A Proposed Approach to Articulations and Phrasing for the Partita in A minor for Flute Solo, Allemande, BWV 1013 by J. S. Bach

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The "Allemande" movement of the solo Partita in A minor, BWV 1013 by J. S. Bach has presented challenges to flutists as well as other woodwinds, particularly in the areas of breathing and articulation. In this paper, I will suggest an approach to the phrasing and application of articulations for this work. There is abundant confusion and debate surrounding BWV 1013 as to what, if any, articulations should be added. While the debate seems particular to the music of J. S. Bach, it is performance practice with other German Baroque music and the decisions about where the important phrasing, and therefore breathing, marks should occur should be considered carefully. It is my contention that to tongue the entire piece, which is often done, ignores the harmonic and polyphonic underpinnings of the work and that the judicious application of slurs will expose the subtle phrasing as well as enliven a performance of the movement. It is the intention of this discussion to offer one possible approach to these issues.

Early in the Baroque period (c. 1600) two types of instrumental sonata began to emerge[1]: one of which often consisted of dance movements such as Allemande, Courante, and Bourée, reflecting the instrumental works of the preceding Renaissance period which typically accompanied dance and providing the rhythmic and format foundation. These instrumental works were often titled Partita. Dance movements were paired, slow-fast, and suites of six movements were very common. There were also solo lute and keyboard works composed that were improvisatory in nature, an element of which is apparent in the Allemande of this Partita as well. Editions of BWV 1013 that pre-date the modern interest in authenticity title this work "Sonata," but more recent scholarship supports the titling of "Partita" as is the case with the Bärenreiter (Ürtext) edition, the one used for this study.

The Bärenreiter edition is a product of the Neue-Bach Ausgabe (New Bach Edition) and considered by many to be the authoritative edition and the one closest to the manuscript. It is absent of any articulation markings, creating a debate is as to whether to add expressive markings such as dynamics and articulations as one would commonly do with contemporary works by Handel and Telemann. There prevails a sense that Bach's music is "not to be altered" and that he railed against any additions/impositions on his music. I believe that this is inaccurate and more an unfortunate idolizing of Bach's music than a true understanding and respect of its construct.

This is truly one of the most difficult pieces in the flute repertoire. While not excessively technically challenging as one could say about works such as the Ibert Concerto or the Prokofiev Sonata, it is a work that many a flutist never feels like they have mastered and must approach it anew each time they make the decision to perform it. What makes it difficult are a few factors: the lack of an overt melody, the constant

[1] Denia Guadalupe Bradshaw, "The Evolution of Sonata and Flute Repertoire," M.M. Thesis, California State University, Northridge, 2013: 5.

running sixteenth notes which present a challenge as to breathing, and the tempo which should be rather moderate and respectful of the surface rhythm of the sixteenth notes.

The melodic challenge is obvious. This is not a "hummable" tune, not an immediately expressive linear unit. Bach, while a prolific composer for voice, was not necessarily regarded as a melodist and even his vocal melodies have been accused of being difficult in length and phrasing. He appears to think as an instrumentalist, keyboard especially, with invention and exploration seeming as primary factors in his melodic construction. This may be approachable for the violinist or cellist, but for the flutist, it presents an immediate need to alter, somehow, the flow of the melody to allow for breaths. Further, the melody in the Allemande is much more exploratory suggesting something other than a dance type. David Ledbetter[2] puts forth that in fact this movement is a Prelude rather than an Allemande. Following on this, it is my contention that Bach used the title "Allemande" more out of habit than intention as the subsequent movements also hold dance titles and, certainly the in the case of the Courante and the Bourée Anglaise, exhibit formalized dance rhythms. It appears that Bach was attempting some level of consistency as he was not a composer to break with tradition. In fact, this movement recalls the improvisatory lute and harpsichord works referred to earlier.

From the outset Bach presents a short melodic idea upon which he expands and varies but for the most part he never contrasts or departs from it. For the flutist, rather than seeking out a clear melodic line, the phrasing should be based more on the harmonic movement. Considering this a Prelude, which allowed for more freedom in the rhythm and expression, rather than a dance type, enables one to address the challenge presented by the constant sixteenth notes through the harmonic movement.

Tempo is another factor that one must consider in interpreting this work. Hans-Peter Schmitz, editor of the Bärenreiter edition, refers to the *Encyclopédie* of 1751, which held the title of "Une Allemande se bat gravement," indicating that this is a slow tempo.[3] The use of the word "grave" suggests solemnity as well. And yet to select a very slow pulse would have a negative impact on the sense of forward movement provided by continual sixteenth notes. Rather than simply choosing a quarter note pulse, the tempo should be based on the desired speed of the sixteenth notes with the resulting tempo emerging from there. This would indicate a somewhat moderate tempo, however moderate tempos are challenging to maintain, especially with relatively fast moving notes. Schmitz suggests that overall this movement should be felt in half notes, rather than quarter, despite the time signature of 4/4. An indication of 2/2 might have suggested an overall faster tempo and perhaps by setting it in 4/4 Bach is more ensuring the moderate tempo required. One might consider a metronome marking of 60 to the half note, although that is not meant to be prescriptive.

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[2] David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009: 271.

[3] Hans-Peter Schmitz, "Preface," *Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita in A minor for Flute alone, BWV 1013*, Kassel, DE: Barenreiter, 1963: 4.

An aspect of the challenge, for the flutist, is the tonguing required. At a moderate speed, single tonguing is most likely, but the muscle of the tongue can become fatigued. Going faster would facilitate this, especially if the speed were such as to allow for double tonguing, however that would contradict the spirit of the gravement Allemande. The careful placement of slurs offers a solution.

There is no doubt that the bulk of the notes should be tongued and that there should be the minimal addition of slurs. This is where debate arises as mentioned earlier. To what degree does one impose personal interpretation on Bach? Certainly, in the six sonatas for flute and basso continuo, it is acceptable to add articulation markings and in the slower movements as well as some embellishments. Yet there seems to be a wholesale ban on this for this piece. A discussion of slurring in Bach would be a book of its own, but suffice it to say, it makes sense to add a few judiciously considered markings, especially to draw out particular motivic and harmonic moment. Primarily considered here are the half step gestures where the tonal center or tonal movement is emphasized such as in the opening figure (A5-G#5 and its reverse in measure 2) and its repeat throughout the piece. I have also paired two notes under a slur as the impetus for the scales in measures 32, 36 and 37. Additionally, as scales are not a feature of the line, a slur provides a certain emphasis (as suggested by Quantz).[4] Quantz' guidance is that scalar figures can be slurred where wider intervals should not be.[5] This is confirmed by Schmitz and is further support for minimal slurring as much of the line contains intervals wider than a 2nd. To slur beyond what I have put forth would create a sort of cliché that should be avoided in this piece.

There are only two areas that I would suggest a planned change in dynamics to piano: measures 3 and its corresponding measure 22. Wholesale dynamic marking throughout would over-romanticize the piece and detract from the dynamics inherent to the change in range and tonal center. The piece often reaches the lowest range of the flute (the low D [D4] was the lowest possible pitch at the time and only three notes higher than what is currently available) and reaches near its highest (E6) several times in the work. The final bar and a half, which reaches the highest note of the flute (as of the Baroque period) will be discussed momentarily. Given this over two-octave range, dynamics will reveal naturally. In addition, there is a natural tendency to play major keys a bit louder or with more positive energy and so those areas with a major tonality should be free to be played at a higher volume (measures 5, 9 and 28 – the arrival to C major in measure 31 is too momentary to have an impact on the relative volume). Schmitz indicates as well that "gravement" also calls for an overly forte presentation with only a few areas that are piano.

The underlining harmony should inform the phrasing both musically and physically in terms of breathing. Where one would be envious of the violinist that does not have to breathe, the flutist should see this as an advantage as the need for air can also inform the points of momentum and repose in the piece. A full harmonic analysis of the

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[4] Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, 2nd edition, trans. Edward R. Reilly, Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1985: 216.
[5] Ibid, 167.

piece is beyond the scope of this discussion therefore the primary points will be discussed here.

As the work begins on the second sixteenth note, most of the phrasing will conform to that therefore breaths should be taken after the first sixteenth note. It is common for Bach to have elision between phrases (the end of one is the start of another). There two phrases where the breath should occur on the bar line: at the beginning of measure 14 and again at the beginning of measure 38. In both cases these measures precede a highly chromatic transitional area by three measures. Measure 14 is in the dominant key of E minor, which will serve as the ending tonality for the section and the opening tonality of the second section as is expected in this binary form. By contrast, measure 38 contains, on the first note of each beat group, an ascending scale from the leading tone of the dominant (D#5) to the dominant itself, reinforcing the upcoming final return to A minor. These are also the two points where Bach does not compose the phrase from the upbeat but instead begins it on a downbeat, remarkable moments that underscore the modalic shift to the dominant.

Other points that breaths serve as phrasing, not just moments to obtain air, are:

- measure 7, which is in the submediant key of F major
- measure 9 where C major, the relative major, is the focus
- measure 20, which is the end of the A section and the lead into the B section
- measure 25, again in the subdominant of D minor
- measure 27 in G major, which is the dominant of C major, corresponding to the harmonic movement earlier in measure 9
- measure 35 which introduces a very chromatic area that serves as transition material to initiate the long ending
- measure 41 which lands squarely on the dominant (E major) and precedes the cascading arpeggios which anticipate those of the final measures
- measure 43 after beat 3 which teases an ending
- measure 46, after the start of beat 3 which is the resolution to the tonic of A minor and essentially the end. What follows is a long arpeggiated gesture on the A minor chord leading up to the A6, the highest note of the piece and the highest note possible on the instrument at that time.

The upward trajectory of the series of arpeggios at the end is a departure from the contour of the rest of the piece. As stated, the piece essentially ends in measure 45, this serving as a coda, quite like the improvised cadential flourishes common to slow movements at that time.

Harmonic movement relies on the alternation of unrest and calm. In music that has true vertical harmony (in writing for the flute, a monophonic instrument, it can only be implied) this tension is achieved through varying levels of dissonance and resolution to consonant intervals. Since this phenomenon cannot be experienced in a solo flute piece, Bach instead relies on tonal movement to create something similar. Thus, the music feels at rest when the tonal centers are two-four beats in duration, more unrestful

when they are closer together and especially active in highly chromatic areas, such as measures 16-17, 23-24, 35 and 41. That there are more unsettled episodes in the second section is logical as B sections in binary form are treated as an opportunity for motivic and harmonic development and variation.

One final note speaks to the opening gesture. It is a long pickup, lasting almost four beats, thereby delaying the true "downbeat" for the first note of measure 2 which acts, in essence, as the first "full" measure. This creates a sense of momentum and forward movement so common to Bach's writing. An extended anacrusis such as this is unusual and almost works as a "mini-introduction."

Hans Peter-Schmitz stated, "…the music presents technical problems such as will preoccupy every true flautist for the rest of his life. His approach to this movement [Allemande] will be unlike that to any other work in the entire literature of the flute; he will always attempt it, he will never quite master it."[6] Truer words were never spoken.

[6] Schmitz, pg. 3.