Clinic: Performance Practice Today! — How to make music "Baroque" with modern tools

presented by Lucinda Marvin and Jacques Ogg
reported by Faith Farr

Violinist Lucinda Marvin is leader and harpsichordist Jacques Ogg is Artistic Director of the Lyra Baroque Orchestra. Their joint presentation for the MNSOTA clinic described how to use historical practice in modern teaching and playing. They demonstrated alone and together in captivating performances of well-known teaching pieces.

Lucinda Marvin began by observing that when violins first emerged from the gamba family, they were used to double vocal lines. So our goal is always to create singing lines.

Modern performance practice is like wall-to-wall carpeting with everything connected and up bows equal to down bows. In Baroque practice, the down bow is strong and the up bow lighter, a reaction to the down bow; there is space between notes.

Rhetoric is persuasive speech or the study of speaking effectively. Music is a language; we need to recognize the rhetorical figures to understand how to use the music to persuade and convince an audience. Repetition is a rhetorical device. We repeat to convince. But we repeat every time differently; *every* time differently; every time *differently.* We can relate playing to speaking and to singing. In repetition in Baroque music, play each repetition somehow differently—pronounce the repetitions differently.

Rhetoric includes gestures. When you attempt to persuade someone you use your arms and your hands, you shrug your shoulders, you roll your eyes—you gesture. In Baroque music, when you group notes (e.g. ♫♫ ♫) into a gesture, you can create an idea (e.g. the Bach *Double Violin Concerto*).

Knowing that composers used rhetoric informs our interpretation of the music. Rising melodies mean optimism; falling ones mean letting go. Until 1850, every piece with a descending chromatic line indicated something not good, gloomy, sad. Jacques Ogg demonstrated with the bass line from *Dido's Lament*. Chromatic is always uncomfortable.

In Baroque music, disjunct motion will have more space, and scalar motion will be more connected. The 7th of a chord is more important than other notes. In a sequence built on a chord, bring out the arpeggio shape.

Use vocalization to discover the right articulation for a passage. Scat the opening to the Bach *A Minor Violin Concerto* (♪|♩. ♪♩. …). You probably sang something like "Bup | ba, bup ba …" Notice that you closed your mouth at the end of the pickup note; you created a gap. You should play with this same gap, but without kicking the pickup.

One of the keys to authentic Baroque playing is to honor the bar lines. Set the bar line when it introduces a new figure or new key. Do not drive pickups into the new figure. Gavottes (such as the Lully Gavotte in the Suzuki book) always have a 2-beat pickup, but honoring the bar line means that you must play a break between the two pickups and the down beat.

Modern playing enjoys fully sustaining long notes. In Baroque playing, back off long notes to allow other parts to come through.

The bottom number of the time signature can be an indication of tempo. Ordinary tempos have 4 on the bottom. Slower tempos have 2 on the bottom. Quicker tempos have 8 on the bottom. Anything with 16 on the bottom is going to be very uncomfortable, hysterical.

There is a hierarchy of beat in Baroque music, with the down beat having the most importance. In 4, the third beat is the second most important. In 3, the hierarchy of the beat depends on what the dance is: either **1** 2 **3** or **1** **2** 3.

Every Baroque dance has a character. A sarabande exhibits ambition, courage. A courante shows sweet hope. An allemande is a slow, well-elaborated German invention. A gavotte is a sweet, jumpy dance, not fiery like a gigue.

Harmonically, a suspension both softens the harmony—as it is not as clear as a straight V–I cadence—and also makes it certain that it will resolve.

Tuning is a big topic in Baroque practice. Jacques Ogg explained that each city had its own tuning, and the tuning affects the articulation. Where the A was low, the players needed thicker strings, which articulate differently. Jacques tunes his harpsichord with 8 perfect fifths and 4 smaller fifths. He knows which chords will sound in tune and which ones not, and simply leaves out the mistuned notes, confident that those pitches are covered by other instruments in the ensemble.

Baroque ornamentation serves to make the music more beautiful or clearer in expression. By way of example, Lucinda Marvin and Jacques Ogg provided handouts and performed several sonatas that had been ornamented by the composer or his contemporary. Corelli *Op. 3* has a simple adagio, and an ornamented version that the publisher claimed notated "the ornaments as Corelli played them." Telemann provided his own ornaments as well as the simple version of this *Sonata #3*. Locatelli (d.1764) resorted to writing out his own cadenzas (*Sonata #11*) because he felt players were being too extreme. In the *Adagio*, the first cadenza is short, then there is a repeat; the final cadenza is longer.

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