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IT'S BAROQUE – SO FIX IT! ***APPROACHING THE BAROQUE IN THE BEGINNING AND*** ***INTERMEDIATE STRING CLASS***

Music of the Baroque era represents the Golden Age of string playing. All intermediate string players learn Baroque solos and perform Baroque string orchestra repertoire. But contemporary string teaching and playing often neglects or ignores those very stylistic, aesthetic, and historical practices that make the Baroque compelling, both to students and audiences. Attention these elements can change the performance of beginning and intermediate string students.

The Problem

Perpetuation of mono-dimensional Romantic style of playing, i.e., J.S. Bach - Sheep May Safely Graze

- Ormandy – Philharmonia Orchestra – Romantic interpretation of 60's-70's <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUICRXMM4pE>
- Barry Wordsworth – Royal Philharmonic – Romantic but historically informed <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYjqnlc7MRw>
- San Francisco Early Music Ensemble – Quite historically informed, Baroque interpretation, reflects today's sensibilities http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VzaCZH1zGww&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL396EBDBF8C2A96AD

Over-emphasis on square right-arm technical development – what I call the “Suzuki Hammer”

Primary focus of teachers and students is on correct notes over correct sound

Lack of focus on musical meaning and historical context

Result: students' lack of appreciation for and motivation by Baroque music, arguably the bastion of string literature.

Solution

A re-shaping of the way we approach Baroque music for enhanced student success and understanding.

Rhetoric

The concept of *rhetoric* is one of the main principles that separates Baroque from Classical and/or Romantic sensibilities. It is integral to the “Baroque Aesthetic.” For string players, it is the relationship of the bow to rhetoric that gives life and direction to the interpretation of early music. In the Baroque, music was subservient and served the function of words/text – not vice-versa. Thus, music was based upon rules of rhetoric (the musician is expected to have the skills of the orator in moving his audience).

What do we mean by “Baroque?” What is the Baroque Aesthetic?

Generally considered the era of European art music roughly between 1600 and 1765 – violin standardized after 1550

Distinct stylistic differences according to nationality – especially French, German, Italian styles – but we can generalize

The Doctrine of the Affects (or Passions) – there are pairs of real-life “affections” or “passions.”

- Generally six: love/hate, joy/sorrow, wonder/desire (sometimes cited: sadness, anger, and jealousy)
- Lorenzo Giacomini (1552–1598), poet/philosopher – affections are “a spiritual movement or operation of the mind in which it is attracted or repelled by an object it has come to know as a result of an imbalance in the animal spirits and vapours that flow continually throughout the body”
- Affects are not the same as emotions, but are analogous to them
- Internal and external sensations (music, art) stimulate the body mechanisms to alter the state of the spirits into a state of imbalance, the movement of the affections or passions, that yields to a particular affect/passion
- Musical compositions (or sections of compositions) and individual instruments were thought to be able to convey – or be responsible for – only one affect at a time, otherwise confusion and dysfunction would arise.
- Musical gestures – ornamentations, melismas, melodic movement – were directly responsible for movement of specific affects

An era of extremes, of extraordinary self-consciousness, of tension/release, of over-statement and ornate ornamentation.

Baroque music is about creating something new and fresh.

Interdisciplinary Context – Comparing to Art and Architecture

Art, architecture, literature reflected the same Baroque principles – appealing to the senses and the affects

Characterized by grandeur, emotion, color, light, drama, vitality, movement, tension, emotional exuberance.

Associated with the Catholic counter-Reformation – expressing eloquence and dynamic movement, self-confidence

- Rubens – Protestant interpretation, color/light, emotion, drama – Daniel in the Lion's Den - <http://www.iliblio.org/wm/paint/auth/rubens/daniel-lions-den.jpg>
- Caravaggio – Rome, vivid colors, emotional interpretation of Luke 24:30-31 – Supper at Emmaus – <http://www.iliblio.org/wm/paint/auth/caravaggio/emmaus.jpg>
- Ittar – Curvilinear lines, domes, ornamentation, dramatic scope, balance – Basilica della Collegiata, Catania, Italy – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Catania,_Santa_Maria_dell%27Elemosina.jpg

Problem of Historical Accuracy (“Authenticity”)

Currently – a motion toward emphasis on authentic instruments and performance practice

Still – there are a *wide variety of justifiable, authentically accurate, beautiful interpretations* -- avoid being dogmatic!

Smaller, less tension, natural strings, no chin rests, etc.

Instruments can be modified, bows bought relatively inexpensively, but usually a practical impossibility

Students should know how the instruments are different, how to emulate their sound – a valuable skill

Students should play in the *style* no matter what materials and equipment are available

Basic Principles

Rhetoric - Rhythmic/agogic stress based on speaking (albeit usually in French, German, Italian!)

Beat hierarchy is the most important consideration.

English phrasing, choral principles can be employed to discover the “syllablization” of music

- Handel, Refiners Fire – Trinity Church Choir and Orchestra – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBBYr4qd0v>

In addition to rhetoric, music is closely tied to dancing: dance forms, rhythms, movements

Technique

Baroque string music is all about the bow

- A wide variety of bow grips existed throughout Europe in the 17th Century, French bows were shorter than Italian
- Most universal: hold the bow at the balance point (perfect for beginners) in the Italian style
- Alternate French style: hand on the frog, thumb on hair (modified Suzuki grip), little finger under stick in opposition
- Fortunately, the standard (modern) Franco-Belgian bow grip is essentially the same as the Italian
- What is key: the bow hold needs to allow for the control necessary to make accurate, expressive articulations

Less tension – in the instrument, the bow, the player (A=415)

Loose neck muscles (lower violin on neck)

Bowing

It's all about the bow – articulation is paramount

Experiencing the resistance and friction of the bow

- “Sink” into the strong note (emphasis on “milking the right thumb” on the down bow)

Down beat = Down bow

- Retake down bows at the bar line, not within the measure
- Bach Brandenburg #4 – Claudio Abbado, Orchestra Mozart Bologna – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRoojYH0GbQ&feature=related>

Avoid slurs for bowing convenience, rather, use slurs for expression

- Telemann, Largo – Carla Moore, S.F. Early Music Ensemble – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anM6UObZLLg>

The smaller the interval, the more legato the stroke (i.e., scalar lines = legato)

- Bach Brandenburg #3 – Freiburg Baroque Orchestra – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4z58CKQ3QtM&feature=related>

The larger the interval, the more articulate the stroke –

- Purcell “Fairy Queen,” Parley of Instruments - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEYnoH_Wejo

Phrasing

Follow the contour of the phrase – crescendo on ascending lines, diminuendo on descending

Think “strong/weak” when playing conjunct/scalar lines, as opposed to thinking “long/short” (almost like swing)

Normal phrasing in 2/4 bars is usually appropriate – but rhythmic verve is key.

Music should not be metronomic or march-like – musical lines almost always are flexible

Double-dotting is probably excessive

- Multiple examples – Alex Woods, et al – The Sebastians – www.sebastians.org
- Purcell Chacony – Parley of Instruments - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRZqfkjXftU>

Ornaments/Vibrato

Trills/ornaments are expressive, shouldn't overshadow the musical line

The longer the trill, the slower the beginning (not "machine-gun" trills)

Be content with mordents and grace notes – the larger the ensemble, the less ornamentation is needed

Vibrato is for color – the bow is the expression

Vibrate on the dissonance (tension note) rather than the release

Vibrato is not necessary on short notes, and should not be continuous

"Vibrato brings attention to the performer; when we don't use it, we bring attention to the pitch (the notes, the music)." - David Robertson (Conductor, St. Louis Symphony)

Some Resources

Tarling, Judy. (2001) *Baroque String Playing for Ingenious Learners*. St. Albans, U.K.: Corda Music Publishers.

Palisca, Claude. (1981) *Baroque Music*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Emily Davison -- Baroque Cello/String Bow Technique Lesson <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIYN-Tdr-Xo>

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Demonstration Repertoire Drawn from the Following:

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| Sonatas and Partitas for violin alone | J.S. Bach (1685 – 1750) |
| (selections) | |
| Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 | J.S. Bach(1685 – 1750), arr. R. Meyer (Alfred Publishing Co.)
<i>from String Explorer, Book 1</i> |
| Sheep May Safely Graze | J.S. Bach(1685 – 1750), arr. A.H. Dabczynski (Alfred Publishing Co.) |
| Themes from Handel's "Messiah" | G.F. Handel (1685 – 1759), arr. A.H. Dabczynski (Alfred Publishing Co.) |
| Larghetto | G.F. Handel (1685 – 1759), arr. A.H. Dabczynski (Alfred Publishing Co.)
<i>from Concerto Grosso op. 6, No. 12</i> |
| Musik of Shakespeare's Daye | arr. A.H. Dabczynski (Alfred Publishing Co.)
(Music of Anthony Holborne, William Brade, Claude Gervaise, Thomas Ravenscroft, John Dowland) |
| Brandenburg Concerto #3, First Movement | J.S. Bach (1685 – 1750), arr. Merle Isaac (Alfred Publishing Co.) |
| Overture to "The Gordian Knot Untied" | H. Purcell (1659-1695), arr. A.H. Dabczynski (Alfred Publishing Co. – 2015) |