

[Partita] by J.S. Bach (BWV1006a)

lute version by Clive Titmuss

Foreword

This work is one of the most puzzling of Bach's works traditionally associated with lute performance. It is an arrangement of the E major violin Partita, supposed to have been made 1736-7 from the original work written around 1720.

Bach scholar Christoph Wolf (Bach: Essays on his Life and Music, Harvard U.P, 1991) established an informal category for this type of work and the process by which it was created. To borrow his phrase, Bach may have made this arrangement "for his own use", that is, as distinguished from works written for publication, dedication or intended for a specific performance.

Most of Bach's better known instrumental works, such as the Concertos for harpsichord, the violin Sonatas and Partitas, the works of the Clavier-Übung (Opus 1), the Cantatas and Passions, Art of Fugue, and the Musical Offering would fit into these latter categories. Perhaps the best known of works for Bach's "own use" might include for example, the two books of *Das Wohltemprirte Klavier*.(c. 1722, c.1744)

The lute arrangement of the Cello Suite V, BWV 1011/995, bears the dedication "Pièces pour le luth á M. Schouster". This shows the way in which Bach copied from himself to supply material for experimentation in a unfamiliar medium.

In contrast to BWV 1011, which was transposed to a favorable key for the lute (as BWV 995), from the low-pitched key of C minor on the 'cello (the tonality of its lowest open string), up a fifth to G minor, BWV 1006a is untransposed and written in typical two-clef keyboard notation. A simple harmonic bass line is added, as were some phrasing marks (preserved in my arrangement) articulation and dynamic markings. There are a few other changes, added appoggiaturas, and other slight textual changes.

It seems surprising for a composer as aurally astute, instrumentally experienced and in contact with so many lutenists (Weiss, Falckenhagen, the aforementioned Schouster, his students Krebs and Straube) that he would choose to write for the lute in the key of E major, having already demonstrated his understanding in the case of BWV 1011/995. In addition the work contains some some technical impossibilities.

Nevertheless, it must be said that Bach may have prepared the work for use on the lute, expecting the player to re-arrange the notes (including transposition) as she preferred. In this way it resembles others of his later keyboard-lute pieces, the C minor suite, BWV 997, and the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E flat, BWV 998. Both of the latter contain numerous technical impossibilities and a busy texture which strain the lute's resources. These latter two seem more in keeping with the *empfindsameder styl*, with their use of chromatic lines, ternary forms, and the sighing appoggiature figurations which Bach

avored in his last years. They are also distinct in being original compositions, rather than arrangements of earlier string pieces, like BWV 1011 and 1006, whose thin texture and use of the *luthée* style adapted better to lute performance.

Taking all these features into consideration and without resorting to anachronistic solutions such as alteration of the lute's vernacular tuning intervals, the solution is transposition to the key of F major. This work (and the first Cello Suite, BWV 1007, transposed to E flat), demanded a key which allows for the bowed instrument *bariolage* effect found in the Prelude to be produced with ease, since the top string of the D minor tuning common to 18th century German lute music is f. The original tonality may easily be preserved without sacrifice if the lute is tuned down one semitone.

In order to highlight the valuable phrasing marks which Bach used in the original, I have desisted from my usual procedure of adding many slurs. This is in any case, a highly individual matter, dependent on tempo and other factors

The piece should be played with the utmost lightness as befits its violin origins, so I also desisted from transposing the bass into the lower octave unless it was indicated by other musical forces, such as technical impossibility or increasing cadential finality. The transposition of the work to F also allows for maximum opportunity for over-ringing fingerings, in which lower notes are played in higher positions rather than in their usual location. The entire arrangement but especially the Bourée, is rich with this feature.

The Loure may be played with a substantial *inégaie* rhythmic alteration, extending at times to double-dotting. The ornamentation of this piece is especially rich, and the player may vary the length of the appoggiaturas at liberty, in order to achieve the dancing motion which is intended.

In the Gavotte en Rondeau there is an opportunity to vary the performance of the *rondeau* by including typical lute devices such as measured separation of chord tones, introduction of passing or neighbor tones, *acciaccature*, or leaving out those ornaments which Bach included. This avoids the sensation of prefatory repetition which detracts from the freshness of the piece. I avoided interpolating the *rondeau* to make this improvisatory idea easier to realize.

In general I would suggest markedly slower tempos than have become traditional in violin performance practice, partly in the nature of a plucked-string instrument, with care taken to make the differences between this version and the violin original evident to the listener.

If it was perhaps Bach's aim in arranging the piece to "fool the ear of a professional lutenist" (in the words of Agricola, referring to the *Lautenwerk*) while he played the piece at the keyboard, then it is my goal to fool the ear of the professional violinist in making the work sound entirely natural to the lute.