DLA Doctoral Dissertation Thesis
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J. S. Bach: Cello Suites – interpretation and arrangement for bassoon

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Studies in Art and Cultural History
Doctoral Program no.28
Budapest
2014
I. Antecedents of the Research

It was years ago when I started to contemplate about the idea of how to make a bassoon arrangement of J. S. Bach's Cello Suites. During my conservatoire years I acquired several movements of the Suites, however they were mostly based on different cello publications. The aim of my present dissertation is to create a bassoon-interpretation which is in addition to being instrument-like, preserves the characteristics of the period.

While composing my own adaptation, I considered it most important to pay attention to – to the best of my knowledge – the one and only bassoon-interpretation, made by the American bassoonist, conductor and composer, Arthur Weisberg: J. S. Bach: *Five Suites for Solo Bassoon BWV 1007-1011* (Boca Raton: Ludwig Masters, 2011). This publication contains the first five Suites, excluding the sixth one, due to its big register. While studying Weisberg's arrangement regarding the rendering and the process of transcription, several important questions arouse in my mind, for which Weisberg's interpretation did not give a satisfactory explanation:

How can it be achievable to produce an arrangement, which is consistent and clear what concerns the articulation and the ornamentation, still, at the same time it is instrument-like and preserves the characteristics of the period mode of playing? How can it be feasible to present the game of double-stops and that of the accords in the notes, so that it would clearly instruct the player how to perform them? The answers for all these mentioned I could obtain while I was analysing further sources, manuscripts, critical publications, arrangements as well as theoretical presentations.

II. Sources

Out of the four Cello-suites having survived, none is the manuscript of Bach's. Scientific literature refers to them as follows: A. Anna Magdalena Bach's copy, B. Johann Peter Kellner's copy, C. the work of two copyists, one of them is known as Anonymous 402, the other is unknown, D. unknown. The first two pieces might have been made between 1720 and 1730, while the other two in the second half of the 18th century. In addition to all these, the most recent critical publications served as great help for me too, which had been elaborated based on the four manuscripts. (J. S. Bach: *6 Suites a Violoncello Solo senza Basso. BWV 1007-1012*. Herausgegeben von Bettina Schwemer, Douglas Woodfull-Harris. Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 2000; J. S. Bach: *Sechs Suiten für Violoncello solo. BWV 1007-1012*. Herausgegeben


What concerns the period interpretations, I found it most important to make use of the musical instrument schools of Quantz and those of L. Mozart, since the concepts included not only provide a general picture of the performing practice of the first and middle part of the 18th century, but at the same time illustrate the characteristics of the style of play of the wind and the string instruments.


In the process of transcription – in addition to Weisberg's bassoon arrangement – I could benefit from other wind adaptations. I could gain a deeper understanding of the practice of making wind arrangements while examining the publishers' explanations on transcriptions.
III. Method

In my dissertation I wished to elucidate that the first four (BWV 1007-1010) of the Cello Suites can undoubtedly be performed by bassoon as well. My primarily aim was to make the bassoon-like solutions as accurate to the routine of the period performance style as possible, furthermore to preserve the characteristics of the cello as much as possible too.

In my arrangement I examined the agreeing and disagreeing opinions of already issued wind publications. I tried to resolve the contradictions using mainly the theoretical works of the period as well as those of the 20th century, while I wished to add my own ideas to explain the other missing concepts. I considered it most important for the notes of my bassoon arrangement to be consistent and clear primarily concerning the articulation, the ornaments, as well as the double-stops and the accords.

IV. Results

My dissertation consists of seven chapters having a close connection between one another in the following arrangement: first I deal with the origins of the manuscripts of the surviving Cello Suites (I). In the next two chapters I study the themes of the period performance – articulation (II), ornaments, dynamics and the tempo of the movements (III). The next chapter examines the wind arrangements of the Cello Suites (IV). I found it essential to introduce the history, the roles and the playing possibilities of the baroque-bassoon on account of the period performance (V). I draw the conclusion of my bassoon transcription based on the deductions of the previous chapters as well as my own experiences and conceptions as a bassoonist (VI). In the closing chapter a short summary of my dissertation can be found.(VII).
I believe, that my own arrangement is a well-elaborated synthesis of the period performance style, and the bassoon-like solutions. My aim to produce a consequent and clear transcription of articulation, ornaments, double-stops and accords is throughout observable in my own arrangements. In this concept, my adaptation differs from that of Arthur Weisberg's and the wind-transcriptions examined in the dissertation.

V. Documentation of the Activity Concerning the Domain of the Argument

Since my present arrangement is the second piece of bassoon-interpretation, I have had no opportunities to perform any of the Suites so far. It is right this adaptation that serves to be the impetus for these masterpieces to be included in my repertoire, which I would like to play the most frequently possible.

During my studies, and since then I have played Bach's pieces – in a full or a chamber orchestra – on several occasions, however it would be just impossible to provide the dates of all the concerts hereby. The occasion I consider most appropriate to mention in close connection with the Cello Suites is my performance of the bassoon arrangement of the Flute Partita (BWV 1013) first presented at my Diploma Concert on March 4th, 2008, in the Main Concert Hall of the Ferenc Liszt Music Academy of Music.