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An Approach to the Historically Informed Performance Practice on a Modern Violin with Case Study of Bach's Chaconne, BWV 1004

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Abstract

Historically informed performance practice has been discussed and debated for a long period of time among musicians who wish to interpret the music authentically and accordingly. However, some issues are discussed whether the performers should play traditionally and historically or the music should be played according to the modern instrument capabilities with new sounds and techniques as a result. This research is limited to analyzing the way of playing chords and voicing. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The data were collected by comparing recordings, documentation, and literature. The result of the study revealed that to be able to interpret historically informed performance practice, a performer needs to study the notation, treatises, documents, and history to deliver the feeling, interpretation, personality, and individual taste in performance.

Keywords: violin, Bach, historically informed performance practice

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Pendekatan Pertunjukan Musik Sesuai dengan Informasi Sejarah pada Instrumen Biola Modern Melalui Studi Kasus *Chaconne, BWV 1004* Karya dari *Bach*

Abstrak

Pertunjukan musik yang sesuai dengan informasi sejarah sudah banyak diperdebatkan oleh para musisi yang ingin memainkan musik secara autentik sesuai dengan apa yang penyusun musik inginkan untuk didengar. Bagaimanapun juga ada beberapa kendala yang menjadi diskusi jika musisi harus memainkan musik secara autentik atau memainkan musik tersebut sesuai dengan kemampuan instrumen modern yang dapat menghasilkan suara dan teknik yang baru sebagai hasilnya. Batasan penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisa cara memainkan akor dan suara dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan dengan membandingkan rekaman, dokumentasi, dan literatur. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa untuk dapat memainkan musik sesuai dengan informasi sejarah, musisi perlu mempelajari notasi, kebiasaan, dokumentasi, dan sejarah untuk dapat memainkan karya musik sesuai dengan perasaan, interpretasi, kepribadian.

Kata Kunci: biola, Bach, *historically informed performance practice*

Introduction

Historically informed performance practice (HIPP) has been debated for a long time among musicians who wish to interpret the music authentically according to what the composer intended to hear. However, some issues are discussed whether the musicians should play the music authentically and historically or whether the music should be played according to the modern instrument capabilities with new sounds and techniques as a result. According to Mark Evan Bonds (2006), the study of HIPP is aimed to maintain the stylistic and technical aspects of the performance as well as using periodic instruments to imitate the sound of historical instruments used at the time of the composition.

In musical life, historical music plays an important role. Therefore, according to Harnoncourt (1988), *"There are two fundamentally different approaches to historical music. One method transplants older music to present, while the other attempts to view it in terms of the period which it originated. Each of this method corresponds to quite different method of rendition."*

There are many speculations about how to perform Bach as HIPP because of the rather subjective data provided by musicians and scholars from our era. It is vital to look at the historical

side of how it originally sounded at the beginning to be able to interpret the music of Bach. The approach of the musician might be different, some musicians modify the interpretation of the music to be able to satisfy the contemporary ears, but others are faithful to the authentic approach.

Many of the traditional practices of performance have undergone constant modification. It is a knowledge that composers could presume among their own contemporaries. An intensive study is required for modern performers; a purely intellectual involvement with old music is an approach that can lead to serious error.

A musician must himself be acquainted first with the conditions under which the music originated to do justice to the piece which he is about to perform. A work by Bach or Telemann demands a different approach of delivery compared to music for example of Tchaikovsky or Beethoven. For it is irrational to play works by Bach as if it were Beethoven, so by this, the performance practice movement began to develop. The importance of mastering an instrument must always be combined with a continuing stylistic awareness.

The *Chaconne of Partita no.2 in D minor from Sonata and Partita for solo violin BWV 1004* by Johann Sebastian Bach is central to violin repertoire which imposes a lot of technical complexities and interpretation challenges for violinists.

This research describes the understanding of historically informed performance practice by examining the performance practice of Bach's time in comparison with modern violin practice through recordings and distinguishing the performance practice methods presented from various sources, then offers ideas and suggestions of performance practice on solving these problems.

Research Method

This research uses qualitative description by collecting data and resources by comparing recordings, documentation, and literature. This research focuses on the theme of Chaconne and the executions of chords. The comparison between performers such as Modern violinists and Baroque violinists are used to be able to see different approaches and results.

The Definition of Chaconne

The *Chaconne* (Italy *ciaccona;* Spain *chacona*; French *chacony*) is a dance form in ¾ metre from before 1800 which often perform at a lively tempo. The theme is mostly presented on the bass line and is often transferred to the upper melody and developed into variations.

A Brief Analysis of Bach's Chaconne

The *Chaconne* is the last movement of the *Partita no. 2 in D minor BWV 1004* from Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin*. Compared with the four movements of *Partita no. 2*, the *Chaconne* exceeds the duration of the total of those four earlier movements. Expressing mourning over the death of his first wife Maria Barbara, the piece is written according to all ranges of human experience, from discovery and joy through tragedy and resignation, to redemption and rebirth.

We can look through *Chaconne* that Bach is a devoted Christian. The *Chaconne* has 257 measures in total, and it is divided into three parts, from D minor to D major and goes back to D minor. It also has many threes in this *Chaconne*, for example, it is based on a three-beat bar (3/4), and the initial theme appeared three times (at the beginning, the middle, and at the end section). The *Chaconne* may be symbolized as The Holy Trinity.

There are many speculations in analysing the phrase of the *Chaconne*, some analyse it as an 8-measured theme phrase, and others analyse it as a 4-measured theme phrase. The *Chaconne* can be analysed as a 4 measures themed phrase which develop into variations every 4 measure, simply by looking at the bass line D C# D Bb G A D which is repeated every 4 bars (see fig. 1)



Fig. 1. Theme of Bach's Chaconne

The first part of D minor excluding the theme has 32 variations, the D major has 19 variations, and the closing D minor has 12 variations. Bach has carefully planned the placement of the sections so that each section is shorter than the previous one which allows the heightening intensifications to proceed even faster than the previous sections. Bach may also have planned the structural proportions in the composition. If *Chaccone* is analysed at the theme as an 8-bar phrase, it gives 62 variations in total which are divided into two groups of 31 variations; the first half of the 31 variations are the D minor and the other 31 variations are in major-minor mode divided into two groups of 19 major mode variation phrases and 12 minor mode variation phrases. On a larger scale, many of the variations occur in pairs in which the second variation would be quite similar to the first one but intensified (fig.2)



Fig. 2. Variation 14 where the theme is intensified by variation 15 (bar 57-63)

The *Chaconne* is a dance with the accent falls on the second beat (see fig. 3). Rhythmically, the variations of *Chaconne* are intensified, it starts with a slow dotted quarter note beat at the opening of the theme and when the new section begins, it develops into a more intensified rhythmic pattern through the variations until it reaches 32nd running notes as in the first minor mode section. The natural rhythmic acceleration in each section affects the characteristic of each statement.



Fig. 3. Theme rhythmical pattern

The Chaconne has a more fluent tempo like a *Sarabande*. A suggestion of metronome mark 66 for a quarter note gives the dotted quarter note a better lively character and it avoids unnecessary weight on the following eighth note.

Executing the Problems of the Right Hand

1. The problems of chords in the opening theme.

The violin is an instrument that usually plays a single-line melody, and if the musical line has double stops and chords, it needs to be played with multiple stops (or multiple notes). The interval that can be sustained simultaneously consists of only 2 notes. If a chord of 3 or 4 notes, it has to be played '1+2'; '2+2'; or '1+2+3+4' with the emphasis on the bass note.



Written *Performed*

Fig. 4. The '2+2' method of playing chords

Bach's *Six Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin* is composed to be played polyphonically and with basso continuo on the violin itself. Technically, it is impossible to play the opening chords of the *Chaconne* on the violin the way Bach wrote it, unless one knows how to approach it.

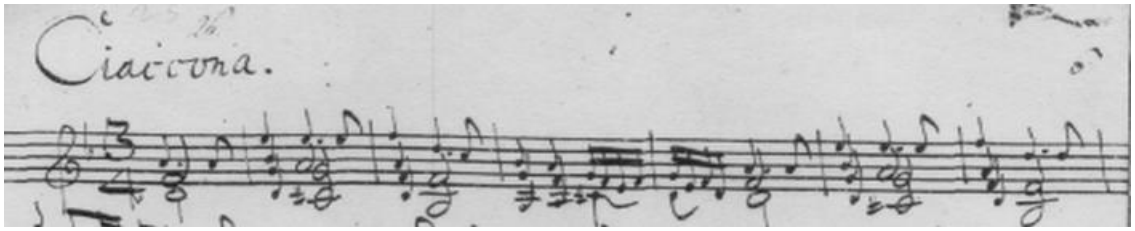


Fig. 5. The manuscript of Bach's Chaconne

To sustain the chords as Bach notated, the upbeats are very difficult or might not be easy to execute on the violin. It is either to leave the upbeats as a single note or to repeat playing the chords once more along with the upbeats (which makes two articulations of the chords).



Fig. 6. Chaconne theme played as Bach had written it by repeating the chords on the 8th notes.

2. The problems of the chords bar 9-15



Fig. 7. Chaconne bar 9-15

There are 3 options for interpreting these chords:

1. playing the chords upwards (from bottom note to upper note)
2. playing the chords downwards (from upper note to bottom note)
3. playing the chords turning (from bottom note to upper note and back to bottom note)

The 2nd and 3rd options are the ways of playing to preserve the melodic line.

Modern and Baroque Violinists

The approach to playing as HIPP is different between modern violinists and Baroque violinists. Here are the comparisons of some modern and Baroque violinists and the ways they approach interpreting these 2 problems.

Modern Violinists

1. **Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987)**

   J. Heifetz is considered as one of the most influential violinists. 'The King' of the violin, he represents Leopold Auer's school of violin playing. He is famous for his violin virtuosity and has influenced violinists from every generation.

2. **Ithzak Perlman (°1945)**

   Perlman is regarded as another prominent virtuoso a generation after Heifetz. The world responds to him not only to his remarkable artistry but also to his joy of music making. He represents Ivan Galamian's school of violin playing.

3. **Hillary Hahn (°1979)**

   Hahn is one of the gifted modern-day violinists; she is famous for her technical brilliance and her love of contemporary music. She has received several Grammy awards.

Parameter		**Modern Violinists**		
		Jascha Heifetz	**Ithzak Perlman**	**Hillary Hahn**
Duration		13'02"	15'47"	17'47"
Chords	**bar 1-8**	Playing the full chord on the 8th notes	Leaving out the 8th notes without chords	Leaving out the 8th notes without chords
	bar 9-15	Playing all the chords turning	Playing the 1st chord upwards, but playing the rest of the chords turning	Playing all the chords turning
Articulation		Using continuous vibrato, changing the bowings to virtuosic playing, and a lot of glissandi because of position changes	Using continuous vibrato, sticky *detaché* bowings	Using continuous vibrato, sticky *detaché* bowings

Table 1. Parameter of Modern Violinist

Baroque Violinist

1. **Sigiswald Kuijken (°1944)**

   Kuijken is a well-known Baroque violinist who started to perform on the baroque violin in the 1960s. He is one of the leading baroque style specialists and is regarded as playing authentic interpretations of baroque instruments.

2. **Monica Hugget (°1953)**

   Hugget has made a career as a baroque violinist and plays baroque instruments.

3. **Alina Ibragimova (°1985)**

   Ibragimova is representing the violinist of the young generation who is playing from baroque to modern violin repertoires. She is playing both on the modern and baroque instruments.

Parameter		**Baroque Violinists**		
		Sigiswald Kuijken	**Monica Hugget**	**Alina Ibragimova**
Duration		12’	14’08”	13’
Chords	**bar 1-8**	Leaving out the 8th notes without chords	Leaving out the 8th notes without chords	Leaving out the 8th notes without chords
	bar 9-15	Playing the 1st chord turning, but playing the rest of the phrase chords upwards	Playing all the chords upwards	Playing the 1st chord downwards, and playing the rest of the phrase chords turning
Articulation		Light detaché bowing, easier and lighter on the 16th notes	Light detaché bowing, easier and lighter on the 16th notes	Light detaché bowing, stickier on the 16th notes

Table 2. Parameter of Baroque Violinist

Bach composed sonatas, partitas, and suites. These compositions are based on a dance form and rhythms, but they are not necessarily designed to be danced upon. In the Chaconne case, it rises into two different ways of interpreting; one way is to really interpret it as a dance, and the other way is to interpret it lyrically or melodically in a more linear way, because it is also a piece of deep emotional remembrance of Maria Barbara, his belated wife. Despite many objections to an open historical way of performing, the value of historical performance lies in the effort to reconstitute the sound of the particular period, just as the historical value lies in the understanding of the events and cultural aesthetics of that particular time.

There are significant differences in executing the problems of chords and articulations from the comparison table above between the Modern and the Baroque violinists. The time duration of playing by Modern violinists seems to be much slower than by the Baroque violinists. This would have been because of the over-romantically played musical style by the Modern violinists. The Modern violinists have modified the fingerings and the use of portamentos to accommodate the taste of this time's listeners. The change in violin evolution and the bow are also significantly contributing to the greater sound production and the singing quality through the bow. The Baroque violinists like Kuijken and Hugget interpret this piece as a dance, their feelings are controlled and with restricted emotion. However, Ibragimova is a modern violinist who plays on the historical instrument, this gives her the advantage to balance her modern way of playing technique with the historical performance.



Fig. 8. Chaconne bar 1-24

The *Chaconne* is a dance form that emphasizes the second beat. In fig. 8 is shown bowings of emphasis on the 2nd beat with a down bow which gives more weight than an up bow, because normally playing an up bow is weaker than a down bow.

According to the HIPP way of playing, it can be summarized the way to execute the chords as follows:

1. The dotted crochet note chord is to be played slightly shorter, lighter, and not to be sustained as its full-length written value. The pre-Tourte bow (baroque bow) is much shorter than the modern bow, and the weight of the bow cannot be equal because of the stick shape and the arching in the middle, thus the sound cannot be sustained too long on the down-bow stroke. It can give a naturally light sound on the dotted crochet. The outward arching on the Baroque bow allows the performer to breathe naturally with the bow because of the construction of the bow. The evolutions of the violin and bow have prompted a gradual revision of playing techniques. Nowadays, more string tension is needed to compensate for the bow pressure. The modern technique relies on an almost constant pressure of the right hand which eliminates the subtleties of baroque articulation, instead of emphasising the natural resonance of the violin and the bright sound of its open strings.

2. The 8th note is treated as a dance. The imagination of lifting a foot on the 8th notes when dancing can give the feeling of lightness. Playing it this way will also make the phrasing to go more to the next chords and not to hold it back.



Fig. 9. Chaconne bar 6

The 32nd notes are played separately and non-legato because it gives more dance character. To achieve this dance character, the modern bow has to be played with the wrist movement and not the whole arm movement.



Fig. 10. Chaconne bar 9-15

The chords are played upward leaving the bass note ringing by itself. According to the respective duration of the two outermost chord notes, when spreading the notes upwards, the performer can emphasise the harmonic progression. As the bow draws the string crossing in a rapid movement to the upper note chord, the bass note will stay long enough in the ear, while the rest of the chords are spread to make harmonic and musical sense.

In the recording of Kuijken and Hugget, these passages are played less fluently because the Baroque bow is unable to sustain long notes until the point. The modern technique relies on an almost constant pressure of the right hand which eliminates the subtleties of baroque articulation, instead of emphasising the natural resonance of the violin and the bright sound of its open strings. Thus somewhat, the modern bow has to adapt to the sound which the Baroque bow creates. The modern bow which has the advantage of sustaining the notes longer can help this phrase to carry the notes a little bit longer but not in continuous pressure of the bow.

The problems of bars 9-15 are persuaded to make music of a calm religious character suited and played with all the requisite nuances and expression. Technically, the chords that are spread upwards or downwards are played according to the register of the main melody. The discussion of whether the chords should be played upwards or downwards or turning are up to the choice of the performer.

Bars 25-48 is a passage that can be played more lyrical, this is the place where emotional feeling can be more emphasized. Although this passage can be played more lyrical, one must not forget that this is still a dance form which emphasizes on the 2nd beat. The bow that is used by a performer also plays an important role in maintaining articulation. The Baroque bow used by the Kuijken and Hugget's performance gives the impression of more staccato sound. The *pre-Tourte* bow which is used by the baroque performers has a different articulation for staccato's, this is caused because the bow hair and stick of *pre-Tourte* bow were lack of elasticity that is needed for an instantaneous and strong attack. The modern bow can play more sustained sound. To apply the staccato sound like a baroque bow, the modern bow has to be played lightly in the middle of the bow and not with continuous pressure on the string (sticky sound).

Nowadays, violin students have to learn to overcome the material resistance (such as bow weight and stiff strings) and achieve a seeming effortlessness through endless repetition of exercises designed to strengthen their fingers and arms. The result of this main focus on technical proficiency has led the performer to neglect performance styles.

For Modern violinists, playing baroque pieces might be harder; but for baroque violinists, this task is easier because the Baroque technique solves many problems of interpretation quite naturally. The challenges with modern technique, modern violinists have to 'unlearn' their technical training that avoids producing a stylistic performance, such as the use of long bow strokes and the continuous vibrato. These techniques are used to produce a big tone, but the baroque concept is that 'less is more'.

Conclusion

There are significant focus values in performing, between the early 20th century musicians compare to contemporary musicians. The earlier 20th century recordings give a direct sense as if the music is being projected spontaneously to an audience, the precision and clarity of each note are less important than the shape and progress of the music as a whole. The contemporary musicians have a significant change of focus so that the accurate and clear performance of the music has become the first priority and the characterisation is considered to take care of itself.

To be able to present a convincing historical performance, the performer is required to understand all manner of historical discernment (whether it is technical or musicological), imagination and artistry. The performer has to realise the music's charm and power as if he has been at the time when composition was made. A performer can study the notation, treatises, documents and history, but most importantly, one can rarely be certain how the music sounded. On the other hand, the feeling, interpretation, personality and individual taste in performance play a vital role in bringing music to life and they are essential adjuncts to the use of early instruments.

Some performers might take a step further and insist on playing with the instruments and styles which the composer used to be faithful to the work and its maker. Others believe that by using the latest instrument, they could serve the work and the composer at the best. Some historical performers are having more intentions to revive period performance practices rather than to serve the composer's intentions. Other performers might think that the performer's duty is not to serve the composer but to the modern audience. The modern audiences have different aesthetic backgrounds than the audiences at the period time which the modern audiences may not have the period ears to listen to the old music and vice versa.

Some musicians are convinced to exercise historical practice because it produces better performance. While some others are yielding for attention and status to make their performance stake out new and unconquered musical territory in repertory or in performance style with others.

The growing complexity in form and harmony structure is revealed in the history of violin music. The student's curriculum has to reflect the history and the technical as well as musical growth have to reflect the chronological development. The increasing technical proficiency of the student has to go together with the understanding of the stylistic characteristics of successive period.

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