

Boston University–Center for Early Music Studies
Mini-Course (Fall 2020): Performing Bach’s Adagios (MH 629 A1)

Meetings: Saturday–Sunday, Sept. 26–27, 10 a.m.–1 p.m. and 2 p.m.–5 p.m. each day, online only (meeting schedule is subject to revision, by agreement of class members)

Office hours: by appointment (online only)

Instructor: David Schulenberg (email: dschulen@wagner.edu)

This mini-course provides an intensive, hands-on introduction to understanding and performing the embellished slow movements in Bach’s instrumental and vocal works. In the eighteenth century, the word *adagio* referred to a type of slow movement that most composers wrote in a plain style, allowing performers to improvise their own embellishments. But the slow movements in Bach’s sonatas, suites, concertos, and vocal works often require soloists to interpret embellishments written out by the composer. These embellishments were evidently meant to sound as if improvised, yet understanding how to give them the freedom, spontaneity, and expressiveness apparently intended by the composer can be difficult, due to the intricacy of Bach’s notation and the complexity of the underlying musical structure.

Using examples from Bach’s arias, instrumental chamber music, and other recital repertoire, this mini-course (1) examines models for Bach’s embellishments provided by Corelli and other composers; (2) introduces ways of analyzing Bach’s written-out melodic decoration; (3) provides suggestions for relating analysis to performance; and (4) offers opportunities for students to perform (or discuss performances of) compositions by Bach that include his own written-out embellishments. As a final project, students either present a performance of an embellished adagio by Bach (with commentary) or give an aural comparison of two or more recorded performances of the same. Potential repertoire for this project is listed at the end of this syllabus.

Online course. This course takes place entirely online, and the instructor will not be on campus. Meetings take place using Zoom videoconferencing software. Students are expected to understand how to use Zoom and to access online course materials via email and [Dropbox](#). Dates and times of meetings are subject to change with the agreement of all registered class members. Once meeting times are set, however, students are expected to attend all class meetings, regardless of local time. Students participating from off-campus are responsible for insuring that they have adequate wifi and internet access.

Class members are encouraged to participate through performance as well as discussion; however, those who lack access to a necessary instrument or a suitable performing space have the option of participating through discussion and shared recordings. All class members are expected to follow customary guidelines for respectful behavior while attending class.

Our objectives include:

- understanding the improvised (unwritten) performance practices that underlay Bach’s embellished adagios, as well as the treatises that document them;
- discovering principles for analyzing written-out embellishments
- knowing and being able to perform some of the likely models for Bach’s embellished adagios by earlier composers;

- improved ability to understand and perform Bach’s embellished adagios fluently and expressively.

Class meetings on the first day (as originally scheduled) consist primarily of lecture and discussion aimed toward the first three objectives listed above. We identify relevant repertory and performance practices as well as possible ways of analyzing written embellishments and their notation. Sources examined include music by Corelli and Hasse and treatises by Printz and Quantz. During the first day we also select examples of music by Bach that class members will analyze and perform on the second day.

The second day is devoted to workshops in which members of the class perform or discuss relevant compositions by Bach. Students need not perform complete works; they may instead focus on particularly interesting, expressive, or challenging passages. Anyone not prepared to perform may instead offer an analysis of a relevant composition and critical comparison of at least two different recorded performances. Our aim is not finished performances but rather a positive learning environment in which members of the group improve their understanding of how to interpret music by Bach with written-out embellishments.

Student work and grading. Each class member is expected to participate in discussion by asking questions and offering ideas and comments. Everyone is also expected to participate in the workshops by performing or through positive contributions to analysis and discussion. Evaluation (grading) is based not on the perceived success of performances but on participation in discussions and in workshops—including the asking of thoughtful questions.

Tentative Plan for Our Four Sessions

Each session comprises two 90-minute periods, with a brief break in between.

session topics

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| 1a | Historical background, sources (treatises, notated models for Bach’s embellished adagios); selection of repertory for workshop |
| 1b | Analysis of embellished adagios by Corelli, Hasse (and others?) |
| 2a | Overview of Bach’s embellished adagios and their notation |
| 2b | Analysis of embellished adagios by Bach; relating analysis to performance |
| 3a | Workshop: historical background of the compositions selected for performance/study |
| 3b | Workshop: analysis of the same |
| 4a | Workshop: performances of vocal selections |
| 4b | Workshop: performances of instrumental selections |

Repertory

These are examples of the types of music that we are studying and which could serve for presentations in the workshop. All works are by J. S. Bach. The vocal examples are somewhat less florid (less highly embellished) than the instrumental ones.

Soprano

“Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 84 (with oboe)

“Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 32 (with oboe)

“Gott versorget alles Leben,” aria (mvt. 5) from Cantata 187 (with oboe)

“Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 202 (with oboe)

Alto

“Gott, man lobet dich in der Stille,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 120

“Ich bitt noch mehr, o Herre Gott,” mvt. 2 from Cantata 177

“Sei bemüht in dieser Zeit,” aria (mvt. 3) from Cantata 185 (with oboe)

Tenor

“Die Seele ruht in Jesu Händen,” aria (mvt. 3) from Cantata 127 (with oboe)

“Ich traue seiner Gnaden,” aria (mvt. 4) from Cantata 97 (with violin)

“Qui tollis peccata mundi,” from Mass in G minor BWV 235 (with oboe)

“Wo wird in diesem Jammertale,” aria (mvt. 2) from Cantata 114 (with flute)

Flute

Largo e dolce (mvt. 2) from Sonata in B minor BWV 1030 (with keyboard)

Adagio (mvt. 1) from Sonata in E, BWV 1035

“Wo wird in diesem Jammertale,” aria (mvt. 2) from Cantata 114 (with tenor)

Oboe

Sinfonia (mvt. 1) from Cantata 12

Sinfonia (mvt. 1) from Cantata 156; compare Harpsichord Concerto BWV 1056, mvt. 2

(sometimes included as mvt. 2 in reconstructions of a lost Oboe Concerto in D minor)

“Die Seele ruht in Jesu Händen,” aria (mvt. 3) from Cantata 127 (with tenor)

“Gott versorget alles Leben,” aria (mvt. 5) from Cantata 187 (with soprano)

“Ich bin vergnügt mit meinem Glücke,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 84 (with soprano)

“Liebster Jesu, mein Verlangen,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 32 (with soprano)

“Qui tollis peccata mundi,” from Mass in G minor BWV 235 (with tenor)—a later version of the aria “Gott versorget alles Leben” from Cantata 187

“Sei bemüht in dieser Zeit,” aria (mvt. 3) from Cantata 185 (with alto)

“Weichet nur, betrübte Schatten,” aria (mvt. 1) from Cantata 202 (with soprano)

Violin

Adagio (mvt. 1) from Sonata no. 1 in G minor BWV 1001
Grave (mvt. 1) from Sonata no. 2 in A minor BWV 1003
Adagio (mvt. 1) from Sonata no. 3 in E for Violin and Harpsichord, BWV 1016
Cantabile, ma un poco adagio (mvt. 1) from Sonata in G, BWV 1019a (later arranged as the soprano aria “Heil und Segen,” mvt. 4 in Cantata 120)
Largo (mvt. 3) from Sonata in G, BWV 1021
Adagio ma non tanto (mvt. 2) from Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023
Adagio (mvt. 2) from Concerto in E, BWV 1042; compare Harpsichord Concerto BWV 1054, mvt. 2

Viola da gamba and Violoncello

Sarabande (mvt. 4) from Suite no. 3 in C, BWV 1009
Allemande (mvt. 1) from Suite no. 6 in D, BWV 1012
Adagio (mvt. 2) from Sonata in G minor BWV 1029

Keyboard

primarily for organ

Lente (mvt. 2) from Sonata no. 6 in G, BWV 530
Recitativo: Adagio (mvt. 2) from Concerto in C, BWV 594, after Vivaldi, Concerto in D, R. 208
“Das alte Jahr vergangen ist” BWV 614 (*Orgelbüchlein*, no. 16)
“O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß” BWV 622 (*Orgelbüchlein*, no. 24)
“Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein” BWV 641 (*Orgelbüchlein*, no. 43)
“Nun komm der Heiden Heiland” BWV 659 (“Great Eighteen,” no. 9)
“Allein Gott in der Höh’ sei Ehr” BWV 662 (“Great Eighteen,” no. 12)

primarily for harpsichord

Sarabande (mvt. 4, with *agrémens*) from English Suite no. 2 in A minor BWV 807
Sarabande (mvt. 4, with *agrémens*) from English Suite no. 3 in G minor BWV 807
Sarabande (mvt. 4) from Partita no. 1 in B-flat BWV 825
Sarabande (mvt. 4) from Partita no. 6 in E minor BWV 830
Prelude in E-flat minor BWV 853/1, from *Well-Tempered Clavier*, pt. 1
Prelude in E minor BWV 855/1, from *Well-Tempered Clavier*, pt. 1
Prelude in C, BWV 870/1, from *Well-Tempered Clavier*, pt. 2
Andante (mvt. 2) from Italian Concerto, BWV 971
Largo e dolce (mvt. 2) from Sonata in B minor BWV 1030 (with flute)
Adagio (mvt. 2) from Concerto no. 1 in D minor BWV 1052; compare earlier versions shown together with final version in BG 17:291ff. (listed under BWV 1052a on imslp.com)
Adagio (mvt. 2) from Concerto no. 3 in D, BWV 1054; compare the earlier version shown in BG 17:318f. (listed as “alternate solo part” on imslp.com)