

Why another edition of the G Major Suite of J. S. Bach?

There are many cello, bass, and viola editions available already. About 10 years ago, I had the great good fortune of joining forces with Edgar Meyer at Curtis Institute, teaching in tandem and getting to share the talented bass studio. Of course, I was honored and excited to share ideas with this incredible artist! Little did I know that this association was going to blow the top of my head off! I had a similar experience about 25 years ago when I was exposed to the concepts of the great Francois Rabbath. Promotion of multiple-choice fingerings, independence of fingers in the left hand, pivots, crab, and a geographical mapping of the fingerboard were all huge steps forward from my traditional upbringing. Fast forward to 10 years ago and my exposure to Edgar's facility, accuracy and perceptible ease on the bass. I had a wonderful opportunity to take a look at Edgar's ideas through our shared studio. After seeing one student's fingerings and bowings to the Prelude and Gigue to the G Major Suite, my head was again officially blown off.

As an overview, there are two major innovations that had escaped me to this point in my life.

Concept #1 was blurring the line between lower position and thumb position. This involves the use of what I call "thumbage" in all areas of the bass, and finding the best place to get in or out of thumb position other than the octave G.

Concept #2 is about utilizing a natural hand position (mostly combinations of + - 1 - 2 or + - 1 - 3) and moving more often (shifts) rather than extending the hand. Because of the length of the fingers and the spacing of the thumb, the **POWER** and ability to use **WEIGHT** are obviously on the thumb side of the hand. As a result of this, all trills are with + - 1 or 1 - 2. For passage work, rather than stay in traditional thumb position and extend your hand, you simply move in small (and occasionally large) ways to remain in your power zone.

Edgar also influenced me to strongly consider the Anna Magdalena bowings as well as observing the bowings that Bach crafted in his other string writing. There are an amazing amount of detaché bowings in the Anna Magdalena manuscript (as opposed to many bass editions) and although at times the Anna Magdalena markings are inconsistent, they provide a lot of information that can help us to interpret the phrases.

If you are like me, you will find many of the ideas difficult to comprehend at first, and I have taken great care to clearly mark all the details including string names when necessary and occasional bracketing for positions. It is important to clarify that a good set-up and physical approach are paramount to advanced techniques such as these. Some of you that are seeing this edition may already be well versed in these concepts. This edition is intended for those of you that have not been exposed to, are curious of, and want to experience how bass technique is evolving.

Hal Robinson, Fall 2014