

Ferenc Liszt University of Music

Doctoral College (7.6 Music)

Theses of the doctoral dissertation:

**GERMAN BAROQUE SOLO
VIOLIN LITERATURE FROM
BIBER TO BACH**

**RELATIONSHIPS IN INSTRUMENTAL
TECHNIQUE AND COMPOSITION**

by

TAMÁS ITTZÉS

CONSULTANT: JÓZSEF SÁRI

2008

I. Research background

I had been interested in this topic for a long time and my curiosity was raised by lack of appropriate information. Although several treatises and theoretical works deal with early violin technique and baroque performance practice, the conclusions drawn by the authors, however, are often controversial and the gap between theory and practice is also remarkably wide. I have found that many are trying to prove their own hypotheses with theoretical research and quotes from old treatises. The attempt to fill missing gaps is also frequent and this questions the authenticity of otherwise valuable research. The exact citation of original sources is strikingly rare in the English language, especially American, literature on the subject and quotes in the original language are lacking. Music used in research papers is often not authentic and the analysis of sources is another weak point. Even serious scholars accept statements (or, often, conclusions) from earlier research without checking the source document.

There are, naturally, thorough writings with exact and faultless data. These, however, are rare and often difficult to obtain.

One major reason for researching the topic was that information available in Hungary is meager even in certain areas of the subject where there is a rich documentation of international research. An additional practical reason was that even in the case of Bach's partitas and solo sonatas the study of the manuscript (not to speak of its use) has not been wide-spread so I also wanted to shed light on the importance of the original score. An important aspect of choosing this subject was that only Bach's works are well-known, the Telemann fantasias are somewhat familiar but the works of Biber, Westhoff and Pisendel are almost unknown to violinists. Even musicologists only mention them fleetingly.

All these missing links and uncertainties made me approach the topic mainly from the point of their contact with the Bach works. Several papers refer to Westhoff and Pisendel as the inspiration behind Bach's works for solo violin but because, owing to lack of exact data, no facts can be stated about this influence, I have found it appropriate to examine the question by studying and comparing the written scores. Considering the chronological sequence of the works studied, the correct title could be „German Baroque Solo Violin is the duty of every performer to approach the inner meaning of the

Literature from Biber to Telemann” but apparently Bach is the last stage in development and quality.

II. Research methodology

As it follows from the above, I have tried to focus especially on the written music by working from manuscripts and facsimiles (an exception was the Telemann Fantasias, which I could only obtain in critical edition). In the case of the Biber Passagalia which ends the Mystery Sonatas and with the Bach solo works I worked from good-quality reprint editions, which made closer examination possible. I received a digital copy of the first edition of the 1683 Suite in A major by Westhoff from Wolfgang Wendel in Germany. I was able to study the original edition of Westhoff's 1696 Six Suites in the Szeged Library and the manuscript of Pisendel's Solo Sonata in A major in the Dresden Library. I also examined the Westhoff suites in the Peters Edition, but the study of the original music yielded new discoveries. I also endeavoured to contact experts, among them musicologists Michael Lutz from Salzburg whose help I am grateful for. Nowadays the wide scale of internet-based research cannot be neglected either. Because of the non-academically systematized nature of the information, I have approached the data with a critical eye and only relied on information which was confirmed by several sources and on pages presenting facsimiles of original manuscripts and treatises. I have also studied homepages of musicological centres and projects. Because of their inaccuracies, I rarely relied upon information from CD sleeve notes or other similar sources. In the footnotes I have done my best to give the original of each quotation and the exact source of important observations so that the data I present and the authenticity of my conclusions could be verified. However, in order to maintain easy readability of the essay I refrained from adding footnotes to each sentence. In more significant places in the paper, however, I have always given the exact information.

I can state that my basic method of research was similar of that of the doubt of the biblical Thomas. I was sceptical of all major statements on the subject of my research and have tried to check all the sources. At the same time, I have placed the questions that emerged in a wider context and tried to give a more complex picture,

one connected to the era, the relations of the surroundings, the music, the technique of the instrument and the personal contact between the composers.

III. Outcome of the research

Perhaps the most valuable result of the dissertation is that it makes public in Hungarian a survey of the possibly most important area and era of polyphonic violin playing and thus it fills a gap. On the other hand, I must emphasize that, although my intention has been to give a complex picture from the point of view of the violinist performer, by no means do I consider this paper finished and complete. The main purpose of this paper may be arousing interest and serving as a starting point for later research.

From the point of view of the subtitle (i.e. the study of the relationships between violin technique and compositional technique) I have not reached a conclusion on purpose. I feel this is a hypothetical field, which can be supported by musical examples (which I have done several times) but any definitive statement would result in the rigid conservation of opinion, whereas the real beauty of music lies in permanent change, the versatility of tastes (depending on age, place, or even the individual performer), in the many-faced truth of musical realization. Giving a definitive statement would be diametrically opposed to the nature of the examined material.

Although I have sounded my opinion occasionally, I have tried only to outline the possibilities and encourage everybody to reach their own conclusions. This does not mean that I do not have an individual stand or that I do not accept responsibility for it since, as a performing musician my interpretation reflects my opinion of the moment. That opinion, however, must not be rigid but may change according to inner or outer circumstances or new musicological information by the next day.

The factual results of my research are mostly based on close examination of the scores.

The most significant of them is the modern transcription (quasi critical edition) of the 1683 Westhoff suite. This edition has not only been unavailable before and thus can be called a pioneering work, but previous attempts at editing and recording it contained several errors which can be eradicated from now on.

After studying the original edition of Westhoff's 1696 suites I could raise questions which deserve further musicological research. My remarks are strictly based on the thorough examination of the notation (contemporary print) and raise questions not taken into consideration in the Peters Edition, questions which can only be safely answered by examining the music paper and ink with scientific methods. Based on the differences in ink but also for musical reasons I doubt the authenticity of some of the notes in the Urtext edition (and on available recordings).

I believe that in the least exactly academic area of my paper, that of number mysticism, I have managed to come up with a few novel observations, especially in connection with the Bach works.

It is almost impossible to state anything new about the Biber *Passaglia* which ends the series of his sonatas, since it has such a rich and thorough literature. However, this work belongs to the topic examined and I had to include it for completeness. The Telemann fantasias (the only source of which is an unattainable contemporary copy and the critical edition based on that copy) could not be dealt with in similar depth as the other works but these pieces also form an integral part of the complete picture.

The dissertation may also help the Reader to — just like me — wake up to the greatness and importance of Bibers, Telemanns, Westhoffs and Pisendels; to the fact that they and other, now forgotten musicians of impeccable taste, who are treated as only „craftsmen” compared to Bach, were the musicians who made the baroque — or any other musical era — so rich, mature, and fully developed.

Finally, I have found it fitting to give my personal opinion in the issue, as if a performer's creed. For this I'm giving a summary of the closing section of my paper.

I am basically examining the performance (or playing) possibilities of the pieces from a practical point of view and focus on the quantitatively and qualitatively necessary mental and spiritual background to them. I have tried to ignore the notions by today's early musicians as far as possible and form my own opinion with baroque and modern violin in hand, studying the music. I have, of course, utilized written sources of information, and often quoted from them. I am convinced, however, that it is an impossible task to make the reader understand exactly the position of the instrument, the

realization of vibrato, bowing, changes of position in writing since written explanation in certain cases can be interpreted in different ways, and even the most illustrative description cannot compete with actual presentation. The most important factor, *measure* cannot be felt in writing. This, of course, is true not only for the sources I studied but also for my own writing. Still, I feel that even if one reaches the same conclusions as the experts who have studied the topic deeply for years or decades, his knowledge will be much deeper and much more useful owing to his personal experiences.

Authenticity is not born of a reproduction of ancient rules and positions but from inside us, performers. At the final account, in a performance it is not the position, the way of attack, the type of instrument or bow which is important, but how the performer feels and understands the essence of the work. Exposing the deeper levels of a piece, important and necessary though it is in order to relate to it, must not result in a mannered or scholarly way of performance so that music itself is lost in the process. It is important that both performer and audience feel that the harmony of nature dominates the music and *harmonia mundi* can be, as it were, tangible.

In music, at least in the performance of music, sophistication has no place. Music is natural; it must sound natural, obvious, it must evoke natural reactions from the listener. The concord of nature and music is desirable but it cannot be born out of science. If one treads the academic path, studies the surroundings of the pieces, digs into all kinds of peripheral issues, then he should put aside all his theoretical knowledge and let the music influence him. We cannot stick to positions and rules based on tracts and treatises. At the time of composition there were many kinds of tastes, notations, the same sign could stand for different embellishments, the same dotted rhythm could be realized differently, bows were of different lengths, strings were of different thickness, there were a number of fingerings, to achieve certain effects even the tuning could be changed. We could make a long list of small devices and tricks which were used by composers and violinists to realize their own, individual, inner ideas. We can reach our goal if, after studying the rules, we cast them aside and try to use our knowledge, gathered while examining and studying the rules, to serve our own inner order, our musical taste. It is impossible to reconstruct the baroque era in ourselves and in our surroundings in its entirety. At the same time it

music authentically, in the most complete manner for himself and his audience.

Today we cannot well relate globally (using the word in a positive sense) to questions of music, we cannot circumnavigate a piece and examine it from several aspects and, what makes it even worse, the majority of printed music offers ready-made (and more often than not incorrect or inappropriate) solutions which are accepted by most. Music, however, cannot be made uniform. Each performer and composer (and it is a pity these are now two different professions) has to go along his own bumpy path to eventually reach the road that looks smooth.

I hope that my paper, in addition to its modest research results will lend a helping hand to this approach to art.

Selected Bibliography

Aschmann Dr., Rudolf, Das deutsche polyphone Violinspiel in 17. Jahrhundert, Zürich, 1962

Boyden, David D., The History of Violin Playing from its Origin to 1761, Oxford University Press, London, 1965

Haas, R., Aufführungspraxis, Wildpark, Potsdam, 1931

Haberl, Dieter, Ordo arithmeticus: Barocker Zahlbezug und seine Wurzeln dargestellt am Beispiel der Rosenkranzsonaten von Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, Geisteswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Salzburg, 1995

Jakob Steiner und seine Zeit, Edition Helbing, Innsbruck, 1984

Jung, H. R., J. G. Pisendel (1687-175), Leben und Werk, Jena, 1956

Mozart, Leopold, Hegedűiskola, Mágus Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, 238. (ford. Székely András)

Quantz, Johann Joachim, Biographie, Berichte und Aufzeichnungen, Festlich anlässlich der Einweihung des neuen Quantz-Denkmal in Scheden am 23.6.1991, Heimatkunde- und Geschichtsverein Scheden, 1991

Telemann, Georg Philipp, Briefwechsel, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig, 1972

Wolff, Christoph, Johann Sebastian Bach, A tudós zeneszerző, Park Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 2004 (ford. Székely János)

Manuscripts, facsimile and Urtext editions:

Bach, Johann Sebastian, Sonaten und Partiten für Violine, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1962

Biber, Heinrich Ignaz Franz, Mysterien-Sonaten (ed. Kubitschek, Ernst, Comes Verlag Bad Reichenhall, 1990)

Geminiani, Francesco, The Art of Playing on the Violin, Op. IX, London, 1751

Pisendel, Johann Georg, Sonata à Violino solo senza Basso, MS (Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Dresden, SLUB Mus. 2421-R-2)

Telemann, Georg Philipp, Musikalische Werke, Band VI, Bärenreiter, Kassel u. Basel, 1955, (ed. Günter Haußwald)

Westhoff, Johann Paul, Suite por le Violon sans Basse continue, első kiadás (Mercure galant, Paris, 1683) digitális másolata (Universitätsbibliothek Freiburg mikrofilmjéről)

Westhoff, Johann Paul, Sechs Suiten für Violine solo (ed. Reich, Wolfgang, Edition Peters, Leipzig, 1974)

Westhoff, Johann Paul, [Six Suites pour Violon seul sans Basse], MS (1696), Somogyi Library, Szeged 581/1913, F. b. 999