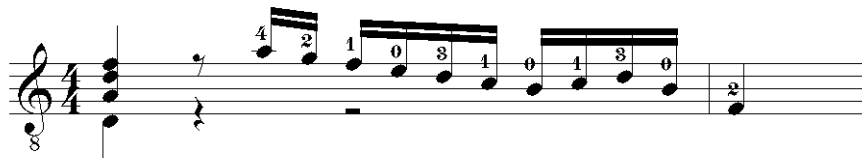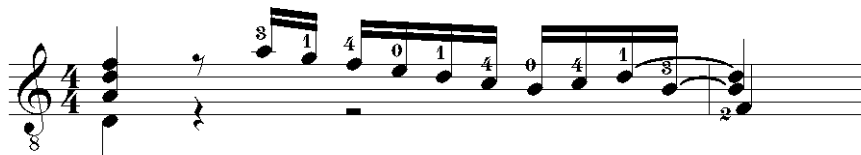# ARTICULATION, TEXTURE, AND VOICING

## By Frank Koonce

Expressive articulation in Baroque music is profoundly important, yet often misunderstood and generally overlooked by modern musicians. For instance, Bach gives an articulate bass line throughout most of the lute works; that is, he took care to write short notes separated from one another by rests. A bass note spanning two or three beats, therefore, is usually written as a quarter note followed by rests, instead of as a half or dotted-half note. The musical result, an enhancement of the rhythm and texture, must have been important to Bach or he would not have bothered with the added notational intricacies required of short notes. Modern players, however, have tended to ignore this and simply allow the basses to sustain indefinitely.

In the upper voices, rests often serve a different purpose—to clarify phrasing, figuration, or the entrance of a new line; thus, more latitude is given whether or not actually to silence a note at the occurrence of a rest sign. Similarly, short notes in the upper voices may be sustained and overlapped beyond their written notation if doing so serves the music, sonically and texturally. This is implicit in the *style brisé* of lute music (or of keyboard music designed to imitate the lute) in which melody notes are allowed to overlap and blend together with harmony notes. Also, in contrast to Bach's deliberate treatment of the bass notation, he usually did not indicate sustain in the upper parts by writing double stems, even when he probably wanted notes held beyond the rhythm of the melody line.[1] Individual preference, therefore, must determine whether to choose strictly "melodic" fingering [Example 1a] or "harmonic" fingering [Example 1b] that allows for the selective overlapping of notes. The fingering in 1b allows both the sustain of an implied chord and the gentle overlapping of stepwise notes, sometimes referred to as "over-legato" by harpsichordists and as "campanella" by guitarists.

a. "Melodic" fingering:



b. "Harmonic" fingering:



Example 1
J.S. Bach, *BWV 995*, *Allemande*, mm. 9-10

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[1] See Couperin's *Les Bergeries* and Anna Magdalena Bach's copy of it in her notebook. The Couperin score is full of complex double-stems and ties while that of Anna Magdalena does away with the intricate notation.

Music that survives only in lute tablature presents a particular set of problems for the modern performer. One of the limitations of this notation is that the duration of slower moving voices is not specified. The most widely accepted practice when transcribing is to write the longest note values possible within the harmonic and rhythmic structure of the music. This practice originates from period lute treatises that often give a directive to sound notes for their maximum possible length. One must consider, however, that this simplistic advice may have been intended to serve only as a starting point for amateur players; advanced musicians would certainly consider how to use degrees of articulation to the greatest musical effect. We should also take into consideration other evidence, such as variant manuscripts in staff notation and the writings of prominent musicians, besides lutenists, to gain a general perspective on the tastes and techniques of the period.

With regard to the tablature of the *Fugue, BWV 1000*, for example, an autograph version exists for the violin (*BWV 1001*) in unambiguous staff notation, as does an anonymous version for the organ (*BWV 539*). Although Bach's authorship of the organ version is called into question (as it is for the lute version as well), it is nonetheless a useful source since it reflects the practice of a period performer. The organ is probably more capable of easily sustaining notes than any other instrument, yet the duration of notes in this manuscript is more or less the same as in the violin version; that is, with many eighth notes punctuated by rests. Furthermore, when one studies the version in lute tablature, it becomes apparent that certain notes, usually transcribed as long notes in guitar editions, originally had to have been played as short notes because of the configuration of the hand (see mm. 19-20). The present editor has come to believe that the shorter notes, whether they be on the violin, lute, or guitar, enable the fugue subject to be articulated more clearly and that they better suit the spirit and character of this piece.
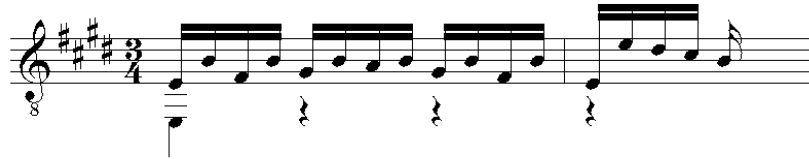
**Octave Displacement and Chord Re-Voicing**

When making transcriptions, alterations to the music are often necessary to accommodate an instrument's idiomatic restrictions, such as its compass and tuning. The most usual alterations involve the raising of octaves in the bass line and the re-voicing of chords. It is important to find solutions that do not change the intent of the music nor that enable the listener to perceive existing musical or technical deficiencies in the transcription. Options sometimes are limited and flawed; however, and a player must weigh positive aspects against negative ones (often a subjective matter) in choosing one way over another. In the Prelude to the *Suite, BWV 995*, for instance, certain notes in the bass line of the autograph are re-articulated at the lower octave, and sometimes these notes fall below the range of the guitar. One must decide, therefore, whether to play them at the same octave, omit them, or take the preceding note up an octave. Historical models of the transcription process are found in the lute-tablature and cello versions, and these also provide possible solutions for the guitar. Repetition at the same octave is chosen for the present edition because it preserves the sonority and rhythmic pulse of the original; however, this imperfect solution is also prone to sound heavy and ungraceful. A lighter articulation and some degree of agogic delay where the octave jump originally would take place will mitigate this effect.
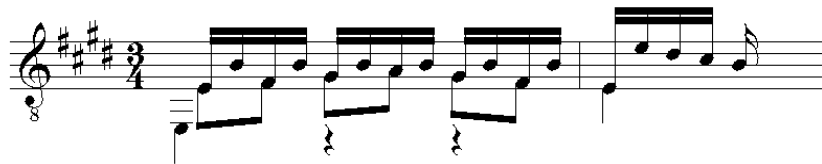
**Implied Polyphony**

There are many instances in Bach's works where polyphony is implied, although not fully realized in the score, perhaps to save clutter, perhaps for expediency, or perhaps because it was not thought necessary at the time. The overall layout of the music (intervallic relationships, linear connections, stem directions, etc.) gives clues to the existence of multi-voice textures behind what may at first appear to be a single voice [Example 2].

a. Written:

b. Interpretation:

Example 2
J.S. Bach, *BWV 1006a*, Prelude, mm. 3-4

Another more complex example is shown below [Example 3].
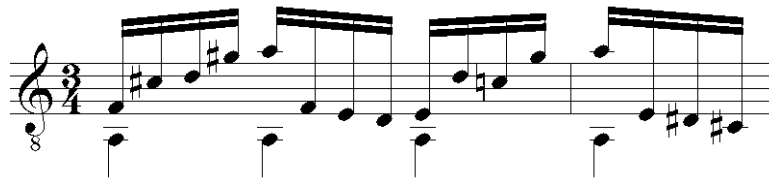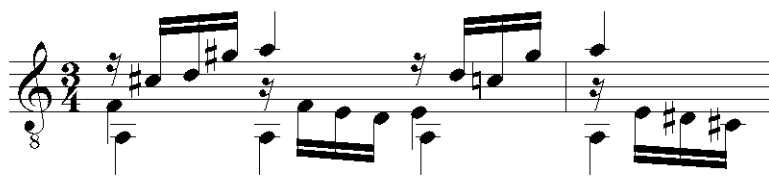
a. Written:

b. Interpretation:

Example 3
J.S. Bach, *BWV 998*, *Allegro*, mm. 91-93

One must also often determine whether a melodic leap is an expressive rhetorical gesture of a single voice or whether it signals the entrance of a second, implied, voice in dialog with the first. Fingerings, therefore, become a critical factor in effectively conveying the existence of multiple voices [Example 4].

a. Written:



b. Interpretation:



Example 4
J.S. Bach, *BWV 997*, *Sarabande*, m. 6

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