

BACH/THE THREE SONATAS FOR VIOLA DA GAMBA AND HARPSICHORD

Side 1: SONATA NO. 1 IN G MAJOR
I—Adagio; II—Allegro ma non tanto
III—Andante; IV—Allegro moderato

SONATA NO. 2 IN D MAJOR
(Beginning)
I—Adagio; II—Allegro

Side 2: SONATA NO. 2 IN D MAJOR
(Conclusion)
III—Andante; IV—Allegro

SONATA NO. 3 IN G MINOR
I—Vivace; II—Adagio; III—Allegro
The selections are in the public domain.

From 1717 to 1723, Johann Sebastian Bach was employed as Kapellmeister in the court of Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Cöthen, a young and loyal patron of the arts who played the violin, viola da gamba, and clavier. During this period, Bach accommodated the Prince's love of instrumental music by composing works for performance by the court orchestra. It is, then, not surprising that a large number of Bach's sonatas, and in particular the three for viola da gamba and clavier, stem from his years in Cöthen. Bach surely wrote the latter with his patron in mind, for the Prince would have been a ready and skillful performer either on the gamba or on the keyboard. In addition, the orchestra boasted a virtuoso cello and gamba soloist, Christian Ferdinand Abel, who could have played the works with Bach.

Bach no doubt also chose the combination of instruments for the sake of tone color, for the gentle, reserved quality of the viola da gamba combines amiably with the sparkling, terse sound of the harpsichord. (A cello and piano may be substituted for the original instruments, with few technical difficulties. However, one should bear in mind that the resulting timbre is more resonant and forceful than the original combination, for vibrato on a viola da gamba is limited by frets, and a harpsichord has little of the sustaining power of a piano. By the same token, a gamba has one technical advantage over a cello, for its less arched bridge enables performance of fuller chords with greater ease.)

In these sonatas, Bach makes only occasional use of double and triple stopping by the gambist and, instead, provides textural interest through a written-out part for the right hand of the keyboard. By substituting the latter for the more typical improvised chords, Bach achieves practically equal contrapuntal and melodic interest in the string and keyboard parts. Although Bach wrote eleven other sonatas for various instruments with realized keyboard, his style was innovative for the time and only reached its peak in the Classic era in the guise of the accompanied piano sonata.

The first two sonatas employ the typical four-movement church sonata plan with alternating slow and fast movements but the third takes the more modern approach of omitting the initial slow movement. In each work, elements of Bach's characteristic Baroque style prevail—extensive polyphony, fast harmonic rhythm, incisive fugue themes, continu-

ously active rhythms—but never without a variety of mood and structure or a diversity of instrumental treatment.

The first Sonata, BWV 1027, in G Major, also exists in a version for three performers—BWV 1039, for two flutes and a keyboard playing a figured bass. There is considerable question as to which version is the original, or if either was. Whatever the case, existence of the two versions shows how the number of instruments in a sonata could be condensed by giving one instrumental part to the right hand of the keyboard in place of improvised chords. Bach actually went a step further, too, for three movements of the same sonata also exist in a version for organ or pedal harpsichord (BWV 1027A), allowing the three-voice texture to be performed on one instrument.

The Adagio of BWV 1027 is in a two-part form, the second part being a variation of the first. Equality between the two instruments is established at the outset, for after the gamba or cello statement of the theme, part exchange occurs and the keyboard sings the melody. Then embellished motivic material appears in close imitation over a chromatically ascending bass that eventually joins in the counterpoint. The return of the opening melody—now initiated by the keyboard and in the dominant—announces the varied second section.

The Allegro ma non tanto is a jovial fugue whose subject is stated by the right hand of the clavier and then imitated by the string player. The theme is developed, inverted, and treated in all three voices before a return to the expository material in the tonic key.

The keyboard reigns in the prelude-like Andante in E Minor. Its migrating arpeggios are initiated and exchanged between the keyboard's right hand and the string part, while the left hand plays octaves in the bass.

The concluding Allegro moderato, a lively three-voice fugue, has a lengthy subject stated by the right hand of the keyboard and accompanied by the left, the subject is then imitated by the string player and bass. The development employs the theme in closer imitation in the two upper parts while the bass carries on an independent line. Recapitulation of the expository material concludes the movement.

The second Sonata, BWV 1028, in D Major, is a virtuosic work for the gambist. It opens with a short Adagio built around part-exchange between the keyboard and string. The vivacious binary-form Allegro opens with a homophonic rendition of the main theme. Contrapuntal treatment of the latter involves rising and falling sequences and strata before the stately homophony returns to complete the first section. The second section provides new textural interest, for after fugue treatment of an extended version of the theme, chorale keyboard accompaniment supports the gambist's statement. An abbreviated return to the opening theme closes the movement.

The B-minor Andante opens with two measures for which Bach has not provided a realized keyboard part, and here the keyboard player figuratively bass chords. The string player simultaneously asserts his independence, but not for long, as his plaintive theme soon permeates the movement in imitation

with the keyboard.

The concluding Allegro is a brilliant movement featuring extensive textural variety. The contrapuntal expository material develops from motives that alternate between gamba and clavier. A middle section employs some of the same motivic material but exhibits three changes in texture: bass chords accompany the upper parts, the gambist has double stops over sixteenth-note keyboard figures, and the keyboard breaks into a passacaglia-like section with minimal gamba accompaniment. The roles then reverse and the gamba comes to the fore with virtuosic passagework as the clavier accompanies. A recapitulation of the opening material brings the movement to a close.

The third Sonata, BWV 1029, in G Minor, is a magnificent three-movement work that requires outstanding string technique. The pulsating descending and ascending theme that pervades the Vivace appears first in the gamba while the clavier plays a figured bass. When the bass takes up the theme the gambist accompanies in unison until the right hand of the keyboard announces the motive. The thematic material is developed contrapuntally, leading through various new key areas, and a unison statement of the opening theme in the tonic rounds off the movement.

The Adagio is a poignant aria-like movement in binary form. The first section features the gamba while the second is an imitative interplay between both instruments.

The Allegro finale creates immediate contrast with alternating fugue treatment of two separate subjects, the first a repeated eighth-note motive that unwinds into sixteenth, the second a pleasing cantabile melody that stands out over a mechanical eighth- and sixteenth-note accompaniment. After the first fugue subject makes its third appearance, the sonata comes to a vigorous contrapuntal conclusion.

—Jean K. Wolf

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Johann Sebastian Bach 1685–1750

The Sonatas for Harpsichord and Viola da gamba

Die Sonaten für Cembalo und Viola da gamba

Les Sonates pour clavecin et viola da gamba

Sonata No. 1 in G major BWV 1027

G-Dur · en *sol* majeur

1	I. Adagio	4:19
2	II. Allegro ma non tanto	3:34
3	III. Andante	2:27
4	IV. Allegro moderato	2:57

Sonata No. 2 in D major BWV 1028

D-Dur · en *ré* majeur

5	I. Adagio	2:11
6	II. Allegro	2:32
7	III. Andante	6:25
8	IV. Allegro	3:51

Sonata No. 3 in G minor BWV 1029

g-Moll · en *sol* mineur

9	I. Vivace	4:53
10	II. Adagio	4:57
11	III. Allegro	3:43

Total Time 42:08

Glenn Gould piano

Leonard Rose cello

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From 1717 to 1723, Johann Sebastian Bach was employed as Kapellmeister in the court of Prince Leopold von Anhalt-Cöthen, a young and loyal patron of the arts who played the violin, viola da gamba, and clavier. During this period, Bach accommodated the Prince's love of instrumental music by composing works for performance by the court orchestra. It is, then, not surprising that a large number of Bach's sonatas, and in particular the three for viola da gamba and clavier, stem from his years in Cöthen. Bach surely wrote the latter with his patron in mind, for the Prince would have been a ready and skillful performer either on the gamba or at the keyboard. In addition, the orchestra boasted a virtuoso cello and gamba soloist, Christian Ferdinand Abel, who could have played the works with Bach.

Bach no doubt also chose the combination of instruments for the sake of tone color, for the gentle, reserved quality of the viola da gamba combines amiably with the sparkling, terse sound of the harpsichord. (A cello and piano may be substituted for the original instruments, with few technical difficulties. However, one should bear in mind that the resulting timbre is more resonant and forceful than the original combination, for vibrato on a viola da gamba is limited by frets, and a harpsichord has little of the sustaining power of a piano. By the same token, a gamba has one technical advantage over a cello, for its less arched bridge enables performance of fuller chords with greater ease.)

In these sonatas, Bach makes only occasional use of double and triple stopping by the gambist and, instead, provides textural interest through a written-out part for the right hand of the keyboard. By substituting the latter for the more typical improvised chords, Bach achieves practically equal contrapuntal and melodic interest in the string and keyboard parts. Although Bach wrote eleven other sonatas for various instruments with realized key-

board, his style was innovative for the time and only reached its peak in the Classic era in the guise of the accompanied piano sonata.

The first two sonatas employ the typical four-movement church sonata plan with alternating slow and fast movements but the third takes the more modern approach of omitting the initial slow movement. In each work, elements of Bach's characteristic Baroque style prevail – extensive polyphony, fast harmonic rhythm, incisive fugue themes, continuously active rhythms – but never without a variety of mood and structure or a diversity of instrumental treatment.

The first Sonata, BWV 1027, in G major, also exists in a version for three performers – BWV 1039, for two flutes and a keyboard playing a figured bass. There is considerable question as to which version is the original, or if either was. Whatever the case, existence of the two versions shows how the number of instruments in a sonata could be condensed by giving one instrumental part to the right hand of the keyboard in place of improvised chords. Bach actually went a step further, too, for three movements of the same sonata also exist in a version for organ or pedal harpsichord (BWV 1027a), allowing the three-voice texture to be performed on one instrument.

The Adagio of BWV 1027 is in a two-part form, the second part being a variation of the first. Equality between the two instruments is established at the outset, for after the gamba or cello statement of the theme, part exchange occurs and the keyboard sings the melody. Then embellished motivic material appears in close imitation over a chromatically ascending bass that eventually joins in the counterpoint. The return of the opening melody – now initiated by the keyboard and in the dominant – announces the varied second section.

The Allegro ma non tanto is a jovial fugue whose subject is stated by the right hand of the clavier and then imitated by the string player. The theme is developed, inverted, and treated in all three voices before a return to the expository material in the tonic key.

The keyboard reigns in the prelude-like Andante in E minor. Its migrating arpeggios are imitated and exchanged between the keyboard's right hand and the string part, while the left hand plays octaves in the bass.

The concluding Allegro moderato, a lively three-voice fugue, has a lengthy subject stated by the right hand of the keyboard and accompanied by the left; the subject is then imitated by the string player and bass. The development employs the theme in closer imitation in the two upper parts while the bass carries on an independent line. Recapitulation of the expository material concludes the movement.

The second Sonata, BWV 1028, in D major, is a virtuosic work for the gambist. It opens with a short Adagio built around part-exchange between the keyboard and string. The vivacious binary-form Allegro opens with a homophonic rendition of the main theme. Contrapuntal treatment of the latter involves rising and falling sequences and stretto before the simpler homophony returns to complete the first section. The second section provides new textural interest, for after fugal treatment of an extended version of the theme, chordal keyboard accompaniment supports the gambist's statement. An abbreviated return to the opening theme closes the movement.

The B-minor Andante opens with two measures for which Bach has not provided a realized keyboard part, and here the keyboardist plays figured bass chords. The string player simultaneously exerts his independence, but not for long, as his plaintive theme soon permeates the movement in imitation with the keyboard.

The concluding Allegro is a brilliant movement featuring extensive textural variety. The contrapuntal expository material develops from motives that alternate between gamba and clavier. A middle section employs some of the same motivic material but exhibits three changes in texture: bass chords accompany the upper parts; the gambist has double stops over sixteenth-note keyboard figures; and the keyboard breaks into a passacaglia-like section with minimal gamba accompaniment. The roles then reverse and the gamba comes to the fore with virtuosic passagework as the clavier accompanies. A recapitulation of the opening material brings the movement to a close.

The third Sonata, BWV 1029, in G minor, is a magnificent three-movement work that requires outstanding string technique. The pulsating descending and ascending theme that pervades the Vivace appears first in the gamba while the clavier plays a figured bass. When the bass takes up the theme the gambist accompanies in unison until the right hand of the keyboard announces the motive. The thematic material is developed contrapuntally, leading through various new key areas, and a unison statement of the opening theme in the tonic rounds off the movement.

The Adagio is a poignant aria-like movement in binary form. The first section features the gamba while the second is an imitative interplay between both instruments.

The Allegro finale creates immediate contrast with alternating fugal treatment of two separate subjects, the first a repeated eighth-note motive that unwinds into sixteenths, the second a pleasing cantabile melody that stands out over a mechanical eighth- and sixteenth-note accompaniment. After the first fugue subject makes its third appearance, the sonata comes to a vigorous contrapuntal conclusion.

JEAN K. WOLF