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**BALANCING THE IDEALS OF WERKTREUE AND
ORIGINALITY IN ONE'S ACTIVITY AS A MUSICIAN**

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: *Werktreue*, originality, interpretation, J. S. Bach

In my thesis I ponder some of the questions around the possibilities and limitations of interpretation in western art music. These include questions such as "what are the limitations of interpretation?" and "what is the purpose of composing and performing music?" My main research question is, however: "Is it possible to balance the ideal of *Werktreue* and that of originality in one's activity as a musician?" As a showcase I am using Bach's *Prelude* from his *Second Suite for Solo Cello*, of which I have performed a version that is widely accepted as the "original" one and two versions of the piece reinterpreted by two composition students of the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg. My text includes a description of a concert performance of these three pieces and the work leading up to it. Furthermore I present my thoughts about interpretation by drawing from my experience as a musician and music student as well as by reflecting on other texts relevant to the subject. I also want to provoke the art music community to think a bit more critically about interpretation and not to take performing practices as granted without questioning anything.

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1. Introduction

In this project I want to reflect on the theme of interpretation in the field of music. The main question is whether the ideal of *Werktreue* – that is, the ideal of being true to a "work" by performing it in a way one believes the composer would have wanted to have it performed – can be somehow combined or balanced with the idea of originality in my activity as a musician.

As a classical cellist, I have experienced a growing feeling of futility caused by the prospects that I would be spending the rest of my career (in the case of acquiring a position in an orchestra, that is) replaying the classical repertoire in more or less unaltered form over and over again. When I thought of it, this did not seem to be a good option for me, since music, being a form of art, should –in my opinion – fulfill certain criteria. For instance, it should be alive, not static, because otherwise the public will lose interest in it – a process I am sure many classical musicians will be able to observe. By alive I mean being in a state of constant change, re-invented in every performance and above all the music should enable us to discover new perspectives, new takes and reflections on the world. However, I can also understand the quest for classics – the search for works of art that show what Art at its best can be and the wish to conserve them. Could it possible to be both original and, at the same time, true to a piece of music? Is it possible to combine *Werktreue* and originality? But where to start – that was the question. I delved into the subject in hopes of clearing some of the chaos in my mind and replacing it with a bit of order.

My aim is to explore the possibilities of interpretation using Bach's *Prelude* from the Suite for solo cello in d minor as a showcase. I gave a concert featuring different versions of this piece, after which I analyzed my performance and discussed whether or not the music I played could be considered emanating from "Bach". Two of these versions, representing two different approaches to the material were composed by composition students from the Academy of Music and Drama at the University of Gothenburg (henceforth referred to as HSM). The main inspiration for this project came from an article by Anders Hultqvist. The article is based on his dissertation work in which he reinterpreted Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and Albinoni's *Adagio*.¹

1 Hultqvist, Anders. " 'Who creates the creator' – and the limits of interpretation?" *Journal for Artistic Research* 0 (2011): Accessed December 15, 2014, <http://old.researchcatalogue.net/view?weave=506&x=0&y=0>. Anders Hultqvist teaches composition at HSM. In his project he wanted to give a new setting for Beethovens *Fifth Symphony* and Albinoni's *Adagio*.

It seems as if the interpretation of western art music is fixed on "authenticity" and the conservation of music at the cost – in my view – of innovation. Works of music are pinned down and the existence of multiple editions or versions of a work seems to be viewed a problem rather than an opportunity. Performing practices are hotly debated, causing musicians to be divided into factions where different techniques are labeled with words such as "authentic", "correct", "right", "wrong". In my view this will eventually lead to the deterioration of art music, as it will become less and less interesting to the public.

2. My musical background

In order to give my thesis a more personal approach and to show where the thoughts presented in it might originate from, I here give a brief account of my musical education and background.

I began my musical studies by taking cello lessons in Tampere, Finland, when I was six or seven years old. My musical training – for the part of instrumental studies at least – consisted mostly of taking instructions and advice from a single teacher at a time in the absence of fellow pupils. Critique did not seem to be welcomed, though I did not have a rebellious mindset either.

Classical, i.e. western art music was the preferred music in our family – that was the music we listened to at home. Unlike my classmates and my peers I hardly ever listened to anything else in private (in public I was of course subjected to other kinds of music as well). This did not apply only to music, but to popular culture in general: I hardly came in touch with films etc. that "everyone" had seen, nor did we have video games at home (I sometimes went to a friend to play though).

It somehow never crossed my mind to rebel against this order, not even during the adolescent years (not that anything was strictly forbidden). I did however develop a liking for jazz and the music of Bobby McFerrin. Perhaps it was through jazz that I became interested in improvisation, although I still to this day haven't had the courage to take it up seriously. In high school I played in a band with some of my friends (we played Metallica's *Nothing Else Matters*, for example), which was an eye-opening experience for me.

Interestingly enough it was natural for me that a piece of classical music was always played the same way in every performance – indeed it was always supposed to be played the same way, whereas popular music was varied more often. I don't know why I made such a distinction between the two back then, but I would at present like to bridge some of these differences.

After high school I continued my studies music studies at the conservatoire in Tampere, still without thinking critically about what I wanted to achieve in or with music.

3. Methodology

In order to examine the problem of balancing the differing ideals of *Werktreue* and originality I have created a situation in which the contrast between these two can be observed. This situation is a concert in which I played both the "original" version of J. S. Bach's *Prelude* from the *Second Suite for Solo Cello* as well as two recompositions of the aforementioned music, provided by composition students at HSM. One might question whether the two new compositions still represent Bach or if they are new compositions altogether. How does one find out? Is there a set of rules which help to judge if a piece of music is a reincarnation – an interpretation – or completely new music? Hultqvist writes:

"A theatre director can change, or completely remove, a sentence that appears to be old-fashioned in an actor's utterance. The director can even cancel a whole scene without disappointing the audience. But all of this is true only if the essence of the play is in some way kept intact..."²

Assuming that we can apply this directly to music, what is the "essence" of a piece of music? It seems to be more difficult to define the essence of a piece of music than that of a play (by this I am not saying that defining the essence of a play is necessarily easy) in the absence of verbal material, since a text often yields themes (e.g. war, social inequality, love etc.) that can then be reflected in the interpretation even with omissions, thus preserving the "essence" of the play. Is, then, the answer to the same question in instrumental music completely subjective?³ Hultqvist continues: "Absolute music is also built around some kind of narrative idea, which evolves through the staging of the central musical ideas."⁴

2 Hultqvist, " 'Who creates the creator' – and the limits of interpretation? ".

3 Vocal music is a different matter, since it usually includes lyrics that can reveal themes in a similar way as the text of a play can.

4 Hultqvist, " 'Who creates the creator' – and the limits of interpretation? ".

3.1. *The narrative idea*

How does one find this narrative idea? One probably has to analyze the music, but how? Is the narrative idea embedded in the melody, since that is the layer which might be the easiest for the audience to follow? Or does the answer lie in the chord sequences? According to Hultqvist the narrative idea is more abstract in instrumental music than in theatre, of course, but it can be found nevertheless. In the case of Bach's music, for example, it is often the forms that are important in preserving the nature of a piece. One can also always propose a certain aspect to be the narrative idea, he continues, as long as one can give a credible explanation for one's choices.⁵

Michael Krausz writes:"...a score indicates the 'essentialities' of the work which an interpretation must – within limits – embody if it is to be an interpretation of that work."⁶ But if the score determines the "essentialities" of a work, does then any change in the score result in a new work? What about using different instruments than what is indicated in the score? Is a piece of music (such as one of the *Cello Suites* by Bach) to be regarded as a different work if it is played on a different instrument (such as viola), even if all other parameters remain identical? What about traditions that are passed on that are considered "correct" (and all performances lacking these traditional aspects "incorrect") even if there is no indication whatsoever of these in the score.

3.2. *Survey*

I was also interested in the reactions and opinions of the concert audience, so I began thinking about questions I could ask them. I tried to come up with ones that wouldn't be suggesting one view or another, which is of course not as easy as one might think. Here are some of the questions I thought of:

- Did you consider all of the pieces you heard in this concert to be Bach's music? Please specify!
- Did all of the pieces played in this concert represent "Bach" as a composer? Why or why not?

5 Interview with Anders Hultqvist. October 23, 2015.

6 Michael Krausz, "Rightness and Reasons in Musical Interpretation." in *The Interpretation of Music – Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Krausz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 78.

A different angle is presented in the next set of questions:

- What kind of mood or affect did the pieces in this concert evoke? Were they different from each other?
- What did the pieces in this concert communicate?

I planned to select one or two questions to be handed out on slips of paper before the concert. They could then be collected either right after the concert if they were completed or left in my mailbox at the academy.

A problem with this questionnaire was that I had no means of telling how many people would attend the concert and how many of those listening would be willing to fill out the paper. My initial estimate of completed answers was 5 – 10, no more. Another problem was that it was difficult to determine what exactly I was looking for as an answer to the survey or what hypothesis I wished to confirm or prove wrong. As a consequence it was hard to come up with relevant and understandable questions. This problem was the reason I decided in the end not to give the concert audience a questionnaire.

4. What are we allowed to do to Bach's music?

In the article *Who creates the creator?* Anders Hultqvist describes a project in which he experiments with Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and Albinoni's *Adagio*.⁷ The reception of his idea reflects the state of the western art music tradition:

"When I first confronted the director of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra with the idea of re-setting some classical pieces the conversation took an interesting direction. At one stage he asked me if I was to add some new music of my own to the Beethoven interpretation. I said no. He then asked suggestively if there would be some electronics added to the performance. Again, I said no. After some seconds of silence he suddenly asked if I wanted to ridicule Beethoven. My idea of going into the piece itself and changing the 'text' appeared to be a somewhat blasphemous act. This suggests that there is still cultural and philosophical petrification and fundamentalism around the interpretation of classical music."⁸

In the end he was allowed to carry out his plans for the most part. What he was not allowed to do was to leave his name unmentioned as the composer and have it buried in the program notes, as a side comment: "a new setting by Anders Hultqvist".

Is it wrong to create a new version of an old masterpiece? What makes Beethoven and the other classical composers seemingly untouchable? (Excluding, for example, remixes in pop music that aren't taken seriously by the art music community anyway, and music cabaret.)

Based on the following analogy I started to think that I perhaps would like to make music in a way similar to my cooking: with some improvisation and without an authoritative and definitive recipe or score, or at least one that I can alter if needed or if I feel like it:

"It has long seemed to me that there are certain formal analogies between music and cookery. For example, the Dundee cake seems to be an abstract entity rather like the 'Unfinished' Symphony, and a Dundee cake seems to be related to the Dundee cake rather as a performance of the 'Unfinished' Symphony is related to the 'Unfinished' Symphony."⁹

The question for me is not if we are allowed to do something, but rather if it still represents the idea of the original piece. I am afraid the line will always be thin and hazy.

7 Hultqvist, " 'Who creates the creator' – and the limits of interpretation?".

8 Ibid.

9 Urmson, J. O., "The Ethics of Musical Performance." in *The Interpretation of Music – Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Krausz (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 157.

4.1. A performer's duties

According to J. O. Urmson, "every performer must recognize some bounds of authenticity beyond which he should not go representing to the audience that it is a performance of a certain work".¹⁰ He agrees that it cannot be known where these bounds are, but states nevertheless:

"But there are limits, and the performer surely has the duty of honesty to the audience not to overstep them... If his views on interpretation differ very widely from those of his intended audience, perhaps he should warn them."¹¹

One might wonder why we should be warned. Is it not the point of art to bring something new to the world? A lot of the music that has been tamed and is now part of the "standard repertoire" has had a surprising or even shocking effect on the audience in its time. I don't want to be warned, I want to be surprised and I also want to surprise others and give them new thoughts. I don't think a musical performance should necessarily be static and unchanged in the same way as a painting. What I see as my duties to my audience: to show them something I find interesting, beautiful, tragic, funny or otherwise stimulating and to send them on a journey to whatever is relevant at a given moment. What I do not want for myself or my audience: boredom, foreseeability, elitism and a know-it-all attitude. I would like to lower the border between performer and audience, even if I don't exactly know yet how to achieve it, especially since I am a rather shy person.

Urmson continues:

"...the performer's duties to his audience seem not to differ widely from those of any purveyor of goods to his customers. ...people should know what they are buying. ...while I may, legitimately, for my own consumption, introduce any changes I wish to the recipe for the Grant loaf, there are limits to what one may do in producing Grant loaves to be sold to the public; perhaps a little extra or less salt is legitimate... but the introduction of, say, 20 per cent white flour obviously is not; it is cheating, as is unfaithfulness in musical performance."¹²

I disagree with this view: in my opinion the audience should expect to hear a musical performance. They are buying a ticket to a performance, one that should – in my opinion – stir more than a little bit of emotions. Why not expect the unexpected? One can still have the composer as a source of inspiration even if the music or the interpretation thereof is not exactly what the composer intended (whatever that might be) – it is, after all, ultimately the performer who is on the stage, not the composer. The question is at which point one points out that the performance is the performer's

¹⁰ Urmson, 161.

¹¹ Ibid., 161.

¹² Ibid., 161–162.

version of a piece rather than the composer's, but then again the name of the performer is always mentioned. Isn't this a sign that the performance is explicitly the performer's version of a work? A Grant loaf always comes with a hopefully trustworthy list of ingredients, but I don't see the point in doing quite the same with music. Of course it is good to know approximately what one might expect from a performance – one might know the artist from previous performances, for instance, but perhaps it is not as important as with food, where the right or wrong ingredients potentially have a direct effect on one's health. A concert could be labeled with other attributes as well, such as "Reinterpreting Bach" in the title or adjectives such as "experimental" in the description. The audience will survive even if it does not receive a detailed score along with the concert programme. Having discussed the performer's duties to his audience, Urmson turns to his duties to the composer:

"If we ask what the duty of the performer to the composer is, here are some possible answers: it is his duty to interpret it in the way in which he believes the score sounds best in accordance with the understanding of musical notation current at the time of composition; ... it is his duty to interpret it according to the known views of the composer on interpretation at the time of composition; it is his duty to perform it in a way that would... be approved by the composer if he heard the performance... [We] should say that all such considerations are relevant, but none overriding and exclusive of others."¹³

I must ask if this question – what are a performer's duties to a composer? – is really relevant if the answer must remain unknown (due to the fact, for instance, that the composer is dead and cannot utter his wishes). How does pondering the performer's duties to the composer affect the performance? What I mean is that in the end one can argue for more or less any interpretation because there is nothing to disprove its legitimacy. One cannot say that a certain interpretation would have been met with disliking by a composer. So why regard the question in the first place? Does changing a tradition show that a performer is arrogant?

Goehr writes about the romantic period:

"...composers began to conceive of their works as discrete, perfectly formed, and completed products. Music soon acquired a kind of untouchability which... meant that persons could no longer tamper with composer's works. The demand that one's works be left alone was rationalized according to the romantic belief that the internal form and content of each such work was inextricably unified, or by the belief that works were specified *in toto* according to an underlying or transcendent truth."¹⁴

But what is the argument today for not "tampering" with music of others? Do musicians believe

13 Urmson, 163–164.

14 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works – an Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 222.

there is something transcendental at work in art? Personally I find it rather strange that composers are seen almost as infallible superhumans, perhaps similar to the Greek gods, their music being revered as relics that can be examined but not changed or challenged.

Recently a group of Swedish musicians presented an interpretation of Mozart's *Requiem* that makes use of elements from popular and rock music.¹⁵ Does the fact that they "tampered" with the score, changing the instrumentation and even writing new movements make their performance simply invalid?

15 "Mozart requiem – en mässa för dem som gått före." Accessed November 16, 2015.
<http://www.svtplay.se/video/4505409/mozart-requiem-en-massa-for-dem-som-gatt-fore/mozart-requiem-en-massa-for-dem-som-gatt-fore-avsnitt-1>.

5. The ideal of *Werktreue*

Some of my questions regarding the ideal of *Werktreue* are: Why are there certain sets of principles dictating how certain pieces of music are to be played? What happens if a performance of a work is not historically accurate?

It seems that the ideal of *Werktreue* stems from the will to create a canon of unchanging, fixed works that will be available for musicians and all of humanity at all times, in the same way a book is always available (in theory) and does not change. Another factor might have been the musicians' quest for independence:

"As the eighteenth century drew to a close, musicians were no longer thought about predominantly as in service to extra-musical institutions. Like their musical compositions, they were fast being liberated from the traditional power and restraint of ecclesiastical and aristocratic dignitaries."¹⁶

Later, in the romantic period composers seem to have requested even more recognition:

"Their romantic role willingly adopted, composers enjoyed describing themselves and each other as divinely inspired creators – even as God-like– whose sole task was to objectify in music something unique and personal and to express something transcendent."¹⁷

Before the romantic era the concept of a work was not so clear-cut as in our days. There was no copyright and composers used each others ideas much more freely, in a manner that would nowadays be probably labeled as plagiarism. At the same time the concepts of 'composer' and 'musician' were less sharply divided, as composers would usually play their own music and musicians would alter the music of other composers to fit their own needs and tastes. Improvisation was an elementary part of music-making. What, under these circumstances, would have been understood as a work of music? Were there no works as we understand them today, since pieces changed shape constantly due to the omitting, adding and improvising of the time? Where was the boundary between "Bach" and "non-Bach"?

What about today? In the days of Bach the public did not have strong preconceptions about what certain pieces should be like, but today virtually everyone has unlimited access to scores and recordings. This generates certain expectations as the public knows what to expect from a

¹⁶ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 206.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

performance and also demands these expectations to be met. Is a work of music, then, as fixed as an antique sculpture, that does not change (or at least not for the better) just as scores and recordings? Or is the concept more fluid, such as a modern piece of interactive art? Is there a perfect way of playing a work, and if yes, why not just record it and play the recording? Is it the role of classical musicians to be hifi music players?

Apart from getting a standard rendition/ interpretational frame, music is also packaged according to the ideals of the romantic era. For example, music by earlier composers, such as Bach and Palestrina is presented in the form of "works".¹⁸ This practice applies to modern, experimental music as well, even though the composers of it do not always wish to conform. This tendency started, as stated before, in the first half of the nineteenth century, when romantic musicians wished to reconstruct music history. The aim was to show that their colleagues in the past would have thought in modern terms had they been given the possibility to establish a canon of timeless, transcendent works or masterpieces. But, given that Bach might not have thought of his music in terms of "works", is it not misleading to present his music in this form?

Also in the theatre world there is an ongoing discussion about the work concept: some directors see plays as sets of lego bits that can be rearranged according to their needs and the message they want to get across, while others are less radical and criticize the more liberal directors of going too far. It depends on the context and the traditions where you draw the line between interpretation and a new work.¹⁹

In my project the *Werktreue* ideal is represented by a *Prelude* by Bach. However, I believe I did not play it in a so-called historically informed manner in my concert. Yet I am sure most modern musicians in the western art music community would have recognized the music in question as Bach's *Prelude* from his *Suite for Solo Cello in D minor*. The question coming to my mind from observing this setting is: how far can one stretch *Werktreue* and what happens when it is overstretched?

18 Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*, 244.

19 Interview with Anders Hultqvist. October 23, 2015.

6. On the "correctness" of interpretation

Can an interpretation of a piece of music be "correct" or "incorrect"? If so, what factors play a role in determining the correctness of an interpretation? In my experience, the following types of arguments are brought up most frequently when talking about the right way to play a piece of music:

- Authority: someone tells you what is correct and what is not, for example a conductor telling the orchestra how they should interpret the score or a teacher telling students how to play a certain piece.
- Notational accuracy: playing the music in the way it's notated, aiming to produce the piece the way the composer intended it to be.
- Historical accuracy: the idea that music should be played the way it was played at the time when it was composed.

However, these are often in conflict not only with each other but sometimes also with themselves: there can be two different conductors, who have differing opinions on how to interpret a piece; there can be two different editions of a piece; and there can be differing views on what is historically accurate and what is not. Another factor is tradition: music can be played in a certain way regardless of what is written in the score, because a tradition has developed to play it in a certain way. I find this very interesting, because these traditions seem to be passed on from one generation to the next. It would be logical, then, that minor changes happen on the way and the end result could differ significantly from the starting point, yet – in essence – the music is considered to be the same. I also find it interesting that although the music is considered to be the same, new instruments have been developed constantly, especially in the wind section. The instruments used in a modern orchestra are not identical with those used two hundred years ago, not to mention the instruments in Bach's time. Therefore the question arises: should musicians compensate for the changed instruments? One could perhaps imitate the sound of a baroque cello when playing Bach on a modern cello, but is it necessary or even desirable?

7. The concert

In this chapter I present the pieces of music I worked on in my project. These are J. S. Bach's "original" *Prelude* from his second *Suite for Solo Cello*, Olle Sundström's *Cutting Room Postlude* and Árpád Solti's *Hommage à BA(CH/ LOGH)*. I also describe the work done by the two composition students, Olle Sundström and Árpád Solti. Lastly I write about the culmination of the project, the concert performance of the three pieces mentioned above.

7.1. About the pieces

The first piece, Bach's *Prelude* in d minor serves as the basis for the other two pieces and represents the ideal of *Werktreue* in my project. However, as mentioned before, one must ask if it truly represents this ideal the way I played it. Firstly, I did not use a baroque instrument, not even a baroque bow. Secondly, the style I was playing in could probably be considered to be more romantic than baroque – this is the way I have distilled for myself from my teachers and my own intuition. The score I use seems almost unreadable since there are so many markings from different teachers – not only my teachers, but also the teachers of my teachers. I was, however, trying to avoid a large vibrato and to use vibrato only as a highlighter on a few chosen notes, something that could be considered historically accurate. Another thing to avoid in my view were audible shifts in position or portamento.

I see the *Prelude* as consisting of two main sections, the first one being the far longer one of the two, lasting from the first measure up until the music comes to an abrupt halt on a dominant chord – shown in example 1 below – and the second being the coda that comes after this general pause.²⁰



Example 1: J. S. Bach, *Prelude*, measures 45–48.

²⁰ Johann Sebastian Bach, "Prélude," *Suite II*, in *Sechs Suiten für Violoncello*, ed. Alfred Dörffel (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879), 64.

The first section seems at first to lead to a great climax yet that is never reached and instead the music ends in an unexpectedly humble coda (even though the last cadence is still rather organ-like)²¹:



Example 2: J. S. Bach, *Prelude*, measures 59–63.

The main elements around which the first section is built are the up-and-down-moving one measure long melody fragments and the sequences built out of these fragments, as seen here in the opening of the *Prelude*²²:



Example 3: J. S. Bach, *Prelude*, measures 1–4.

Using these the music gradually builds up momentum until it comes to the end of the section. The coda returns the music to a lower register than where it ended up before the pause. There is a build-up to the end but not in the same way as in the first section and so the music ends more peacefully. If the narrative idea lies in the structure, it could perhaps be the one described above: two sections, the first of which ends abruptly before reaching a climax, followed by a shortish coda.

Further detail is added to this picture if one looks at the harmonic layout of the piece. For example, in measure 13 one can observe the theme in F major. This is followed by two long rising bass lines, first from F# back to D minor in measures 14 to 20 and then again from F# to G in measures 25 to 29:²³



Example 4: J. S. Bach, *Prelude*, measures 25–29.

In measure 36 the music returns to D minor, reinforced by a preceding long A major pedal in

21 Bach, Johann Sebastian, *Prélude*, 65.

22 Ibid., 64.

23 Ibid., 64.

measures 30 to 35. Leading up to the aforementioned abrupt halt is a sequence in which the main theme is recapitulated in a C# diminished and a G# diminished chord in measures 40 and 42 (example 5)²⁴, the latter leading to the A major chord at the end of the first section.



Example 5: J. S. Bach, *Prelude*, measures 40–42.

At the end of the second section the music alternates between dominant and tonic in measures 50 to 55 before the bass line leads up to the final cadence with an upward progression from D to G.

7.1.1. *Rewriting Bach*

When I gave the task of reinterpreting the Bach *Prelude* to the composition students Sundström and Solti I wanted to give them relatively free hands, so that they could decide in what direction to take their music. All I asked was that the compositions were to be based on the *Prelude* and that they could be argued to be closely connected to it.

7.1.1.1. *Cutting Room Postlude*

I agreed with Sundström that there could be electronics in his piece, since he already had some experience with this technique – although not with *live* electronics – and I was curious to find out what it would be like. We also discussed the possibility of improvisation or aleatoricism – for instance writing musical elements into boxes, giving the performer the possibility to play these bits in a random order and/ or repeating them, but this idea was discarded later for two reasons, as Sundström revealed to me in an email. Firstly, since the performance of baroque music already relies heavily on the performer's interpretation and since *Cutting Room Postlude* was supposed to be the composer's interpretation, using improvisation – that would have put even more emphasis on the performer – would not have served the purpose. Secondly, improvisation would not have worked well together with the use of electronics. Sundström came up with the title *Cutting Room Postlude* after he had finished composing most of the piece, before that the piece had the working title

24 Bach, *Prélude*, 64.

(Prelude from) *Cello Suite No 2 in D Minor – with live electronics*.

We recorded the piece soon after the score had been finished, in October 2015. This recording was needed as a basis for the electronics track. This track was compiled by Sundström and it features three different kinds of artificial reverb, and pitch shifting. The electronics do not make sounds by themselves: they solely react to the sounds produced by the cello. The reactions are heard mainly during pauses which is the practical reason for the reverb effects: the electronics needed continued input in these pauses even after I had stopped playing and this input was provided by the reverb. There were two pitch shifters so that the sound could be shifted in two ways simultaneously. Sundström composed the score first in order to make sure that the piece would also stand alone, without the electronics. As he told me, he used this principle in the composition of other pieces as well. However, had he known that electronics would not be added, he would have strayed even further from the original *Prelude*.

In the performance, the electronics reacted to my playing live: the sound from the cello was processed and then played through speakers. In theory it works automatically once started, but in practice manual adjustments (moving the cursor) could and had to be done during the performance in places where my playing was not synchronized with the electronic track.

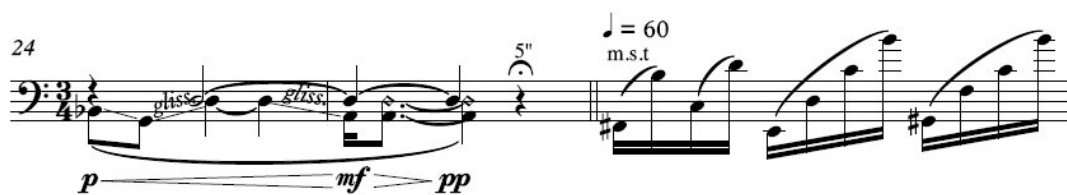
Before the recording session we had already been meeting from time to time, whenever there was new music to play. In these meetings we discussed the technical possibilities of the cello (and the cellist), that is to say whether certain passages were playable or not. There were some double stops that I was not able to play that Sundström had to change. He was experimenting with using glissando in combination with double stops – either with glissando on one of the notes or on both – and it did not always work. In another passage (measures 9–10) we agreed to move a harmonic one octave lower so that I did not need to "jump" and play an artificial harmonic, but could instead safely play a natural one (shown in example 6)²⁵.



Example 6: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 9–10.

25 Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude – A Reinterpretation of "Prelude" from Cello Suite nr. 2 by J. S. Bach*, (unpublished score, 2015), 1.

Another thing was the middle part of the piece (beginning in measure 25) that was originally meant to be in tempo 82, but was then slowed down to 60 (shown in example 7) because the large intervals in this section were difficult to play so fast (example 8).²⁶



Example 7: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 24–25.



Example 8: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 31–32.

As a whole, however, no large passages were discarded. I asked Sundström if he had learned anything new about writing for the cello in the process. He replied that he had gained useful experience for example about glissandi, but not that he had learned something completely new.

In the end Sundström had (re)worked his way through the entire *Prelude* and he could begin working on the electronics as well, after we had the aforementioned recording.

Olle Sundström's version maps the entire *Prelude*, meaning that every note presented in Bach's original is represented in the piece. However, some of the notes are played simultaneously in double stops or arpeggios while others have been transformed into harmonics or just moved into a different register. Some notes appear only as parts of continuous glissandi. In addition, the composer also added new notes.

Cutting Room Prelude deploys mostly conventional playing techniques but it also features other more or less unconventional techniques, namely the following ones: *molto sul ponticello* (m. s. p., bowing as close as possible to the bridge) and *molto sul tasto* (m. s. t., bowing very much on the fingerboard); *col legno battuto* (hitting the strings with the backside of the bow), bartók pizzicato (plucking the string so that it hits the fingerboard) and left hand pizzicati. Fermatas with

²⁶ Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, 2.

specific lengths (in seconds) – as seen for instance in example 8 – indicate pauses where the cellist waits the indicated amount of time for the electronics to react to his/ her playing. There are also numerous *glissandi* in the music. One could argue that using all of these "special" playing techniques are a move away from Bach, but I would disagree. I would rather say they are an update, in the same way as playing Bach on a modern instrument is. I must, however, add that Sundström himself wrote to me that their use is a way of distancing oneself from the conventional way of playing Bach – apart from being a part of the intuitive work with timbre, phrasing and dynamics. This is a result of the fact that scores from Bach's time do not display as much information as contemporary scores. Instead, every performer has to decide, what kind of phrasing and dynamics to use – which is what Sundström did.

Cutting Room Postlude roughly reflects the structure I found in my analysis of the Bach "original": after a long build-up the music leads to an interrupted climax in measure 55, as shown in example 9:²⁷

Example 9: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 50–55.

After measure 55 the coda begins, ending with almost the same chords as the "original" *Prelude*²⁸:

Example 10: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 77–84.

27 Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, 3.

28 Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, 4.

Therefore, having analyzed these central points I would argue that at least when it comes to the form Sundström's *Cutting Room Postlude* can be considered an interpretation of Bach's *Prelude*. The fact that the "original" material clearly shines through also otherwise at least in certain places gives further support to this view. The chords shown in example 10 is one example of such a place, but also in the very beginning of the piece (example 11) the Bachian sequence-building material can be observed²⁹:



Example 11: Olle Sundström, *Cutting Room Postlude*, measures 1–2.

7.1.1.2. *Hommage à BA(CH/ LOGH)*

Meanwhile, Solti took a different approach in his *Hommage à BA(CH/ LOGH)* and decided to take the first phrase, that is the first four measures of Bach's *Prelude* to work on instead of the entire piece. His aim was to show the different tone colour dimensions hiding in the chosen Bachian tones by stretching them in time. The title refers on one side to Bach and on the other to a colleague of Solti's, Máté Balogh who has inspired the piece. According to Solti, Balogh manages to create tension even with just a few notes and pauses and it is this atmosphere that he wanted to recreate in the *Hommage*. Balogh is a teacher of contemporary composition at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music in Budapest, who has won several prizes with his compositions.³⁰ Solti's interpretation also showed new playing techniques for me. The unconventional and/or extended playing techniques in Solti's piece are as follows: muting the strings with the left hand to produce a breathing-like sound when the strings are bowed; *molto sul ponticello* and *col legno battuto*, both techniques are also put to use by Sundström; a *tremolo* between *sul tasto* and *ponticello*, that is moving the bow in a circular motion on the string(s) or parallel to the string(s); bowing the bridge; tapping on the body of the cello and on the strings with the fingers; scratching the strings with the fingernails; bowing the tailpiece; using a cleaning rag or cloth to stroke the strings; fingernail *pizzicato* (plucking the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁰ "Balogh Máté," Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem, accessed November 27, 2015, <http://lfze.hu/hu/-/balogh-mate>.

strings with the fingernails). These techniques are either written in the music or expressed as a symbol. The symbols are explained on a separate page. As mentioned earlier in the discussion about Sundström's piece, in my opinion these techniques are not necessarily a move away from Bach's music but rather introducing it to modern practices.

I met Solti less frequently than Sundström since his piece was shorter and also because he gave it to me in one piece so that we were able to make all the necessary changes during one meeting session. In addition we did not need to meet in order to work on electronics and such.

Since Solti used only the first few measures of the "original" *Prelude*, it was impossible to retain the same form structure as in the "original" *Prelude*. Therefore the question arises whether it is still possible to represent the "essence" of the entire *Prelude* even if one uses only a fraction of it as a starting point. The piece does contain something of the "essence" of the "original" *Prelude*, it still displays elements of it. The most obvious ones are the parts that are notated conventionally, without using extended techniques, such as bowing the tailpiece. In example 11 one can observe a D minor triad in the opening of the *Hommage*, just as in the very beginning of the *Prelude* (example 3 earlier)³¹:



Example 12: Árpád Solti, *Hommage à BA(CH/LOGH)*, beginning.

Other elements are less obvious, but still present. The "noise" also represents the tones from "original" *Prelude*, even if they have been changed almost beyond recognition. In a Facebook message Solti explained his approach to the piece: he told me that every instant in Bach's music is highly sacral, which is the exact opposite of Solti's normal attitude as a composer. In order to challenge his own views and to enable an expansion of his horizons, Solti wanted to move in this direction, away from his normal path. Another theme he wanted to explore was the relationship between 'noise' and 'sound', and so everything departs from and returns to "noise" again in the *Hommage*.

Noise, Solti says, is a natural part of our daily environment. Between these units of noise –

31 Árpád Solti, *Hommage à BA(CH/LOGH)*, (unpublished score, 2015), 1. (The box-shaped notes are played by muting the strings with the left hand, so that no precise tone is produced but rather a sound that resembles breathing.)

the parts where the extended techniques such as bowing muted strings or bowing the tailpiece are put to use – there are short motifs, such as the D minor triad shown in example 11. Due to this fragmentation, only the elements referring to tonality are recognizable, but not the original motive as a whole. About using extended techniques Solti says: mixing traditional and extended techniques is a characterization of postmodernism. "I simply viewed one of the greatest works for solo cello through the toolkit of contemporary composition. This is my reading of Bach."

Even though the original *Prelude* might not be recognizable it is still strongly present in the *Hommage*. On this basis one could still argue that a narrative idea – the tonal elements in a condensed form – can be found in the *Prelude* that is represented in Solti's piece. In addition the "noise" in the *Hommage* also has its origin in the *Prelude*.

7.2. The performance

When the reinterpretations were about to be finished I began planning the performance. Since it was already my last semester I decided it would be best if I had only one concert, which would be at the Academy in the form of a lunch concert. I played the pieces in the following order: Bach – Sundström – Solti, in decreasing order of *Werktreue*. I recorded the pieces afterwards on my own in a practice room at HSM and Sundström added the electronic effects to that recording of *Cutting Room Postlude*. Thus the electronics on the recording attached to this thesis are not live.

The concert audience was not as numerous as I had expected. Therefore, with such an unrepresentative audience a survey would not have made sense. Overall, however, I was satisfied with the concert even though I would have wished for a larger audience. I was relatively happy with my performance and the composers also expressed their satisfaction.

8. Conclusion

My main question in this thesis was whether or not the ideals of *Werktreue* and originality can be balanced in one's activity as a musician. I have come to the conclusion that it is not always easy, but certainly possible. One can, in my opinion, represent masterpieces from the past as well as contemporary innovation. After all, many of the themes and problems we encounter in our lives today are the same ones as the ones people before us have encountered as well. Music is no exception in that sense.

Having worked with Bach's "original" *Prelude* and being able to compare the piece to two reinterpretations of it, I would say that *Werktreue* is an expandable term and cannot be pinned down. Both *Cutting Room Postlude* and *Hommage à BA(CH/ LOGH)* represent Bach's music on some level, but they also have their own narrative ideas. Performing all three pieces together was an intriguing experience: I learned not only something new about extended techniques, live electronics and contemporary composition, but in addition I also gained new ways of looking at "old" music.

Another question that was raised was what one is allowed to do to Bach's or for that matter any other composer's music. Personally I would argue in favour of the rather liberal view that musicians can do virtually anything with music. I do not see why there should be taboos in place stopping music-makers from transforming (master)pieces, giving them new shapes and providing new angles from where to look at them. Musicians, composers and their works are no more divine than anyone else and thus – while their efforts and contributions can and should certainly be appreciated – I do not see why their works should be untouchable.

In the future it could be interesting to work on doing a survey among musicians in order to map the general attitude towards the kind of reinterpretation explored in this thesis. One could perhaps create an online questionnaire. The questionnaire could include questions such as "How far can an interpretation go? What is an interpretation of a piece of music? How much can one change in a piece of music before it becomes a new piece?" I would also be interested in further exploration in the realm of reinterpretation, for example by pondering the relationship of new and old.

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10. Appendices

Concert programme

Scores

Olle Sundström: Cutting room Postlude

A reinterpretation of "Prelude" from Cello Suite Nr. 2 by J.S. Bach.

Reinterpreting Bach is a difficult, yet delicious task. A task I probably would not venture into unless someone asked me to. Once asked, the questions started to hang like heavy storm clouds over my head: What can be done with Bach? What has been done before? What is one allowed to do? But when it was clear that what was asked, or rather demanded, of me was to stray far away from the safe havens of the original, one question clearly overshadowed the others: How far can I stray from the original but still keep it "Bach"?

This is no place for tedious descriptions of the composition process, but I will tell you this: Most of the elements from the original landed on the cutting room floor. But in the end I kept every single note. Sometimes bundled together as heavy objects lying around. Sometimes like a residue from a distant memory. Lingerin~~g~~.
Curtain's Blackness. Postlude.

Olle Sundström

CH

Árpád Solti: Hommage à BA

LOGH

This work was composed using the first four bars of Bach's Cello Suite in d minor. In it, I used composition techniques typical for Máté Balogh, a Hungarian composer highly respected by me. My aim was to represent the different dimensions of tone colour hidden in the bachian tones by stretching them in time.

Árpád Solti

Rewriting Bach

– A Thesis Concert –

Ohlinsalen, Artisten
University of Gothenburg
Academy of Music and Drama

25.11.2015

Concert Programme

J. S. Bach: *Prelude from Suite for Solo Cello no 2 in d minor*

Olle Sundström: *Carving Room Postlude* (World Premiere)

Arpád Solti: *Hommage à BA* CH
(World Premiere)

LOGH

Oliver Müller: Cello

Olle Sundström: Electronics

>Welcome to this thesis concert!

The aim of my thesis is to explore the possibilities of interpretation in western art music, using Bach's *Prelude* from his second *Suite for Solo Cello* as a showcase. I asked two composition students at HSM, Olle Sundström and Arpád Solti, to reinterpret this piece so that they could be presented side by side in a concert performance. Unfortunately I do not have enough space here to write more about the thesis, but it will hopefully be available in the university library soon.

Enjoy the concert!

Oliver Müller

J. S. Bach: *Prelude from Suite for Solo Cello No 2 in d minor*

The *Suites for Solo Cello* by Bach, since their rediscovery by Catalan cellist Pablo Casals, are at the very core of the classical cello repertoire. This makes them interesting targets for experimentation as cellists tend to have strong opinions about them. Also, there is a lot of uncertainty around the cello suites, because no autographed manuscript by Bach himself has survived. It is in fact debated whether the suites were written for the cello in the first place or if Bach intended them for another instrument, such as one called the *Viboncello da spalla*, which is held against one's shoulder instead of between one's legs.

In any case the d minor suite, along with the other ones, was composed most likely around 1717–23, during Bach's service in Cöthen. Each suite features six movements, of which the prelude is the first.

SUITE II.

Prélude.

The musical score for the Prélude of Suite II, BWV 207, is presented in 11 staves of bass clef notation. The piece is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is characterized by a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more melodic line in the left hand. The piece concludes with a final cadence in the key of G major.

Three staves of musical notation in bass clef. The first staff contains a sequence of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. The second staff continues with similar rhythmic patterns, including some beamed notes. The third staff features a mix of eighth notes and quarter notes, ending with a double bar line.

Allemande.

Ten staves of musical notation for the piece 'Allemande'. The notation is in bass clef and includes various rhythmic figures such as sixteenth-note runs, eighth-note patterns, and quarter-note sequences. Several staves feature trills, indicated by the 'tr' symbol. The piece concludes with a double bar line on the final staff.

Cutting room Postlude

A reinterpretation of "Prelude" from cello suite nr. 2 by J.S. Bach

Olle Sundström

♩ = 58
molto sul pont. (m.s.p)

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The piece begins in 5/4 time. Measure 1 features a triplet of eighth notes with a glissando (marked with an asterisk) and a 6th fingering. Measure 2 has a 5th fingering. Measure 3 is in 3/4 time with a triplet. Measure 4 is in 6/4 time with a triplet and a 'sul D' instruction. Dynamics include *f*, *sub. p*, *pp*, *mf*, *ff*, *pp*, *ff*, *ffp*, and *ff*.

* perform all glissandi evenly during full note value

Musical notation for measures 5-8. Measure 5 is in 6/4 time with a 4th fingering. Measure 6 is in 5/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 7 is in 3/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 8 is in 5/8 time. Dynamics include *fff*, *mp*, *pp*, *mf*, and *p*. Performance instructions include 'molto sul tasto (m.s.t)', 'm.s.t' to 'm.s.p', and 'm.s.t'.

(♩ = 116)

Musical notation for measures 9-11. Measure 9 is in 5/8 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 10 is in 3/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 11 is in 3/4 time with a 4th fingering. Measure 12 is in 3/4 time with a 6th fingering and a 'pizz' instruction. Dynamics include *fff*, *mp*, and *fff*. Performance instructions include 'm.s.p' and '(♩ = 58)'.

12 pizz arco pizz arco (m.s.p)

Musical notation for measures 13-15. Measure 13 is in 3/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 14 is in 3/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 15 is in 2/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Dynamics include *mf*, *fff*, and *p*. Performance instructions include 'gliss.' and 'm.s.t'.

16 rit. + col legno batt.

Musical notation for measures 16-18. Measure 16 is in 2/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 17 is in 3/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Measure 18 is in 2/4 time with a 3rd fingering. Dynamics include *fff*, *mn*, and *fn*. Performance instructions include 'rit.', 'pizz', 'arco ord.', and 'gliss.'

19 m.s.p. pizz. gliss. 4" arco ord. *f* *fff* *p* *mf*

21 m.s.p. pizz. arco m.s.t. 3" 3" *fp* *fff* *pp* *f*

24 gliss. gliss. 5" m.s.t. ♩ = 60 *p* *mf* *pp*

27 *f* φ bartok pizz

30 m.s.p. *mp* *sub.fff* *mp* *pp*

33 ord. m.s.p. gliss. 3" *fp* *ff* *pp*

36 pizz. arco m.s.t. *pizz* *arco m.s.t.*

4

arco (m.s.p)

62

arco (m.s.p) pizz arco (m.s.p) pizz

f mp ff p

66

arco (m.s.p) ord.

ff fp ff

69

m.s.t ord.

fp < ff p ff

72

p

75

ff

79

sul G & D sul G & C

ff

Árpád Solti

CH


Hommage à BA

LOGH

for cello solo

Abbreviations and signs

n: al niente

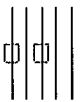
 'Sciarrino tasto-ponticello': Very fast up and down vertical movement of the bow along the indicated strings, which creates a fast tremolo between the 'tasto' and 'ponticello'.



Bowing the tailpiece.



Play on the bridge by bowing the wood of the bridge at a right angle at its right side.



Play on the two middle strings (muted) to create air noise-sound.



Continuous repetition of the given group of notes, as fast as possible.

CH

Hommage à BA

for cello solo

LOGH

- Müller Olivérnek -

Árpád Solti

Timeline

13" 3" 7" 8" 5" 1" 5" 2" 30"

Timeline: 13" 3" 7" 8" 5" 1" 5" 2" 30"

pizz.

arco
m.s.p.

cl. batt.

u < d d d > u u < d d d > u d d d u < d d d > u d d d d d u u d d d d d d u < d d d > u

7" 4" 5" 15"

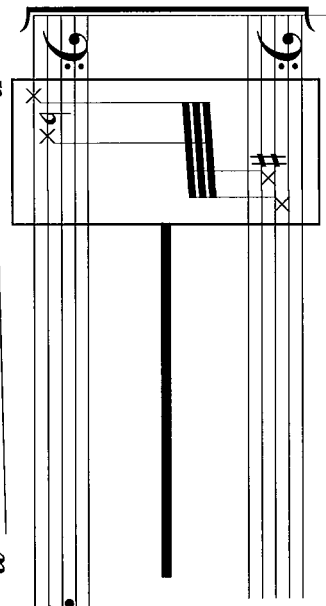
pp

tapping the body (left hand)

n p p n

d u u u < d d d > u u < p d d > u u < d d d > u u < p d d > u d d d d d d

20" 14" 6" 7" 1" 4" 6"



slow scratching the string by fingernails

pizz.

arco

pizz.

scratching the strings with a cloth

6" 3" 14" 5" 10" 30"

p < *f* *p* < *f* *p* < *f* *p* < *f* *p* < *f* *p* < *f*

n *mf*

pp *n*

fingernail pizz.

arco