died on July 28, 1750.

The six suites for unaccompanied 'cello were written while Bach was in Cothen between 1717 and 1723, most likely in 1720. The reason for uncertainty is that no autograph manuscript in Bach's own handwriting survives to us today. The only manuscripts extant are one copied by Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena, and one copied by a colleague, Kellner. Several early editions were published also. All of these sources differ in various details. The Anna Magdalena manuscript has come to be regarded as the most accurate. She was from a musical family and was herself a singer, and therefore was familiar with the notation and copying of music. According to the New Grove Dictionary, "Anna Magdalena... in addition to her domestic tasks was a loyal and industrious collaborator, participating in performances and copying out music..."

These six suites were the first pieces ever written for

unaccompanied 'cello. They were probably influenced by Bach's works for unaccompanied lute, and were leading up to the sonatas and partitas for unaccompanied violin.

The genius of these pieces is that they need no accompaniment. Through various techniques Bach allows one instrument to play melody and harmony, in effect accompanying itself. Through double-stopping, broken chords, arpeggios, barriolaugue, and other tricks of counterpoint, Bach created polyphonic, or many-voiced music for one instrument. Often two or three of these voices speak to each other at the same time.

The suites take the form of stylized dance suites with standard dance movements: the Allemande, Courante, Saraband, Bouree or Minuet, and Gigue. Each of these dances has its own characteristic rhythm and form. A Prelude is placed before these dances, making a total of six movements.

For the reason of the polyphony occurring in a single instrument these pieces are perhaps a cellist's toughest test. Violists, whose Baroque repertoire is limited, also play transcriptions of these suites. As the viola is voiced exactly one octave above the 'cello, no change of key or other aberration is necessary, other than simply transposing up one octave.

In the Romantic Era of the 19th century, stringed instruments were improved. The inner construction of stringed instruments was altered to produce a thicker, more powerful tone. The tone of stringed instruments in the Baroque Era had been more thin and transparent. Romantic Players added a much heavier vibrato to this new tone in order to increase the expressive potential of the instrument. Baroque players had used vibrato sparingly, more as an ornament than as an essential part of the tone. The final perfection of the Tourte bow caused major changes in bowing styles. The Tourte style bow was concave whereas Baroque bows were convex. The Tourte, a heavier bow, allowed a smooth, legato bowing style and produced a bigger, warmer sound from the instrument. The Baroque bow was light and springy, and could barely be kept on the string, especially in fast passages. Baroque players tended to use more bouncing and off-the-string

bowing styles.

The effect of all this was that Baroque music came to be performed in a drastically different way in the Romantic Era. Beauty of tone was the primary consideration, as the possibilities of the new romantic instruments were investigated. The music was played much slower to allow a full tone to be dug out of each note. Heavy romantic vibrato was applied constantly to enhance the tone. The bowing style was very smooth and legato; a rule of thumb in the Romantic Era was to never allow the bow to leave the string while playing Bach.

This resulted in a very beautiful, lush tone. However, much of the Baroque music's original meaning fell by the wayside. The Bach 'cello suites, which were originally dance suites, hardly felt dancelike under such heavy treatment. Performances seemed to drag on because of the slow tempos, so performers began to cut up the music by not taking **repeats** or by leaving out movements altogether. The slow tempos and full tones blurred much of the interplay between the voices, and hence the polyphonic effect was lost. The great composer Robert Schumann wrote out a piano accompaniment for the suites in one edition which was published in the 19th century. To him they sounded barren played by just one instrument. This is indicative of the fact that most musicians of the 19th century missed perhaps the most important aspect of the suites -- their polyphony. Yet, the music survived. It served the Romantics well. Romantic players did what they wanted to do with the music.

Each culture produces music in its own image, and reproduces old music in its own way. We now live in an age of science. The scientific approach has finally been applied to music. Our culture is now asking for historical accuracy in musical performance. Ensembles have been formed which only use instruments made during the Baroque Era or exact copies of such instruments. Every school of music in the country (including Ball State's) is offering opportunities to train in Baroque or ancient music performance practice. The "original instruments" craze has spread through North America and Europe. The idea is to go back to playing music the way it sounded when it was new. This is analogous to

removing layers of varnish and lacquer from old paintings to reveal much different art beneath.

This new approach has produced some marvelous effects. It has brought new life into many old works. However, it often leaves the Romantic or older modern performer confused, angry, or out in the cold. We can't all be experts in ancient performance practice, and we can't all own and master an original instrument. And yet, the modern performer in this situation still wants to play the wonderful music from the past.

In my performance of the Bach unaccompanied 'cello suite no.3 I attempted to reject both of these schools of thought. I desired no part of the Romantic distortions of Bach's masterwork.

However, I hardly subscribed to the "original instrument" ideal. I took a piece originally written for the 'cello and played it on the viola. In fact, three out of four of the pieces on the recital were not written originally for the viola. This does not display great concern for original instrumentation.

The performer stands between two entities: the composer and the audience. First, the performer must try to understand what the composer has done. Why did he write this music? What was he trying to say when he put those notes on the paper?

Once the performer has understood this, he must deliver these thoughts and ideas to the audience. The audience is the most important element in this chain. There is no music unless there is someone to hear it. Without an audience the performer has no job. He might as well sit in a closet and hum. Therefore he owes his greatest allegiance to the audience. His most important task is to make the composer's ideas clear to the audience.

I attempted to do this by first studying Bach's music carefully. I tried to ignore the influence of Romantic music editors and performers and drop any other cultural baggage that I might have been carrying. I went back and studied the Anna Magdalena manuscript and other editions as well.

My instrument is not "original". It was made in 1984 and will never produce a Baroque sound. However, there is much more to music, and to Bach's writing, than tone quality. Tone

is only the tool with which we make music. It is only the medium through which the ideas pass. There are other more important considerations.

Romantic tempos were usually too slow. A Romantic editor had put metronome markings in an edition I consulted, some of which I felt were twice too slow. I attempted to take lively dancelike tempos for the dance movements and a brilliant organ-toccatta tempo for the prelude which was written as a virtuosic display piece.

Romantic articulations tended to be very legato with almost all the notes slurred into long bow strokes. I separated many of the bowings and attempted to use slurs only to shape notes into more graceful, dancelike groups. For example, compare a Romantic bowing with one found in the Anna Magdalena manuscript. (see examples) The Baroque bowing slurs three notes and leaves the fourth separate in each beat. This produces an elegant dancelike feel, with the fourth note functioning as an upbeat leading into the next beat and always drawing the music onward. The Romantic bowing slurs two notes and two notes in each beat. This produces a square effect, perhaps like dancing with heavy boots on. Articulated this way the music tends to slow and bog down. The Romantics slurred it this way because it was easier for a legato bowing. It left no single note separate, and therefore the bow did not have to leave the string at any time.

The entire suite was full of details such as this. In each case I attempted to come as near as possible to the spirit of Bach's music. I feel that the original ideas are more important than original instruments, and that these ideas can come through even on modern instruments. The work that I did preparing for this performance was a long step forward for me toward realizing this goal.

Examples. From Bouree 1, Bach cello suite no. 3



A Romantic bowing



The same passage, from the Anna Magdalena manuscript.

(Published in the Bach-Gesellschaft edition)