

The concert program of my harpsichord recital on 22 October 2017 in the Bremen Oberneuland Church toys with the idea of transmission, transcription and adaptation. J.S. Bach's sixth English suite is, for example, only known in transcriptions of Bach's students: so, it is an authentic work for keyboard instrument, as seen through the (slightly varying) lenses of his disciples;

The Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in e-flat-major is originally written for lute, but exists in Bach's own handwriting as a keyboard transcription;

Bach's d-minor Ciaccona for solo violin from the Partita No. 2 in D minor, finally, is an arrangement by the famous harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt, which was unpublished at the point that I got interested in the work, and only available on one of Leonhardt's recordings. So I transcribed the piece, using headphones and a lot of patience, from the recording for my own use. The concert on 22 October 2017 was the last one in a row of performances, beginning in 2013.

One problem with transcribing and learning Leonhardt's arrangement was to decide where to draw the line between what to write down and what to leave for the moment of the performance. To take a dictation of such a long piece means listening many times, not merely to the notes, but also to the performance. The performer's most stellar moments, his good moments, his standard solutions, his quirks and mannerisms, and even a few skipped notes all get etched into your brain during the process. There is no escaping from the very thing we were always warned about: using someone else's playing style as the starting point for our own performances. My project to play this piece over the course of a longer period of time now includes the decision *not* to listen to Leonhardt's recording again before I have my own version properly documented, in order to be able to answer the following question: how wrong, or limiting, is it really if we imitate our teachers?

In late March 2013, after copying out my CD transcription in ink, I put away the CD and started practicing. I put in fingerings, added slurs and written comments and got the work up to speed and "in character." During May, I played it for friends and family, returned to the tricky parts, revised fingerings and timings, and along came the first public performance in early June. The only thing I did directly after the concert was to listen one more time to Leonhardt's CD in order to catch the last few transcription errors. Then I let the project rest for a while.

A few months after this first performance, I received a recording of the June concert. What I secretly feared was to hear a weaker blueprint of Leonhardt's original. What I luckily heard instead was only me, playing the harpsichord, sometimes sounding more or less as I had imagined I would, and sometimes not. I made a mental list of things I had to work on: structural decisions and phrasings that I had entrusted to my musical auto-pilot and that I now needed to chisel out more clearly, sonorities that I had imagined but not fully realized, a few issues of choreography and registration that had not worked well under pressure, and so on. The resulting sleeves-rolled-up phase of work had less and less to do with Leonhardt's playing, and more and more to do with what was on the page and in my head. When I played the Ciaccona again, it had become "mine", and when I listened one last time to Leonhardt's recording again during the fall, his interpretation had become surprisingly unfamiliar to me.

A musical performance born in imitation of a "master" does not stay there. As soon as the music is internalized, it begins to move, shift, re-arrange itself, change character and intent. If, as in notated music, the original is prescribed to a large degree, this process may be slow and subtle, but the shifting, changing, and growing happens all the same.

An unexpected twist before the October 22 concert was that the transcriptions had become available in print in mid-2017. I did look the printed version over and found a number of transcribing errors—by the editor! I also found some things I had missed or mis-interpreted in my auditive transcription, but luckily nothing of consequence. So I decided that my version was still good to go, as it moved ever further away from what I remember from Leonhardt's recording. The project will be continued, and new recordings will be made.

Tilman Skowroneck, 12 December 2017