

### **Bach's eight foot *Violone*, tuned *CGda*.**

Some of Bach's working habits and **practical decisions** might be deduced from the sources of his works (scores and performance parts):

a) Bach had all necessary **octave transpositions** or **other adaptations** to the peculiarities of the different instruments (generally) **notated exactly in the parts**:

e.g. in movement 7 of *Missa BWV 232* where the *Alto* part descends to **c'#** and **b**, these notes are exactly doubled by the *Violino Secondo*, but Bach adapted the *Oboe* part.

So in m 8 the *Alto* sings d' - - **c'#-b** (which notes are played also by *Violino Secondo*), whereas the *Oboe* plays d'-e'- **d'**- e'.

b) Bach's string parts nearly always involve **the use of all strings**, **violin parts** nearly always descend to g or g#.

c) Bach's 'Originalstimmen' show the efficient precise way in which **all *tacet*-movements are indicated**: every singer and instrumentalist always could see what to do in the next movement; '*tacet*'-indications are sometimes specified: '*Aria Tenore e Trombe tacet*' and '*Aria Soprano è Violoncelli*' etc.

d) in the performance parts **change of instrument is clearly indicated** in words or by change of clef: e.g. from *Oboe* to *Oboe d' Amour / Flauto*.

e) **continuo parts almost always contain the music of all movements**.

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Some baffling facts in modern performance practices and some questions:

1) the *Violone* parts of BWV 18/3, 42/6, 132 / 2, 182/6: **complete integral realisation of these original *Violone* notes by a modern 'Violone' seems to be impossible, whatever**

**'Violone' tuning is used**. In Historical Instrument Performances (HIP) conductors usually have these parts performed by their 'baroque cello', a practical tell tale sign that could 'be construed as indicating' a cello as the true representative of Bach's *Violone*.

2) the use of a  ${}^1G$ -C-E/F-A-d-g *Violone* in Bach's works is questionable. Its  ${}^1G$  string would be a useless appendix;

octave transposition up and down was a thing not (to be) done in Bach's works.

See supra sub a) and b).

3) A whole range of old and more recent tunings is used by modern 'Violonists' or/and postulated by Bach specialists:

${}_1C-{}_1F-{}_1Bb- Eb$  (Eisel 1738) //  ${}_1C-{}_1G-D-A$  (Eisel, Alfred Dürr, Joel Quarrington) //  ${}_1C-{}_1A-D-G$  (Nicholas Pap, Ton Koopman's bassist) //  ${}_1C-{}_1E-{}_1A-D-G$  (Planyavsky, Rampe/Sackmann, Jan Hollestelle) //  ${}_1C-{}_1F-{}_1Bb-D-G-c$  (postulated by David Chapman<sup>1</sup> for the F major Brandenburg concertos No. 1 and 2) //  ${}_2Bb-{}_1F-{}_1Bb-D-G-c$  (postulated by Chapman for the 'baffling' low  $Bb_2$  in Concerto 6) //  **$C-G-c-f$**  (Groningen, 1 oct '05: Peter Rikkers played an instrument with 91 cm vibrating string length) //  ${}_1D-{}_1A-D-G$  (used by several contrabassists in works that contain no C's or only few C's in the continuo lines).

4) Was the *Violone* the only instrument about which Bach failed to be clear as to tuning, inevitable adaptations, as to passages or whole movements that a musician should omit?

5) The very last note in Brandenburg Concerto VI - at least in Bach's score, our only source! - is a low BB flat in mm 45/110 written in the staff for *Violone è Cembalo*: see p. 4, example. This unique 'baffling low  $Bb_2$ ' for *Violone* perhaps can be explained as the result of haste / hurry: it seems (see Festschrift Max Schneider, p 132 ff.) that Bach did not have enough time to correct the Brandenburg score (before the man who had to bring his precious score to the Margrave, had to leave for Berlin).

In movement 3, mm 45/110 he had already put the fermata-sign in all staves (twice in staves 1, 2, 4, 5: both under and above the noteheads), then proceeded to write the fermata in the middle of the bottom stave: **the dot of this fermata is above the second line, just where Bach could have notated a  $Bb$ , if he wanted to do so.** Did Bach notate a  $Bb$  in a separate *Violone* part? Should a copier notate an unplayable  ${}_2Bb$  in the *Violone* part?

**Bach wrote the octaves  $G+g$  and  $A+a$  in mm 9 and 20 of the *Adagio* of the first Brandenburg Concerto in the staff for “*Continuo è Violono Groŕo*”:** these notes of course were not copied as double stops in the separate *Violono (Groŕo)* part. Bach himself knew and a clever copier of the performance part could easily guess that the high notes (quarter + 8th-note  $g$  and  $a$ ) were intended for the *Violone*.

**Why should 16'-addicts postulate that Bach in the very final measure of Brandenburg Concerto Nr. 6, the one that has the lightest texture of all six, wanted a Mahlerian  ${}_2Bb$**

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<sup>1</sup> David Chapman in *The Galpin Society Journal*, June 2003, 224-231: 'Historical and Practical Considerations for the Tuning of Double Bass Instruments in Fourths'

**in the *Violone* part, one octave below the  ${}_1Bb$  of the *Cembalo* and that a copier of the performance part would thoughtlessly notate an unplayable  ${}_2Bb$  in the *Violone* part?**<sup>2</sup>

6) **restricted** 16-foot range: Mattheson's and Majer's texts about *Violone* have nearly identical wordings; Mattheson wrote a poem in praise of Majer's work (printed in Majer's book); Mattheson edited Niedt's 1710 work in 1717: he allowed Niedt to mention merely a six string  ${}_1G$  -g *Violone*: "*eine grosse Baß=Geige [...] vom contra G ins d, e*"

Mattheson did not interpolate a six string  ${}_1D$ -d *Violone* into Niedt's work. So we may safely assume that Mattheson accepted Niedt's and Majer's interpretation of the term *Violone*.

Perhaps Mattheson in writing "*Ihr Tohn ist sechzehnfüßig*" only meant to say 'its sound reminds of 16' organ registers'. His vague phrase doesn't necessarily mean that the bottom string was tuned to  ${}_1C$ : Majer who copied this statement (*Ihr Ton is 16. füßig*) and most of Mattheson's text, went on to mention - notwithstanding this *sechzehnfüßiger Tohn* '16-foot sound' - no other *Violone* than the smaller 8-foot instrument tuned to  ${}_1G$ -C-F-A-d-g; in the "*Inhalt*" (= 'contents') of the 1732 edition of his book he called this instrument: '*teutsche Bass-Geige.*'

The correlation between Majer's  ${}_1G$ -C-F-A-d-g *Violone* and Mattheson's text can be seen as a 'tell tale sign', that both authors had in mind a  ${}_1G$  -g *Violone*, an instrument that **cannot** fully double Bc notes down to contra C.

Dreyfus, however, wrote concerning the tuning of Mattheson's *Violone*: '*by his use of the term "16-foot" he undoubtedly meant that his violone sounded an octave below the violoncello in practice*'. (p.139-140).

Quantz possibly meant Majer's '*teutsche* Bass-Geige, where he wrote (p. 219): "*Der sogenannte deutsche Violon von fünf bis sechs Saiten ist also mit Recht abgeschaffet worden.*"

But Georg Friedrich Wolf's Lexicon (editions from 1787 to 1813) still mentions only the six-string  ${}_1G$  -g *Violone*: "*Violone, ist ein Bass von grösserer Form, und fängt vom Contra G an, und geht bis ins d' oder e'. Dieser schlägt blos die Grund= und Haupttöne an, und überlässt die schnellere Noten dem Violoncel zur Ausführung*".

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<sup>2</sup> Bach's scores usually served as source for copying the separate performance parts. Although often the vocal bass part and the Bc were identical, yet both were written in full in the score to prevent mistakes in the copies. Exactly so Bach wrote in the third Brandenburg Concerto the identical notes of *Violoncello* I, II, III and *Violone* completely in four staves: out of these four staves the four performance parts had to be copied exactly. Therefore it seems to be more logical to expect that the deviating octave position which now is postulated for *Violone* would have been fixed with a clear indication by the composer Bach who always fastidiously fixed the precise octave position in the bass realm.