

## A Bach Sarabande (From the Cello Suite Number Five)

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If you are ever lost in a trackless desert, a sure way to be rescued is to make certain that you have brought along gin, vodka, vermouth, pernod, pearl onions, olives, and lemon peel. If you are lost, start to put together a martini. Someone will come up behind you and tell you that you are not doing it right. The same thing occurs when you try to parse Bach. Although this piece might be considered as a trio for one player, I have treated it more like a single melody. I have extracted two 'hidden slurs' for you to play. If you think this piece should be done differently, learn to do it differently. The secret is in 'learn to do.' Find, and play, what you consider to be the 'hidden slur.' Then play the piece. Arguing is much easier than playing.



Dances tend to sit inside the measure, melodies tend to resolve over the barline. Since the Sarabande is a dance, the most simplistic arrangement would be to have the melody sit inside each bar. For example, measures five and six (left) can be considered as:

I have phrased it differently because I think it is much more beautiful to think of the Ab as a chord tone of Ab major rather than

an appoggiatura to G, which reiterates C minor. The way presented here brings out the Ab chord (subdominant), going to Bb (dominant), resolving to a beautiful tonic Eb major.

### ***'Expressive Intonation.'***

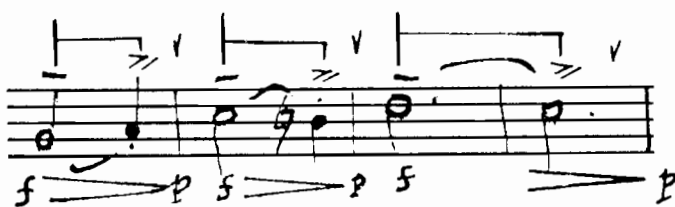
In Bach, as in most music, intervals must be played as untemperedly as possible, even when accompanied by a keyboard. In many of the moderns, it makes no difference, as the notes do not especially go from someplace to someplace. But when Bach ... or Beethoven ... changes an accidental, mountains can be moved. When you see an accidental placed by Bach it means *raise or lower* the pitch ... flats are flat, sharps are sharp. For example, in the first two measures the B $\flat$ 's and the E $\flat$  are played high, close to their resolutions. They are leading tones. (One must be very careful that the C and F are not also high.) The oboe itself can be a help with intonation, or a big hindrance. For example, in the first measure the C will probably tend to be too high. In the second, since E $\flat$  tends to be high and the F low, the instrument will play them correctly for you. In bar 9 the oboe will let you play the dominant seventh Db low enough. (With low C# you will have troubles), but much care must be taken with the high Db in bar 11 ... it is lower than you think.

### ***Playing the Written Articulations.***

The piece should be played with great dignity and nobility, 'd' tongue ... no 't's'. Do not hit the measures in the stomach. The first beat of the bar is the first beat of the bar. Push across the fingers for a long over-arching line. The first eighth note G is *long* and well placed, so that the rest of the bar depends from it. Third beats are tongued very lightly, if at all. Especially, slur to the low C in bar 4, otherwise it will stick out like a star in a billy-goat's butt. It is the 'fin-ish' of the first four measures. The leap will be more than enough articulation.

When articulated correctly the groups will allow you a place to breathe. Breath gives life to the music, but it is especially handy in Bach to be able to breathe as you play.

Play the 'hidden slur,' then put all the notes inside of the same shape.



It must not sound:



**The Fingering may be Correct and the Handings, Terrible.**

Many oboists hold their hands much too high, with the backs at an angle to the oboe and some fingers flatly splayed out. They slap to the notes ... perhaps to make sure that the keys cover ... making a beautiful legato impossible.

The backs of both hands should be parallel to the instrument, fingers curved and very near the keys. The left hand is lowered so that the first finger is just touching the *end* of the octave key, so that you can squeeze from the half hole to the octave. If it teeters way above the middle of the key, from the time you have gotten from mashing the octave key over to the half-hole you have missed the interval. (Try legato high B $\flat$  to high D.) The thumb *stays on the wood* and squeezes to the end of the octave key only when that key is needed, as it does on the recorder or clarinet. Note that the octave key moves to the left, and not up. With the left hand parallel and low, the little finger will be touching the keys it commands, able to use them without diving with the whole hand.

Do not hold the weight of the oboe by pinching it with the right hand thumb and first finger. When the back of the right hand is parallel to the instrument the weight will rest on the natural tension of the thumb tendon, stretched into the middle of the hand. This is the reason the thumb rest is placed where it is, and not higher. When the first finger is not constricted by pinching, all the fingers of both hands can work together to create smooth intervals and an even technique. If right hand fingers are curved and the first finger is close to the end of the alternate G# then the hand is low enough.

**Glossary of the Terms Used in This Piece.**

The Hidden Slur This is found by resolving all metric, harmonic or melodic dissonances. It can be anything that leads to musical coherence ... a scale, series of thirds, harmonic goal, bass line, metric unit, etc.

| The "time spot." The precise spot where the note is due to begin. It does *not* mean accent.

+ Anti accent. No finger accent or diaphragm yank on the beginning of the note.

≧ Finish the note well.

[ Bracket for a group.

⊥ A vertical line in a group is the point d'appui (fulcrum) of the group.


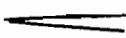
⤴ The Incise is the first note of a group. (Is he a store keeper, or a stork eeper?)

⤵ The last note of a group. (Round off the end of the note.)

(+ + + +) A horizontal line over the notes. *Line*. No yanks.

be | gin The energy is released *starting* at the point of resolution.

fin | ish No yank on the last down-pulse. The last note is on the end of the penultimate note. This is more difficult to achieve than 'be-gin.' (Do not put up sign-posts during your journey.)

- x → y Direction. Carry 'x' to 'y.'
-  Develop. Move! (  ?) Do not let tension die, even across silence.
- Pressure. Fill up the note.
- ↑  
↓ A half breath, out.
- ↓  
↓ A half breath, in.
- LHL Left hand low.
- RHL Right hand low.
- TOW Thumb on wood.
- PLON Play the Level of the Notes. Do not let a leap mis-shape the phrase.

**Notes.**

- The G is long and full. Attack *at* the level of the sound, not above. The whole measure is in one jet. (No 'chewing-gum' playing.)
- A legato interval G to Eb. TOW. The thumb squeezes from the end of the first octave back to the wood. It does not wave about in the breeze. Squeeze to the Eb, fingers close to the keys. (Do not slap down.)
- Push across the fingers from Eb to B. Do not pinch the oboe with the thumb and the first finger. All fingers of both hands must be relaxed and precisely together. The B: is an appoggiatura. *Listen* to the dissonance, then resolve molto legato to the C. Think a glissando resolution to the C. (Don't worry ... You will think it and not make it.) Bach has *raised* the pitch. It should be closer to the C than it is on the piano.



- Very light 'd' tongue on the Ab. It is not:
- Attack a long, full high C *at* the level of the sound, not above.
- Move fingers, not hand to the Ab. (LHL)
- Squeeze to the E:/. Do not pinch the oboe. (RHL)  
The E: is high, next to the F.
- Finish off the two bars with a bright shining B:/. Listen!
- A long full high D. 'd' tongue. No accent. It must have enough presence to balance the low C resolution in the next bar. Careful that the D is not too sharp, otherwise the low C will sound very flat.
- Push across the D to the Ab. No match-strike on the Ab!
- Prepare the low G so that the upper G does not stick out. (PLON)  
TOW. Squeeze to the octave key from the wood, so that there is no jolt.  
Perhaps, think:



- Slur to the low C. The register change is more than enough articulation.

Finish the low C as *ppp* as possible. (  $\rightrightarrows$  )

- 13. The notes must buttress the hidden slur.



- 14. The Ab is long ... it is an appoggiatura. Lean on it, resolving to the G. Do not yank the little finger off the Ab key. Squeeze off gracefully.

- 15. No finger accent on the D, and squeeze to the Eb. Do not drop the end of the Eb. There must be room to put the Bb on the end of it. The Bb is an 'ish' not a 'gin.'

- 16. To practice, perhaps think:



Then: fin ish.



- 17. Clear your lungs!

- 18. A long and full first eighth. Play loud enough to balance with the register change for the 'ish' at the end of the bar.

- 19. Handings! The little finger is right over the side Eb. Squeeze to Eb, do not dive with the whole hand.

- 20. Be very careful. No match-strike on the low Db. Is the register change enough articulation without the tongue? Finish it well ... as softly as possible (  $\rightrightarrows$  ).

- 21. The Db is *low*. It is a Db in C minor, not a C# in D major.

- 22. Handings! The little finger is over the side F key. If you do dive for it with your whole hand, there will be a finger accent instead of an appoggiatura release.

- 23. Slur to low C?

- 24. PLON. The high C must be prepared for so that it does not stick out too much. Move on through to the Bb - Ab. (Do not relax the diaphragm support on the high C.)

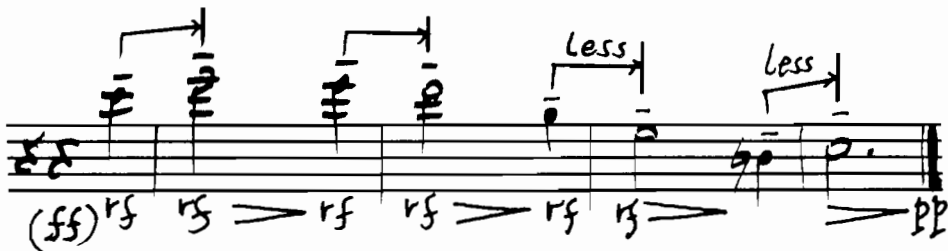
Perhaps think:



- 25. Push across the fingers. One jet to the low F finish. The Bb is an appoggiatura, resolving gracefully to the Ab. Squeeze to the E: without a finger accent, resolve gracefully to the F. 'D' tongue the low F ('ish').

- 26. Measure 12 is a dark F minor. Measure 13 is much brighter, an F *major* dominant seventh. It moves to an even brighter G major chord, the dominant of C minor. The sun is coming out from behind the clouds. Therefore, make crescendos. In measure 15 the C chord is now the subdominant in G major, resolving to the bright shining major of measure 16, *in* G major, not just on a G major chord. All hope is shattered by the Schoenbergian dissonances of the next two measures ... back to C minor. Play as impassioned as possible ... *fff*. (The piece subsides back into great sadness ... *pp*.)

27. Full and long high C. It must be strong enough to carry through to the G's of the next bar.
28. The oboe should have no trouble playing this F# high enough for you. Be careful that the G is close enough to it ... not sharp.
29. The first eighth notes of the measures are long and full, and they are balanced with their long and full eighth upbeats. Play this hidden slur expressively. Then add all the notes.



30. Stay loud enough to balance the coming low C.

**Eat the meal, not the menu.**