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The Performer's Strategies in Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites

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Every performer has his or her own evolution through his or her professional career, but Bach's Cello Suites offer the most spectacular changes from one recording to another, from one tour to another and even from one performance to another. Many analysts maintain that this "freedom", which is uncommon for other instruments, is due to the lack of an original manuscript signed by Bach and to the existence of only copies from that period.¹

The musician's growth is not the only reason for interpretive diversity, the other being the permanent effervescence of society and implicitly of the audience, who always demands something new. The interpretive trajectories of major international schools are also of great importance, such as those from Western Europe (Germany, the Netherlands, France, Scandinavia) or, crossing the ocean, of the American school, increasingly more prevailing and interesting, all of whom bring originality and consistency to the performance.

Concerning the personal approach of this topic, I have carried out a tour of ten performances in March 2012 of the *Complete Cello Suites by J. S. Bach*, being the only Romanian to play all of them in one performance. The second edition of the *Do You Like Bach?* tour took place in October 2012, in ten

¹ One of the best examples of interpretive diversity is renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma, who not only radically changes his approach, each time trying to get closer to the authenticity of the composer's era, but also pairs music with the other arts, such as cinema or dance, making six films, one for each suite.

other towns in Romania. For me, the interpretive development was spectacular, especially because I succeeded in pairing it with the visual arts, creating a multimedia, rear projection, and lights performance.

In this study, I attempt to propose strategies and solutions that could help other cellists approach the six Suites, each having six movements, thus summing up to thirty-six individual musical moments; when played in a concert, they generate a single moment – *the recital*. I believe that the detailed analysis is useful only if you keep in mind at all times the integral character of the six suites. You always know where you are headed, what you leave behind, where you build the climactic moments, especially because, in a concert hall, music unfolds in time and must be thought out accordingly.

BAROQUE CELLO OR MODERN CELLO?

The adaptation of modern playing technique to the baroque repertoire is a very important issue relating to the performance of the Cello Suites. Where does “the truth” lie: between playing on a baroque instrument (accessories, bow, setup, tuning, or phrasing, in accordance with the historically informed performance trend) or playing on a modern instrument with a modern bow, metal strings and endpin?

The Early Music performer attempts to recreate the performance practice of the Baroque period when playing the Suites, which is a real challenge, since Baroque musicians had very different instruments, bows, and strings, different concepts of intonation and articulation, and different musical goals. As previously discussed, the baroque sound world was very different from today’s. . . . Also, since our instruments are so different from baroque instruments, including bows and strings, what is the use of trying to re-create the baroque sound? It will never sound the same. Or is it our “duty” to try?

Many questions surface when one chooses to play Bach. Given the tremendous variety of performances on record, it should come as no surprise that there is little agreement on the answers, which probably means that there is no “right” answer. It seems that the best one can do is learn as much as one can about the outstanding issues, and then make informed choices. My hunch is that a hybrid of the two approaches is appropriate, and realistic. (Janof 1998a)

Considering this “hybrid” performance as a combination or a medium between the baroque-style performances, the romantic-style performances, or the modern, “objectified” ones, with everything they represent, each performing style should influence and inspire this combination.

In the many performances I chose as guidelines, some performers, such as Anner Bylsma or Pieter Wispelwey are superb. They play Bach on baroque instruments, with all the accessories required for the respective performing style: very attractive, provocative and especially beautiful, in my opinion. My first experiment getting closer to the style of historical performance was to change the metal strings, on which I was used to playing, for gut strings.

During these auditions, I also found that many musicians who perform in the baroque style are also influenced by it in their other performing areas – romantic, modern etc. As an example, I have listened to the *Adagio and Allegro* by Robert Schumann, performed by Anner Bylsma: a completely different direction compared to how I see this romantic piece. Bylsma retains the baroque articulation, very different from what we call today “romantic phrasing”. On the other side, we can't ignore Bylsma's playing. This is what he said in an interview, regarding the direction of performing:

We cellists have been brainwashed to think that we must all sing in one big line. To me this isn't singing, this is more like talking without enunciating the syllables, belonging more to a twentieth century aesthetic. I prefer clarity.

If Bach didn't show slurs, why would we add them? He certainly could have added them if he wanted. He was a string player after all. (Anner Bylsma, cited in Janof 1998c)

Metal strings have been created at the beginning of the twentieth century and perfected towards the middle of the century, so maybe Bylsma is right to play a romantic repertoire using baroque articulation, a means of expression imposed by the accessories of the baroque cello. Usually, those who play both romantic and baroque works have two cellos, each with a completely different sonority. Changing the strings was a spectacular step in my evolution of performing Bach. Everything that sounded direct and articulated on metal strings became much softer on gut strings, as these strings “asked” for a different type of stroke – gentler, with less pressure, the resulting effect being completely different from metal strings. While continuing to experiment with Bach's bowing, these strings made everything feel more natural, coming closer to my ideal concept, the one I envisaged. This moment represents the

biggest acceleration since then, regarding the crystallisation of the interpretation. I was able to play all the suites with almost all of the original bowing, and the result sounded much more natural than on metal strings. The phrasing changed considerably: the long phrases that I was used to playing gave way to phrasing on very short thematic motifs, taken to the extreme all the way to cells.

This work was not only productive, but extremely necessary. The G and C strings had to be changed after two months, because of works performed in other concerts. The A and D strings lasted over six months. After this period of time, an artist who experiments should ask one question very seriously: does he or she keep this setup of the instrument and adapt all concerts to a limited acoustic performance – the purpose for this being a possible tour in four years' time – or does he or she continue the solo and chamber music career with a modern setup and adapts the discoveries made until that point? I could see the acoustic limitations of the baroque setup on a romantic repertoire; another important factor was my familiarity with the sounds of metal strings. I decided to come back to these strings after six months and continue my career as a concert soloist, while applying the baroque phrasing, bowing and tone which I had discovered.

MY PERSPECTIVE OF PERFORMING BACH'S CELLO SUITES: TOUR EXPERIENCE

We get accustomed to playing in a certain way, thanks to the information we have at that point. I began to learn movements of the Cello Suites when I was 12 years old. When I decided to carry out the project that included the recording of the Cello Suites and the *Do You Like Bach?* tours, I realized that I wasn't playing what I wanted to express, and that the performance had to be adapted and changed in its majority. This process took more than five years. In order to be able to feel and express the music of the Cello Suites in the context of the early twenty-first century, in relation to our current cultural level, to the personal cultural level, I had to experiment and be brave enough to change many of the "reflexes" of the performing style I had learnt from my teachers, and of the autochthonous performing traditions with which I had come in contact until then, as a musician.

From the beginning of the first concert of the first tour (which took place on February 29th, 2012) until the end of the second tour (in November of the same year), I changed my performing style to a large degree, mainly because I was grounding my own performance. It is very important to be able

to “listen to yourself” live – a feat which is difficult enough at certain stages of development. Then, after listening repeatedly to the recordings of previous recitals, you must accept with honesty the comparison between what you are listening to while playing live and what is heard on recordings. This analysis of performances can be achieved only in front of the audience and cannot be done in a study room, alone or in the company of teachers. Also, adapting the performance to distinct types of acoustics forces the musician to research the piece under all aspects. In a hall with cathedral-type acoustics, you can finish a concert relatively rested physically, while the next concert, in an acoustically dry theatre-type hall, can make you exit the stage completely exhausted.

In each concert performance, one always tries to surpass the limitations of the moment. We do this because in a study room we try many things that are impossible to achieve at once, for many reasons such as memory, focus, lack of performing reflex, technique, or other individual details. The stage is the place where, which each concert, we add one or more elements of the arsenal we practiced, experimented with, and eventually deemed qualitative, thus crystallising a personal performance. Some experiments work, others do not, and the only arbiter to decide whether unsuccessful experiments are to be carried on is none other than the performer. Other significant aspects which influence performance are: different acoustics in each hall, varied types of audience, different environments or conditions, the state of time in which the concert takes place etc.

THE PERFORMER'S ADAPTABILITY TO ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT

Nowadays, the performer must adapt to any situation, or risk losing the audience, the relationship with the organizers and even “win” their dislike. When played with repeats, the Cello Suites last two hours and twenty minutes. When I suggested the Complete Cello Suites to certain organizers at home and even abroad, they told me frankly that the audience – which they knew very well – would find such a feat very difficult to bear and proposed that I reduce the duration. There were two options: one was to reduce the number of suites, thus no longer performing the “Complete Cello Suites”, and the second was to play without repeats, thus making it a 90-minute performance. If I had chosen only the places that agreed to the original duration, I would have been left with only six towns, which I knew very well, as they are solid music centres, with an educated and cultured audience. In this case, the performer, who in Romania is also the organizer, must make the best and least risky choice for

his or her career. There is a very serious question to be asked: “For whom do I perform?” – for 5% of musicians and 20% of people who wish and have the time to listen to two hours and twenty minutes of music, or for the remaining 65% of the audience, who do not want/are not capable of such patience, for different reasons. There is a segment of the audience who comes to the concert uninformed and realizes that intermission occurs after one hour and twenty minutes, the usual time for a concert; or there is another segment of the audience who gets bored and leaves at intermission. How do we make them stay? Here comes an answer:

My first priority is to not bore my audience. If I sense that the audience is getting restless, I will sometimes skip a repeat. I am not there for my pleasure I am there for the crowd’s pleasure. After all, they are paying to listen to me. If they don’t enjoy themselves, they may not come back. (Anner Bylsma, cited in Janof 1998c)

Here is Tim Janof’s opinion, also on the topic of repeats:

Though Janos Starker plays all repeats in his recent recording of the Bach Suites, in earlier recordings he doesn’t. In some of the Bach movements, the first section is 16 bars and the second one is 32 bars, so I find that the 16 bars should be repeated while the 32 bars should not. I think it was sort of a mechanical gesture on the part of the composer to put in the repeat marks. Sometimes I choose not to repeat the second half because it’s too long. (Janof 1998a)

Here is an obvious question: how can we tell, while on stage, when the audience reached the level of saturation? The answer is very debatable. Given the experience I acquired after hundreds of performances, I can say that in most cases, I am aware of the audience’s endurance. Their limits can be seen and measured by restlessness, coughing, moving in their chairs or searching in their bags, whispering and general restlessness. If we manage to change the atmosphere through an expressive shock, we can eliminate this state of saturation, since that is what we are dealing with – a state which is too monotonous for some. In the same hall, we will undoubtedly have audience who would like to listen to all the repeats in the Bach Cello Suites, but we, as artists, must choose between majority and minority.

How do we win an audience? A personal answer, unrelated to music, would be catering during intermission, a practice which is more and more

common at private cultural events. This is what I have done for my latest concert in Bucharest, as it is impossible to transport the food around the country. This practice is recommended for other types of events, as the audience changes and has more expectations from a concert, becoming oriented towards a full social event.

ADOPTED TECHNIQUES – BOWING

The bow technique adapted to the modern cello is very elaborate. Everything that sounds naturally long on gut strings – because from the stroke on the string until the end of the sound, a phrasing arc is created, with a slow onset, a climactic moment in the middle and a slow ending, and if “short” playing is forced, sounds are replaced by noises – must be achieved artificially on metal strings, it must be played longer, imitating this phrasing arc. Once achieved, it flows naturally. Not performing other repertoires is also fundamental.

The right-hand technique is defining in the case of baroque performance, adapted on metal strings. Many experts compare the right hand to the gear mechanism of an automobile, which makes it possible to absorb the shocks caused by holes in the road, leading to a smooth drive. Practically, from an aggressive movement of the arm, we pass on to a joint in the forearm, which already absorbs the shock partially; then to the wrist, another very important joint; then to the three joints of each finger all the way to the contact with the bow; the thumb, which plays a fundamental role in absorbing and grasping; the elasticity of the bow stick; and, finally, the bow hair, which has its own elasticity. All these elements make a smooth stroke possible. Seeing as a gut string is much softer than a metal string, using elementary logic, this technique on metal strings must be more intense in order to absorb the string's reaction. According to this principle, one can play on metal strings achieving a similar effect as on gut strings, with the advantage of a more powerful sound. Quoting Paul Tortelier, Tim Janof said:

“Searching for the ideal bowings in each passage is a lifelong challenge for every cellist”, which I'm sure he [Tortelier]’d extend to fingerings as well. The primary motivation is always how to play the cello better. (Janof 1998a)

Bach's Cello Suites rely on thematic voices accompanied by chords or harmonies on the other strings. Therefore, the section that is used when playing is very important. If we play with the bow near the bridge, the sound will

be stronger, but, due to this proximity, the string arc increases, implicitly increasing the stroke angle between strings. If we play closer to the fingerboard, it will be easier to access two, even three strings. This way, the sound diminishes in power, but it gives us a much larger continuity especially when playing chords. Thus, we will be able to play chords using an “arpeggio”-type stroke, but with a continuous sound, without stops during the string crossings, achieving a “pedal” effect, if we are to compare it with the piano technique. This technique must be sustained by the left hand, which must sustain the bass notes – at the onset of the bow stroke – in order not to interrupt the vibration of the strings, leaving them to harmonically support the soprano notes, where the theme usually is.

Because the Cello Suites are built on dance motifs, in order to convey the appropriate character, the bow spends a large amount of time in the air, thus making it possible to associate this “lift-off” with the dancers’ steps.

FINGERINGS

Theoretically speaking, a good cellist already has a fingering system. This system is best visible during sight-reading. The eye-brain-hand connection becomes reflex, meaning that the eye and the hand are in direct contact, leaving no time for variants. After reaching a different level of knowledge, the thought process replaces this reflex, leading to the search for the best suited variant for that particular musical style, piece or moment. The choices vary based on reasons concerning style, technique, connection between notes or positions and last, but not least the type of bowing you are using in the musical motif. With experience, reflex takes over thinking. Personally, I keep about 70% of the fingerings I use during sight-readings.

Fingerings have different and very important roles. One of them is to make playing the cello easier. When you prepare for a musical “marathon” such as the Complete Cello Suites, performed in one concert, with or without repeats, the effort is undeniable, and if this happens ever so rarely among cellists, maybe the physical constraints are one of the barriers.

None of the manuscript copies has any fingering, which is a much later practice, brought on by the appearance of the publishers, of editors who took notes about bowings, fingerings, nuances or phrasing markings. After the crystallisation of the style I chose for the performance of the Cello Suites, I began the physical training. At first, I found it impossible to complete even one suite without feeling exhausted. When you prepare yourself for the Complete Suites, you search for ways to reach your goal. I realized that my

left hand became extremely tired, compared to the right hand. Experimenting with gut strings was of great help, as it offered the option to play with open strings. Until then, the opinion was to avoid open strings, simply because they are “inexpressive”, due to the lack of vibrato. With the new sonority of my interpretation – by significantly reducing the vibrato – the open strings found their natural fit. It's impossible to play open strings without adapting the fingerings before and after. So, with what I had studied until then from the Bach repertoire, this adaptation to the four open strings came very easily, everything changing naturally with this new element. The result was remarkable: all of a sudden, I could play three suites. With every “start-to-finish” attempt, which was unsuccessful due to physical limitations, I would come up with new variants, more natural and less tiring. The “start-to-finish” became the main practice solution, as I was making progress physically, I was crystallising the interpretation, and I was connecting the suites, which is a defining element in the interpretive stylistic unit.

To make playing even easier, only with Bach did I manage to adopt a different type of articulation, based on the impulse with which the string is pressed and the immediate relaxing of the finger and implicitly of the active hand joints, a system very similar to the piano's hammer striking forcefully and immediately releasing the tension. This system, which is more common in sports, especially in martial arts, increased my endurance by at least 20%. This system could certainly be adapted to any repertoire, but only partially, as it can be used in the case of pieces with limited vibrato, the notion of “vibrato” implying the tension of the distal joints in the fingers and especially of the forearm, which is very rarely required when playing Bach. I realized this technique is extremely useful for trills and very fast ornaments, the advantage being a very clear effect thanks to this type of articulation.

PREPARING THE CELLO BY A LUTHIER

Every cellist has his or her own instrument setup. This can vary from one performer to another. Some play on heavy tension strings, others play on medium of very light tension strings. The lutherie margins adapt to the majority. There are many elements that influence sound, such as comfort or fatigue. The Complete Cello Suites require the finest setup comfort-wise, which can exasperate a luthier. Usually, a luthier considers that a setup is perfect when it fits within the “margins”. After carefully studying the problem of effort, of the moment when fatigue set in and recognizing the cause, namely the instrument's setup, I would try to force its limits. A very comfortable setup elimi-

nates many problems. There are three elements that can be adjusted: the nut, the fingerboard, and the bridge. The first element where I changed the height was the bridge. We can deduce that, if we reduce the height of the bridge, the distance between the strings and the fingerboard will be smaller, thus, by pressing lighter, the fingers will tire less. On the first attempt of lowering under four millimetres, the A string gave an unesthetic whir, so the initial height had to be restored. Upon studying the matter more closely, I noticed that the whirring could be caused by the fingerboard. I suggested to the luthier to exaggerate its curvature. When viewed from the side, the cello's fingerboard may seem like a flat piece of ebony, but it has a curve which is made by finely grinding the fingerboard, in order to vibrate the string, without touching it. A well-made curvature can significantly reduce the height of the bridge. After this adjustment, I moved on to the third and last element – the nut. This is the piece that supports the strings, together with the bridge. This, too, is adjusted by luthiers within certain margins, but even the nut could be lowered. So, despite the exasperation of the luthier in charge of this painstaking task, Silvian Rusu, I arrived to a string setup much under the measurements given in lutherie books.

ARGUMENT FOR THE INTERPRETIVE TYPE

The main idea to which I arrived was a temporally descending stylistic scale, starting with modern music, then descending towards romantic, classical, and finally baroque music. There are of course intermediate styles, styles of regional composition schools (see the French or the Italian school), or contemporary music – which is not yet defined as a “style”. I tried to sum everything up to four interpretive styles on the cello.

1. The modern style: a sound of great variety, extreme nuances (from *pppp* to *ffff*), rich vibrato, yet static from an ambitus point of view, extreme colour – from non vibrato or matte (white) sounds to harshness, aggressiveness and extreme climactic moments, extremely long phrases.
2. The romantic style: sound of extreme variety, extreme nuances (from *ppp* to *fff*), extremely diverse vibrato, from “narrow” to very “rich”, rich colour, extreme climactic moments, long phrases.
3. The classical style: sound of limited variety, balanced nuances (from *pp* to – rarely – *ff*), rather static vibrato with limited variation, limited colour, balanced climactic moments, short phrases.

4. The baroque: here, many schools no longer follow the "style", but the freedom of expression on the cello.

The cello is a predominantly romantic instrument, it has characteristics which make the romantic repertoire the easiest to perform. In the baroque style, whether it is Bach, Boccherini, or Vivaldi, today's cellists tend to reach towards the romantic interpretive style, using a lot of vibrato, building up the performance on long phrases, inventing them if they don't exist, or using the romantic colour. However, it can be said that each cellist has his or her style, so he or she can perform Bach in any preferred way, but that raises a question: why doesn't this happen in the case of the classical repertoire? Only because, in addition to extremely precise performance markings, the German composition school left us extremely direct letters addressed to the performers of those times, which limited the performer's "personal contribution"? Beethoven's markings on his scores, the precision with which he wrote down each detail, the metronome etc. are already proverbial. My first question was whether Bach was a creator just as thorough, precise, and meticulous as Beethoven. Seeing as there are mathematical analyses correlated with his compositions, the answer was affirmative. I don't know if it can be said that the other three styles have a mannerism much more strongly implemented in musicians, or that the baroque does not have it and it should be created or not. But I, as a musician, have considered this question. My only answer was to come up with my own interpretation. I also believe there is no "one truth", not just a single one anyway, as it is varying and especially adaptable.

The audience's opinions seem to part in three ways: those who appreciate the rich sound and long phrasing, the so-called "romantic interpretation"; those who appreciate the "authentically" baroque interpretation, meaning a performance with period instruments; those who achieve a fusion between the two, the performance involving instruments with modern accessories. This attitude sometimes leads them to criticize the performer, which is why many cellists stay away from Bach's Suites. Arto Noras, one of the most important Finnish cellists, said:

I prefer not to perform Bach these days. It has become too complicated and too controversial a subject. This becomes evident in competitions, for example. When the jury listens to Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, or Dvořák, everybody pretty much agrees upon whether the performance was good or bad. But when somebody plays Bach, some of the judges hate it, some love it, and the rest don't say anything at all!

The normal way to approach a composition is not enough for some reason when playing Bach. I am not allowed, by some groups, to apply all my knowledge and experience of music and music-making and perform Bach the way I like it. No matter what I do, somebody will be offended. I can play it with or without vibrato, legato or with separate bows, with a variety of tempos, and so on, and somebody is guaranteed to hate it. There are no rules with Bach, which I find to be very irritating! Violinists are lucky, since they don't face this problem with their solo Bach works.

And do we really want to play Bach the way it was actually done back then, with amateurish scratchy technique and out of tune? I don't think so. (Arto Noras, cited in Janof 1998b)

SENSATIONS ACQUIRED WHILE PLAYING BACH

By far, the most difficult aspect of performing the Complete Cello Suites is the physical effort. One of the obstacles is the adjustment of the breathing. It is known that too little air in the body leads to reduced physical potential, everything being directed towards the hands – the fundamental elements in playing the cello – while too much air leads to dizziness, clouded thinking, and implicitly foggy memory. Being used to play endurance concertos, such as Dvořák, Shostakovich, or Elgar, which last over 45 minutes, I never considered breathing to be an issue. Breathing is more of a relaxation technique, rather used before the performance, when we try to free ourselves of stress. There are special breathing techniques, and finding the ideal adjustment between hypo- and hyperventilation of the lungs is fundamental. For me, triple metre pieces, of medium speed and with an upbeat, create the perfect setting for hyperventilation, with more intense inhales that outnumber the exhales, causing dizziness (the Minuet from the Sonata in E minor by Brahms).

Another problem that is not brought to our attention is blood circulation. When attempting to play “start-to-finish”, to achieve endurance, I hit what in sports is called a “dead spot”, during Suite No. 5, somewhere between the third movement, the courante, and the fifth movement, the gavotte: the reason was always numbness in the forearm and then in the palm and fingers. Every time I managed to move on to Suite No. 6, everything seemed much easier, and even though I kept playing, my hands regained their strength and the numbness disappeared. The first five suites are played mainly in the first to fourth position, and the angle between the arm and forearm is very narrow, obstructing normal blood flow. Bach wrote Suite No. 6 for “violoncello

piccolo”, and he used higher octaves; thus, even from the prelude, the cellist must go up to the highest positions of the instrument. When you play the usual repertoire in lower positions, you don't have to think about blood flow, but when you decide to play for two whole hours, the body forces you to consider this issue. Therefore, I tried to make use of open strings in order to relieve the pressure in my forearm, especially during the sarabandes, where there was enough time to extend the arm in a downward direction. I tried to create an aesthetically pleasing extension, which would not disturb the audience and would not seem striking. This personal discovery allowed me to play all the suites, from start to finish, sometimes without a break.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCORE ANALYSIS FOR THE PERFORMER

Based on the principle of similarity between music and architecture, structure is defining for a performance. Whether it is a harmonic, formal, or simply global structure, a strategy of structures – imagined by the composer and understood by the performer – is very important. I have already stated in this paper that I approach Bach's six Suites globally: six suites, each with six movements, summed up to thirty-six individual moments, which, when played in a concert, generate a single moment: the recital.

As an interpretive strategy, we start out in a different way from other composers, who have left us much more information regarding their ideas and wishes, through detailed markings of nuance, agogics, character, or sometimes colour. With Bach, apart from a few nuances, there are no other markings in his manuscripts. Therefore, the difference between one *forte* and another is left to the performer. In my opinion, a movement or a piece, regardless of genre or era in which it was composed, should have, from the point of view of the performer, a positive climactic moment – the moment when we achieve the highest intensity of nuance – and its opposite, a negative climactic moment – the moment with the lowest nuance. In order to have the desired effect, these points must be reached one time only; even if there are repeats, the intensity must not be replicated. Most certainly, none of these moments will appear at the beginning or ending of a movement, as they usually appear in the second half, towards the ending. I will make no speculation on any significance of the golden ratio, because the thirty-six dances are so diverse, that they do not fall under a pattern. I think the bourrées and the gavottes are the most clearly structured, because (from the score) the repetition of the first section can create the climactic moment. Also, all the preludes are constructed in such a way, that the identification of the climactic moment

does not lead to a philosophical dilemma. At the opposite end we find the allemandes, which hypnotize us through their thematic ambiguity, and many times during my study sessions, I finished these dances without any recollection of whether I had reached the desired culmination or not.

It is recommendable to consider all these relations at a higher level, that of suite. And here we can identify the strongest (most suspenseful) moments and their opposites. The strategy is harder to apply, because the memory of intensities plays an important role for the audience, too (who does not and should not have this problem, but must be intuitively convinced of it), but also for the performer. It is very difficult to remember precisely a *forte* in the prelude, which you manage to not repeat until the gigue; it is also extremely difficult to create a *piano* in the allemande, and not repeat it until the sarabande. Yet, helped by tones or sound colours and especially attitude, we can create moments of unique intensities even throughout an entire suite. If these climactic moments are exploited properly, the audience will subjectively notice their hierarchy. The more explicitly we play, maintaining the spontaneity of the artistic moment, the clearer it will be for the audience as they leave the concert hall, than if we were to limit ourselves to an indifferent and unconvincing performance.

In the case of the general strategy regarding the entire recital, the most important question and the most difficult is the same: where are the climactic moments? After a subjective (but well argued) answer, we will have to create this climactic moment and make it functional, more precisely visible. How can we prove that this climactic moment is indeed the strongest? How can we determine its conspicuousness, and convey this sensation to the audience?

The only objective way to prove the dynamic of a musical discourse is without a doubt the measurement of its frequencies and intensities on a computer. If the pattern generated on screen by the parameters is obvious, we can prove that that is the strongest or weakest climactic moment, be it positive or negative. The cello has tonalities that sound stronger or softer, and this is not related to the colour of the tonality; practically, the tonalities that contain more primary degrees supported by open strings will have a significantly greater sound volume than those tonalities with no or fewer primary degrees supported by open strings. This is logical from a point of view of the harmonies generated sympathetically by open strings, but also due to the positions on the left hand, much more accessible when one or two notes in a chord are played on open strings. A cello also has positions and especially areas where the vibration is more reduced. The middle positions (third, fourth, and fifth positions) on the D string, but especially on the G string sound much more

closed than on the other strings in the same areas. When the open strings are not accessible, these areas cannot be avoided, and thus the vibration of the instrument will be much more reduced.

Reviewing the tonalities of Bach's Cello Suites, we can analyse the potential of each suite to become a possible ground for the climax of the entire recital:

Suite No. 1 – G major – the triad chord includes the G and D open strings.

Suite No. 2 – D minor – the triad chord includes the D and A open strings.

Suite No. 3 – C major – the triad chord includes the C and G open strings.

Suite No. 4 – E \flat major – the triad chord includes the G open string.

Suite No. 5 – C minor – the triad chord includes the C and G open strings.

Suite No. 6 – D major – the triad chord includes the D and A open strings.

In conclusion, five of the suites have two open strings in the triad chord, the tonality of the majority of the musical discourse, therefore we can exclude Suite No. 4, the most "limited" from this point of view. For anyone who has some experience with international competitions, when possibly choosing one of the six suites, Suite No. 4 will most likely come last, the text being the most technically uncomfortable for the left hand.

Another choice to be made with regards to the climactic moment is the tonality type – major or minor? It is obvious the minor tonality is an option, but certainly the brilliance of the major tonality can give extra nuance. Therefore, the personal and subjective choice is the major tonality. In this case, the climax can be created in three suites, after eliminating Suite No. 4 and subsequently Suites Nos. 2 and 5.

The G major, C major, and D major tonalities of Suites Nos. 1, 3, and 6 are similar from several points of view – they generate a sound that is relatively similar, the accessibility of the positions on the left hand is also similar, and the control of the intonation is comfortable, especially in G major and C major. With three similar options, one question arises: can a climactic moment of a two-and-a-half-hour concert happen in the first suite? In my opinion, it cannot. Not taking into account the complexity of the musical discourse, favourable to Suites Nos. 3 and 6, if a musical act consumes its most

intense moment right from the beginning, I believe the entire structure that should follow loses much of its tension, and the audience's attention is lost.

Having two contenders for the climax, namely Suites Nos. 3 and 6, greatly simplifies the strategy. If we include an intermission halfway through the six suites, we will have at the end of each section a suite that proposes a climactic moment of the respective section, generating another "unit of measure" in addition to those of dance, suite or complete cycle of six suites: the cycle of three suites. Although Suite No. 3 is a strong one, with a possible climactic moment in three of the movements – prelude, courante or gigue – I believe Suite No. 6 has a greater potential in the same corresponding movements. Suite No. 6 has the advantage of a text written in a higher octave, which allows the performer to push the nuances on progressive culminations more and more. In conclusion, we will have two climactic moments in the Suites which end the two cycles, the one in the last suite being slightly superior in volume and tension.

The entire theoretic introspection given above can remain just an idea, without a concrete and convincing transposition into practice. I think each performer must devise his or her own subjective strategy regarding what he or she wishes to express during each appearance on stage.

I proposed an example which I apply in the majority of cases, whether a concert, recital, or any other musical manifestation. We must try to ponder these positive and negative culminations (maximum and minimum, as they are called by some Romanian theorists concerned with the semantics of interpretation; see Ciocan and Rădulescu 1989, Sandu-Dediu 1994). How can they be achieved, so that the audience get the idea? Through accentuating the sensations these moments create. A positive culmination will be prepared over time, the final ascension towards the main peak being a question of preparation and precisely calculated gradation.

The questions to be answered are:

1. What is the basic starting level?
2. What is the level I should achieve?
3. When is the most suitable moment to start this ascension? What type of curve for the crescendo should I adopt in order to get the best result?

This means thinking about the audience's perception, in order to suggest the biggest possible difference between the starting point – *moment zero* – and the final culmination – *the climactic moment*.

My answers are:

1. *The starting level is the lowest possible level, in relation to the character of the musical moment.* We will not be able to achieve a minimal nuance similar

to a *piano* in a sarabande, if we are playing a prelude, courante or gigue. The result would be irrational differences;

2. *The maximum possible level*, with the respective care for the music we play, for the general style of the whole recital, for the quality of sound, and especially for the musical good sense;

3. *As late as possible*. There are three basic forms of a *crescendo*: a. that where the most important build-up is achieved at the beginning of the process, leaving only a small percentage towards the end; b. the perfect diagonal, meaning a gradual *crescendo*; c. the late *crescendo*, in complete opposition to the first, where in the beginning the build-up is only suggested, while the big explosion happens towards the end, giving us that sense of the spectacular, needed for any well executed climactic moment.

During a hypothetical survey after the recital, asking the question regarding the climactic moment, such a strategy could ensure that most answers would indicate the spot where we placed it. The audience senses the way in which it is led by a performer with a well thought-out strategy, even though, during an objective computer analysis, the climax is found somewhere else.

English version by Anca Baci

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