Performance Practice Techniques and Conflicts Between Interpretations of the
Violin Sonata in G minor by Johann Sebastian Bach

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Abstract

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For many decades, discrepancies among performers and the proper interpretation of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach has lingered and sparked controversy between artists. While many believe that recreating the “Baroque” style of playing is necessary by the use of period instruments, many think that this style of playing can be obtained with our modern instruments, as long as the performer interprets the music in the Baroque style. However, several musicians argue that considering we have new, modern instruments, we cannot aim to recreate anything from the past as back in the Baroque period; J.S. Bach as well as other composers, did not imagine how their music would sound on a modern instrument. This is where the controversy comes into play among performers. Does one perform the music of J.S. Bach as they would normally play on their modern instrument, or does one try to emulate, with modern instruments, an authentic performance as it would be done with the period instruments of the Baroque era? My main focus in this paper will be the differences and controversies in the interpretation of J.S. Bach’s solo violin Sonatas and Partitas, particularly the Sonata No.1 in G minor. Through an in-depth study of scores, interviews and recordings, I will show how I believe the music of J.S. Bach should be properly interpreted and why performers should not aim to imitate a style of playing based on when a certain composer lived.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Regardless of what instrument, over the years it has been said by many that the music of Johann Sebastian Bach is the most difficult to perform. A very powerful statement considering all the great masterpieces written over the last few centuries by some of the greatest composers like Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms, to name a few. So why does such a statement hold water? What makes Bach’s music so powerful and able to convey great ranges of emotions even though a lot of it is simply written for one instrument? These are all questions that will be addressed in this paper. Bach was known during his time as the greatest composer alive and to this day, for many, he is still considered to be the greatest composer who lived. His music will stay alive forever, but what has been the center of attention is how his music should be interpreted in order to recreate how he would have wanted it to be portrayed. Prior to the twentieth century, there were practically no sound recording devices invented; as a matter of fact, according to an article in “The History of Recording Technology”, the first recording device ever documented to capture a sound clip was in 1857.¹ This is far beyond Bach’s years, thus there is no record of how any music, prior to the twentieth century, was performed. Many solely base their interpretations on the time period of when a certain work was written or they study an ürtext edition that is intended to replicate the composer’s writing without any changes from the editor. There are a couple of editions of Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin that are the original manuscript which many refer to in order

to help them gain a better understanding of the work stylistically and how Bach may have intended it to sound according to the way certain bowings end up.

Example 1: This is an excerpt from the original manuscript Bach wrote of the Sonata No.1 in G minor; Adagio

![Example 1: An excerpt from the original manuscript Bach wrote of the Sonata No.1 in G minor; Adagio.](image)

Although the use of an original manuscript is a logical approach to emulating an authentic performance, I do not consider it an exact definition of how the music should be interpreted. Sure, it is a tremendous privilege to have access to such documentation and having Bach’s original bowings helps one understand how he envisioned the shaping of the phrases, etc., but it does not emphasize specifics, such as which voice needs to be brought out from the three to four string chords followed by a thirty-second note passage as seen in measure one of Example 1. In my personal experience with various musicians playing Bach on modern instruments, I heard varying opinions on the topic of how chords need to be played; for instance, one professor suggested that when playing Bach, one needs to bring out the bass line. In other words, emphasizing the bottom strings of the chords at all times, therefore creating this “release” effect on every chord in order to attain the Baroque style of playing. On the other hand, I was told that the main note to sustain from a chord is the note that will continue on the melody, regardless of which
note it is in the chord. For example, referring to the Adagio movement of the Sonata in G minor, if a sustained four string chord is followed, without any rest in between, by a thirty-second note figure, whichever string the thirty-second note passage is on tells you which note from the previous chord to sustain. Also, if one listens to the recordings of the world’s greatest violinists in the twentieth century, they all share a similar understanding of the interpretation. While not overly romantic, violinists that have been labeled the best interpreters of Bach, such as Henryk Szeryng, Arthur Grumiaux and Yehudi Menuhin, play their chords very full and sustained with no release in the sound. Along with that, many interpreters of the Baroque style of playing like to alter rhythms and play quick passages unevenly with faster bow speeds. However, the great violinists mentioned early had a tendency to play Bach’s music rhythmically precise and the quick note runs evenly. A pupil of the late Yehudi Menuhin, world renowned violinist Nigel Kennedy, said in an interview how his teacher’s interpretation remains the “gold standard”. The following is from the same interview titled “Nigel Kennedy accuses fellow violinists of destroying Bach's legacy”, in which Kennedy voices his opinion on his colleague’s so-called “authentic” interpretation of Bach:

[Kennedy] is particularly irritated by the soullessness of contemporary Bach interpretations, which he says lack passion, fire and dynamism. He also excoriates "so-called authentic" interpretations that use period instruments to recreate sounds that he claims early composers would think "unbelievably blinkered". According to Kennedy, "specialists are pushing Bach into … a ghetto, which leaves many people feeling that Bach's music is merely mathematical and technical. I see it as my job to try to keep Bach in the mainstream and present his music with, rather than without, its emotional core."²

Although many have attacked Kennedy for voicing his opinion, I agree with him.

For me, the gold standard of interpreting J.S. Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, are the recordings of the legendary violinists of the early and mid 20th century. In my performance of any one of the Sonatas or Partitas, I strive to play the music of Bach with the same passion, sound, and understanding as these older generation violinists played. I just hear the music the same way and believe that regardless of what time period it was written in or what types of instruments were used, we are now living in a different time, and whatever sounds better should be the way one is to play a certain work. The sudden interest in playing in the style of a certain period may be attributed to the rise of interest in the musicology field. Many musicologists whose main concentration is the seventeenth century, including period instruments, have written books and articles on why performers should play in the Baroque style, which may have contributed to such a sudden interest among current artists to experiment playing in that style. However, Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow and musical director of Edinburgh’s Dunedin Consort, John Butt, argues that “the commonplace assumption that HIP (historically informed performance) resulted from ‘progress’ in musicology is simply inadequate, particularly since there has been an increasing rift between HIP and post-war musicology.”

My main focus in this paper will be the Sonata No.1 in G minor; however, everything discussed will be pertinent to the remaining solo works for violin by Bach.

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Chapter 2: A Brief History of the Sonatas and Partitas

The cycle of Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin by Bach can be regarded as the most important works in the violin repertoire. They define an ultimate achievement in the art of violin playing for those who reach the level of being able to play them. It has been wondered why Bach decided to write a series of Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin, which had not been done before or during that time period by any other composer. According to the award-winning book “Bach's Works for Solo Violin” by scholar, violinist, and administrator at Princeton University, Joel Lester Ph.D., usually composers would write these kinds of solo works for organ or harpsichord. But, considering Bach played the violin and had a rich knowledge of the instrument, his proficiency at the organ and harpsichord inspired him to write these magnificent works for solo violin as he would have written them for organ or harpsichord.\(^4\) Bach divided these works, completed by 1720, into two sets: three Sonatas which “exemplify the sonata da camera (chamber-sonata) genre, each having a slow movement, a fugue, another slow movement, and a fast finale”\(^5\), and in between the Sonatas are found each of the three Partitas, which represent the “sonata da chiesa (church-sonata) genre, each containing a series of dance movements”\(^6\). The only movement from the Partitas that stands out as a theme and variations is the massive Ciaccona from the Partita No.2 in d minor. This extraordinary movement often steers away from the rest of the Partita and is performed as a separate work altogether considering its length which can be from 15 to 18 minutes. Many great

\(^5\) Ibid., 7.
\(^6\) Ibid.
violinists view this movement as a hallmark of the violin repertoire and, as world renowned violinist Joshua Bell stated, it is "not just one of the greatest pieces of music ever written, but one of the greatest achievements of any man in history. It's a spiritually powerful piece, emotionally powerful, structurally perfect." In the early twentieth century, it was deemed impossible by many to stand up and play with a bare violin and no accompaniment. It has been said that even the great violinist Ferdinand David did not dare to go on stage, regardless of the fee he was offered, to play by himself. Only when Felix Mendelssohn presented a piano accompaniment part he wrote for the Ciaccona did David agree to perform it with him on stage. Several arrangements of the famous work have been made for other instruments, such as the piano transcriptions by Busoni and Brahms, as well as a popular transcription for the guitar by Andres Segovia.

After hundreds of years, it is fascinating to see Bach’s autographed score being copied and printed in various editions of the Sonatas and Partitas. From three complete surviving copies, “Bach’s autograph score, a copy by his second wife (Anna Magdalena), and a copy by two unknown scribes” every performer around the world can see Bach’s original handwritten score and familiarize themselves with what he may have intended his music to sound like merely based on his writing. As discussed earlier, I find that if he wrote a chord with the sustained note being held through until the following thirty-second note passages begins on that same note, as seen in Example 2, then he intended for that note to be brought out as the main voice of the chord.

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8 Lester, Bach’s Works for Solo Violin, 23.
10 Lester, Bach’s Works for Solo Violin, 20
Example 2- The note sustained in the chord is the middle note, D, which carries through to the thirty-second note passage, therefore, the leading voice is the middle note, D. Many Baroque style violinists do not agree and consider, in this situation, for the G on top to be held with a release effect (quicker bow speed), followed by the thirty-second run.

In every slow movement or Fugue that Bach wrote, this concept applies as he carefully wrote in the slurs and ties to depict which notes he intended to be carried over into the following segment, therefore bringing out the important voice in the chord. Bach visualized and heard exactly what he wanted to be played as illustrated in his handwritten score. Seeing and correctly understanding this “will help a performer see that Bach probably did not intend the first thirty-second notes to be separated from the following slur in any of the passages”,\(^{11}\) a key point in proving that separation and space is not necessary to create a correct or authentic Baroque performance of any one of Bach’s Sonatas or Partitas. Many performers who try to replicate authentic Baroque performances on modern instruments have this understanding of playing with spaces between fast passages and preceding chords. When I hear these rhythmically-altered performances, I feel like I cannot even place a beat anywhere. Now, if Bach’s original autographed manuscript was merely notes written without any measures or bar lines on a piece of paper, I would be open to understanding these kinds of performances. However, his manuscript clearly has a time signature, bar lines signifying where exactly the measure ends, written rhythms which all add up correctly, and there is no specification of releasing the sound or even dynamics that can support arguments of Bach wanting the

\(^{11}\) Lester, *Bach’s Works for Solo Violin*, 18.
sound to fade or disappear. These performers try to make up for the spaces or, releases in the sound, they place in between chords and passages by playing the thirty-second note passages very fast and purposely uneven because they believe that is how music was played in the seventeenth century. Several Baroque interpreters also believe that double dotting was the trend in the seventeenth century and that all dotted notes must be double dotted followed by a shortened note, regardless of its length. However, according to Lester’s findings, Bach was aware of the double dotting practice and even incorporated it in his keyboard overture (BWV 831)\textsuperscript{12}, which further supports that Bach wrote exactly what rhythms he intended to be played in the Sonatas and Partitas.

\textsuperscript{12} Lester, \textit{Bach’s Works for Solo Violin}, 50.
Chapter 3: Sonata No.1 in G minor

The opening four-note chord of the Adagio from the Sonata No.1 is arguably the most recognizable introduction of a work for any violinist. It is the first chord that begins the entire cycle of the Sonatas and Partitas and “[resonates] through all four movements and concluding all three G-minor movements”\textsuperscript{13} of the Sonata No.1, considered to be the most popular of all the Sonatas. Since the Sonatas are unaccompanied works, despite the Baroque era being all about the bass line, known at the time as basso continuo, the violin must accompany itself. Therefore, the consistent three to four-note chords present the basso continuo in the bottom voices which on the violin, are played on the bottom two low strings, G and D. The opening chord of the Adagio can be viewed various ways by interpreters, for instance, historian of early violin playing David Boyden argues that “the modern way of breaking quadruple-stops 2 + 2 is never mentioned as a performance option in the early eighteenth century. He suggests that eighteenth century violinists sometimes played quadruple-stops by lingering on the bass, followed by a quick arpeggiation to the top”\textsuperscript{14}, as seen in Example 3.

Example 3- Opening chord of the Adagio is rolled with emphasis on the bass note.

\textsuperscript{13} Lester, \textit{Bach Works for Solo Violin}, 3.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 39.
Example 4—Opening chord in the Joachim-Moser edition depicts short notes in the bottom of the chord to quickly get up to the melody note in order to sustain it.

In Example 4, it is evident that the intention of the short bottom two notes of the chord implies that they must be played quickly in order to have enough bow to sustain the top voice which continues the melody in the following thirty-second note passage. The G and D are written as sixteenth notes, the third note of the chord, B-flat written as an eighth note, and the high G is a quarter note, all of which translate to playing the bottom two notes simultaneously, then quickly breaking the chord and moving to the B-flat and high G, then releasing the B-flat after playing it for the duration of an eighth note. Ultimately, the high G will be heard independently from the rest of the chord, hence making it the leading voice with the melody continuing on in the thirty-second note passage starting from the high G. This interpretation is not only pertinent to the specific example given of the opening chord, but it carries through the entire Sonata every time there is a chord. According to Lester, editions that are printed with the text as seen in Example 4 “reflect Classical-era and nineteenth-century notions of melody and texture that continue to dominate twentieth-century attitudes towards this movement.”

It is interesting to note, in Bach’s original manuscript (Example 1), he wrote the opening chord as a quarter note. In other words, all the notes are even in duration, which technically contradicts both Examples 3 and 4. Although many early music advocates accuse the nineteenth and early twentieth century editions of falsifying Bach’s music by

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15 Lester, Bach’s Works for Solo Violin, 37.
the way many editors noted the Sonatas and Partitas, such as in Example 4, therefore creating an incorrect interpretation of Bach’s music, it is clear that Bach did not intend for it to sound like Example 3 would sound, either. Of course it is impossible to know exactly what he meant in his writing, simply because it is impossible to play all four strings simultaneously as quarter notes. But I believe his intention, according to the fact that his original clearly shows the top G sustaining over to the thirty-second note passage with absolutely no gap or rest specified in between, was for it to be played with a full sounding chord (all the voices played with equal volume), with the chord broken as 2 + 2, as opposed to rolling it across with the bottom note G sustained as the longest just because it is playing the role of the basso continuo. Throughout the rest of the circa five minute movement, which comprises of the same chord/thirty-second note patterns, the same concept regarding chords and unaltered rhythms applies if one is playing a standard nineteenth and twentieth century interpretation. Baroque interpreters also use very little- practically zero-vibrato, another major difference in authentic versus traditional performances. In the recording by world renowned violinist, Henryk Szeryng (1918-1988), who is regarded by the majority of violinists as the best interpreter of Bach’s music, we can hear his calm and evenly paced performance of the Adagio which he begins as seen in Example 4, if one were to look at music.\textsuperscript{16} The first thing heard in his opening are the three notes of the chord starting from the bottom followed by quickly releasing the bottom two and flowing right into the high G which he sustains as he releases the B-flat. I don’t quite know how he does this difficult technique, but his recordings of all the Sonatas and Partitas by Bach have been regarded as the epitome of the perfect interpretation and there is no doubt as to why he has been labeled that way.

\textsuperscript{16}Henryk Szeryng’s opening chord is played exactly as written in Bach’s original manuscript.
The Adagio serves as a prelude to the Fugue; not only in this Sonata, but in the Baroque period, the fugue and a preceding movement went hand-in-hand as composers “paired preludes and fugues for both aesthetic and practical reasons”\textsuperscript{17}, meaning that the fugue needed an introduction prior to being played. Perhaps, this was done in order to demonstrate how difficult a fugue is and to help build the momentum for both the performer and audience. It is amazing how Bach conceived writing fugues for the violin, an instrument on which only 4 fingers are used to play on as opposed to an organ, where one has all ten fingers to use. The complex G minor fugue begins with a single voice playing the motif that will be heard throughout the entire 94 measure fugue, with the exception of a few sixteenth note passages that do not contain this motif. Joel Lester brings up an interesting point in his chapter on the Fugue, asking the question, how does the G minor Fuga stay interesting so long? His answer, “essentially, by doing what all Bach pieces do: have something new in each section that builds upon and heightens the previous musical discussion.”\textsuperscript{18} There are several sections in this fugue, most of which orbit around the opening motif seen in Example 5.

Example 5- Opening motif of the Fuga in measure one followed by an answer in measure two in a different voice.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example5.png}
\caption{Opening motif of the Fuga in measure one followed by an answer in measure two in a different voice.}
\end{figure}

From measure two, only in the beginning of a new section will the motif be found in a single voice again. I hear the whole Fuga as a conversation with a question being asked and immediately answered in the following measure. The sections are difficult to

\textsuperscript{17} Lester, \textit{Bach’s Works for Solo Violin}, 25.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 58.
pinpoint, as there are no set amount of measures that are equal in any section; however, each section ends with a cadence “immediately followed by a new section, different in texture, figuration, contrapuntal devices, and usually register from the preceding music—confirming that the cadences do indeed articulate the form of the piece.” Every time a new section starts, there is more intensity added as multiple note chords, counterpoint and countersubjects are introduced. The recurring motif seen in Example 5 is the main line that is brought out during the entire course of the fugue and, although labeled Allegro, it should be a fairly held-back tempo in order to play all the notes properly. This movement isn’t as open as the Adagio; therefore, regardless of the interpretation, it is basically played the same. The only major difference I found between a performance by Henryk Szeryng and that of a historically-informed performer was the tempo. Szeryng’s tempo makes the 94 measure movement roughly six minutes in length, while a Baroque style performance would probably last about four and a half minutes. The tendency is to play faster because Baroque performers play it much lighter, making it sound almost effortless.

Following the Fuga is the third movement; Siciliana. This movement is the only one of the four movements that is written in the key of B-flat major, delivering a “sense of relief from the tonal unity of the opening prelude-fugue pair.” The mellow movement allows room for open interpretation, unlike the Fuga which consists of fast-pace, nonstop multiple-note chords. The word itself, Siciliano, is defined in several dictionaries as a “dance, song, or instrumental piece in 6/8 or 12/8 time and evoking a pastoral mood.” These dances, or movements, are typically found in the context of a

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19 Lester, Bach’s Works for Solo Violin, 58.  
20 Ibid., 87.
larger piece of music in the Baroque era. Although the overall feel of this piece is tranquil and mellow, many violinists still play it with the same energy as the previous movements. I find the Adagio and Siciliana to be somewhat similar in terms of chord execution; however, the Siciliana is written in a way where certain gaps and spaces are inevitable. For instance, a chord is written and ends on a note on the E string and concludes a phrase or cadence. It is followed by a double stop on the G and D strings which would be impossible to execute without some sort of breath or pause in the bow in order to give one time to set their fingers on the next strings. Even though many violinists of the early twentieth century recorded Bach with the interpretation style of Example 4, in this particular movement they steer away from the high energy of the previous movements, particularly the Fuga, and play it very light and relaxed with quicker bow speed and lazier vibrato, at times almost none at all. Despite the lighter and relaxed performance, as heard in a recording by violinist Joseph Szigeti, he doesn’t play it in a Baroque style with exaggerated swells of each bow change like a period performer would play. His rendition does sound different than that of David Oistrakh, who has almost no space whatsoever between double stops and maintains the same energy and volume as heard in his recording of the previous movements. At this point, it is up to the listener to determine which rendition they prefer, but in regards to how it should be played stylistically, I believe lighter is fine. But, like in the Adagio, I do not agree with interpretations that alter rhythms or play with heavy swells as in Bach’s original manuscript- he does not denote any of that and clearly writes key signatures and values of the notes.

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21 Szigeti plays in a lighter style and spaces between chords and double stops.
22 Oistrakh maintains the same energy and volume as the previous movements.
The final movement, Presto, demonstrates the violinist’s virtuosity in a continuous series of arpeggiated passages. Written in a 3/8 time signature, I believe Bach emphasizes that each arpeggio pattern is a six note grouping and should be thought of as a separate measure by writing short lines in the middle of the measures. While this is just an opinion and there is no evidence of a definite translation of these lines, they must have had some significance since he marked the entire movement with them.23

Example 6- The red arrows point out the short bars Bach marked in the original manuscript to exemplify a separation in the grouping of each measure. This continues throughout the movement.

Just as in the Fuga, this movement does not allow room for spaces or gaps. The major interpretation differences between those striving for a historically-informed performance versus those staying true to the notion of twentieth century interpretation, is tempo and sound. Baroque performers tend to play this movement extremely light with a thin sound and very small amount of bow, hence allowing them to play it quicker. Traditional performers in the early twentieth century, however, play this movement with high energy, more bow, and with a big even sound, unless a dynamic change is marked.24 Even among traditional performers, the main difference is tempi; Szeryng chooses a slower

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24 Henryk Szeryng’s tempo is much slower than that of others.
tempo than most others. However, every note speaks clearly and his choice of the tempo helps shape what he is doing with the phrasing. Violin virtuoso Hilary Hahn chooses a very quick tempo, but allures to the traditional twentieth century style of playing.\footnote{Hilary Hahn’s rendition is much quicker than most of the earlier recordings, but stylistically, she allures to the twentieth century interpretations.} What performers have in common in this movement, whether authentic or traditional, is bowings. As noted by Lester, “a striking feature common to almost all recordings is the uniformity of bow strokes used throughout the movement, despite all the changes in surface configurations.”\footnote{Lester, \textit{Bach’s Works for Solo Violin}, 136.} The most obvious bowing differences in this movement between Bach’s original manuscript and some current editions is a 5 measure strand of passages present in the beginning and of the movement and second half (new section) of the Presto following the repeat. The bowing Bach wrote may create some inconvenience as it is an awkward bowing for a fast tempo. For my performance, I played the second bowing seen in Example 8 that is the other choice of bowings among violinists for this passage.

Example 8 – Bach’s original bowing seen in A and the most common alternate bowing among violinists seen in B.
While all the movements in this Sonata convey different emotions, techniques, challenges and skills, the most striking difference I find between performers aiming to replicate an authentic performance on a modern instrument compared to those emulating traditional twentieth century recordings that have been around for several decades, is the lightness of playing, rhythmic differences, and chord executions. While I don’t agree with the rhythmic alterations that Baroque players employ (as Bach’s original manuscript shows no confusion or doubt as to what he wrote), I do understand the urge to explore playing with a different sound. In Bach’s original manuscript, there is no indication of dynamics anywhere in the Sonata, therefore, the fact that many authentic performers choose to play very lightly with a thin sound is understandable and a matter of taste. Those that explore even further and are eager to hear what Bach’s works would sound like during his time play the music on period instruments. Whether these instruments voice what he wanted it to sound like or were merely the only option available to him, it is interesting to experiment, for those who have access, on how different this same work would sound on an instrument that existed in the Baroque period.
Chapter 4: Period Instruments Versus Modern Instruments

“Historical performance in theory and practice has truly established itself as part of everyday musical life. Period instruments are routinely encountered in the concert hall and are virtually obligatory in substantial areas of the repertory. Throughout the world there has developed an immense interest in discovering the original expectations of composers in terms of sound and musical style and in acquiring appropriate instrumental techniques for their faithful realization”. 27 Robin Stowell Ph.D.

With today’s technological advancements, access to historical resources and ease of obtaining valuable information and materials, musicians can reenact a performance as it would be in previous eras in music history. During Bach’s time, the violin as we know it today was slightly different. While the difference in violins wasn’t as drastic as the Baroque bows compared to modern bows, it’s still significant to point out. According to violin soloist and professor at several institutions, Robin Stowell, during the sixteenth century, the violin was very underdeveloped and only had 3 strings. It was considered a consort instrument; in other words, used in ensembles as an accompaniment instrument, and had no soloistic value. As music progressed, “the more expressive, soloistic requirements of the time resulted in the violin’s increased social esteem and artistic credibility”. 28 And, because of that, an additional string, the high E string, was developed in order for these soloistic attributes to come through. In the Baroque period, the strings used were different from the wide variety of strings available nowadays. Catgut strings were used, made from the intestines of cattle, and had a very different timbre than the bright steel strings violinists resort to today. The gut strings, which are still available in their most modern form, don’t have as much brilliance in sound and

28 Ibid., 28.
often times sound fuzzy. Note that these are modified gut strings; therefore, the characteristics mentioned must have been more extreme more than three hundred years ago.

The early violin bows looked quite different than what we see today. The tips of the bows were narrow, the stick had an arch, and the hair was very thin. A general idea of the evolution of the bow can be seen in Example 9.

Example 9- Some of the earliest models of the bow during Bach’s time can be seen in figure A. The gradual evolution began in the 1700’s and can be seen in Figure B.

![Example 9](image-url)

The early bows were much shorter in length because of the style of playing at the time; the violin was a background instrument to dancing, therefore the light sound and gentle sound was suitable in relation to the music and dance. According to Stowell, while France sustained this style of music, Italy was undergoing major musical development as composers were writing more virtuostic music that required more sound, dynamic
differences, and bow techniques from the performer.\textsuperscript{29} These demands made it impossible to play with the short, semi-straight bows seen in Example 9, thus, the bow began undergoing changes. A significant change necessary to lengthen the bow from the pike-tipped, arched bow to what it would become, was to straighten the stick. As Stowell describes, this process “required modifications in the height and curvature of the so-called pike’s (or swan’s) head, in order to allow sufficient separation of the hair and the stick; and when, towards the mid eighteenth century, makers began to anticipate the concave camber of the ‘modern’ stick, further changes in the head-design were required for optimum hair/stick separation at the middle.”\textsuperscript{30} As seen in Example 9A, the years next to a few of the bows correlate with Bach’s lifetime; therefore, violinists at the time played his music with such bows. Just looking at the images, one can conclude that any work by any composer of the time must have sounded much different than it does today. Even with replicas of these types of bows, it still isn’t the same as nothing can be replicated to the extent of the original, particularly something over three hundred years old, such as these bows. In the case of Bach’s music, many consider that the correct way to interpret his compositions is through the use of these historic instruments and bows. However, we will never know if, had modern instruments and the evolution of the bow occurred sooner and were available during Bach’s time, how he would have intended for his music to sound. Those that criticize modern performers’ interpretation of Bach being incorrect or not doing justice to the Baroque style need to consider that, as interesting as it is playing on period instruments, we must not forget that back in Bach’s time, they were only using and playing a certain way because that was the only available option.

\textsuperscript{29} Stowell, \textit{Early Violin and Viola}, 39.
\textsuperscript{30} Stowell, \textit{Early Violin and Viola}, 39.
Conclusion

For my performance of the Sonata No.1 in G minor, I listened to and studied several recordings as well as scores. Regarding bowings, even though I viewed Bach’s original manuscript, I decided to play with bowings most comfortable for me, regardless of how the great violin masters whose recordings I look up to played. I believe instead that playing how a certain edition prints the bowings or even how Bach wrote them, ultimately it is in the hands of the performer. Again, since during Bach’s times they had different bows (shorter lengths and shapes), we cannot expect to comply with all the bowings Bach wrote. Many do stay true to the bowings; however it depends on phrasing and shaping of the music. As long as the performer is shaping the piece correctly, any bowing is passable. For my interpretation, I listened to and fell in love with the recordings of Henryk Szeryng. My chord execution, sound production and energetic playing were all inspired by his recording. To me, his ideas, tempos, understanding, phrasing and flow of the Sonata is the epitome of perfect interpretation of Bach’s music. After researching and gaining insight on Historically Informed Performances, I’ve developed an understanding and appreciation towards those who try to replicate performances as they would be in the Baroque era. However, the controversy comes into play when musicians start arguing about which is right and wrong. While it is completely up to the performer, I believe that modern instruments have given us the opportunity to play and sound better, which translates to interpreting these magnificent pieces to their full potential. Particularly with Bach’s Solo Violin Sonatas, they are written ahead of the years which he lived, because they sound like nothing else written in that period for Solo
Violin. Most Baroque repertoire for violin consisted of monophonic lines with hardly any double stops or continuous arpeggiated passages. It is hard to imagine that he expected such powerful music to be played with the light bows of the time. I believe his intention was for the Sonatas to sound as powerful and dynamic as they do with today’s modern instruments because, if one analyzes his original manuscript, there is no indication of playing with swells or lightness as many early music advocates argue. The only reason it sounded like that was because the violin and bow weren’t as developed and musicians had no control over the sounds they produced; therefore, some passages may have sounded rhythmically altered or chords weren’t played as full as they can be played with today’s instruments. With that said, while I strongly believe performers should view music in its historic context, they should not emulate a performance that was done on practically different instruments. Our main task as performers, especially with original scores available, is to honor the music of our great predecessors by respecting their ideas and playing them to the best of our ability with our present day, modified instruments.
Works Cited


