

The Royal Conservatoire of The Hague

Intentional Listening

Research Exposition

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Introduction

“If I’m going to sing like someone else, then I don’t need to sing at all.” This quotation from Billie Holiday brings to light one of the most important aspects of any artist, individuality. If one looks up the definition of an artist in the Oxford Dictionary, the first four words are “a person who creates.” However, in music this part of the definition is sometimes overlooked for the second part that defines an artist simply as “a person who practices or performs any of the creative arts.”

Classical music is arguably the art form where imitation is discouraged the least. If a painter copies another’s artwork, he is accused of forgery. If a writer copies an author’s book, she is accused of plagiarism. If a musician copies a soloist’s recording, he is “accused” of technical precision, flawless intonation, and honoring the score.

Musicians, particularly aspiring professionals often found studying in conservatories, are not held to the same standard of creation as the visual artist. Part of this stems from musicians playing from a score, trying to honor the composer, and staying historically informed. But serious music students who are now moving into the professional world are faced with another creative influence, countless recordings. While recordings can serve as a learning tool, they can also be a temptation for imitation as one seeks to recreate what a role model musician has already done successfully.

How to best use recordings is a fairly recent problem for aspiring professional musicians to face. Though the earliest known recordings of music are from the late nineteenth century, the age of the internet has drastically changed their ease of access. To put this into perspective, YouTube was activated in 2005, Spotify was developed in 2006, and SoundCloud was founded in 2007. This means for at least half of current music students’ lifetime, recordings could be accessed with a few taps at a computer.

This raises questions for the studying musician that did not previously exist. How much should one listen to recordings? How can recordings be beneficial? Can they be harmful? But most importantly, if we return to the initial topic of an artist, how does listening to recordings while learning a piece affect one’s artistic interpretation?

There are a few aspects of this final question that need to be dissected and defined before proceeding. The first is the word “recordings.” This refers to pre-existing recordings, not recordings made in the practice room of oneself. The next part of the question “while learning a piece” refers to the time period from when a musician decides to begin studying a piece to when it is performed. The word “one’s” means the studying musician’s. “Artistic interpretation” is the question’s most complicated aspect and merits a definition. As artist has already been defined, the Oxford Dictionary defines interpretation as “the action of explaining the meaning of something.” So then artistic interpretation for music is sounds created to explain the meaning of a piece. To reiterate the question now that these aspects have been explained: how does listening to recordings while learning a piece affect one’s artistic interpretation?

This research aims to tackle the question in the hopes of discovering ways for studying musicians to find individuality in their music. Two questions underlie the main question: how can students refer to

recordings without allowing them to override personal creativity? And what will be the effect of not consulting any recordings while learning a piece?

Methodology

The research process involves three steps.

Reading pre-existing information on the topics of artistry and recordings is the first step of the process. In terms of artistry, articles by or involving interviews with prominent musicians in the classical music scene prove the most insightful. These include the violinist Christian Tetzlaff, cellist of the Chiara Quartet, Gregory Beaver, and pianist Stephen Hough. For the topic of recordings, most fascinating is an article from the [US] National Association of Music Education which provides information on a research study about whether the use of an auditory model speeds the learning process. However, there seems to be little research done on the connection between artistry and listening to recordings.

The second step in the research process is a survey and/or discussion with teachers who are also (or have been) active performers. This includes Raphael Jimenez, associate professor of conducting and director of the Oberlin Orchestras, Brian Alegant, director of the Oberlin division of music theory and the United States 2015 professor of the year, Catharina Meints, associate professor of viola da gamba and cello, Peter Slowik, professor of viola, and Carol Wasson, retired cello teacher. The professors provide their views on the following questions:

How much do pre-existing recordings play a role in your personal learning process?

What is the first step you take when learning a new piece?

What suggestions do you have for finding a unique and personal interpretation of a piece?

Under what circumstances would you suggest students consult (or don't consult) recordings while learning a piece?

How can students refer to recordings without allowing them to override personal creativity?

The third and most substantial step is a personal case study that explores what it is like to remove recordings from the learning process. Without consulting recordings, I have learned the Prelude from Suite No. 1 by Ernest Bloch, a piece I have never heard before. I journaled to track what was difficult or helpful through this process and used self-recordings in the practice room to make sure that my ideas came through. I also used these recordings to push the extremes, exaggerate various markings, and create different interpretations until I found a unique take I believe in. Once this take was formed I recorded the piece and compared the resulting recording with pre-existing professional recordings.

Part two of the case study provides a basis for comparison in which I studied the Canzona from the same suite by Ernest Bloch while consulting recordings throughout the learning process. Based on the insight

from the various teachers, I created a plan for how to use the recordings. Again I journaled about what was difficult or helpful through this process, recorded excerpts, and recorded the end take.

Though there are specific pieces I've used within the case study to have a detailed and simplified focal point, the question of how and why I am consulting recordings is at the forefront of my mind as I study other repertoire as well.

Step One: Score Study

It is important for students who want to form their own interpretation to start with an understanding of the score. Not one of the articles or teachers interviewed said that recordings should never be consulted. However, each of them emphasized the importance of knowing the score. According to Stephen Hough, learning great works “should be a struggle to a certain extent, where you need to labor intensely with your own brain and soul for the meaning of the work, instead of cutting and pasting a bunch of stuff together from the Internet” (Gardels). In response to the question “what is the first step you take when learning a new piece?” each teacher gave some form of score study as an answer. This highlights the importance of score based interpretation instead of sound based.

So how can one go about studying the score with the goal of a unique take? Carol Wasson recommends starting by looking for patterns through the entirety of a piece. Do themes crop up in other movements, tempos, modes, keys, or variations? What is the proportion of these themes to each other? This is a fairly simple way to look for a structure in the piece. Then make a note of the “cool spots” and “hearts” of the piece, to quote terms often used by Brian Alegant. What spots already stand out to the studying musician? This could be an unexpected harmony change or a rhythmical twist. Many musicians have had the experience of feeling chills at a particularly special moment during a performance; this moment would be considered a heart. The purpose of finding these stand-out spots during score study is to start forming an idea in ones' head for how the energy could flow to or away from each of these places.

Raphael Jimenez gave a thought provoking metaphor for recording based study versus score based study. He said to think of a recording as a photograph of the outside of a house. It can be a beautiful photograph, but it will not tell you how many rooms are in the house, what color each room is, or how they are decorated. To really have an understanding of the house one would need to look inside. Likewise, in order to have a true understanding of a piece, one needs to look in the score. Once a music student has done this work himself, going to recordings can be beneficial.

Active Listening

Listening Critically

After score understanding is established and personal opinions are formed, a student can consult recordings. Listening with the score still in hand is quite important at this point, as Peter Slowik points out. If a student is still consulting the score, he or she is able to see what markings the performing musician is or is not following. Note that it is only possible to notice these variations from the score if score knowledge has previously been established. If differences are found between the score and recording, Jimenez suggests a student should then question why. By questioning why, a student is not making a judgement as to whether an aspect of the interpretation is correct but rather looking for reasons that merit this interpretation. This can act as an example for the student for how to find reasons for their own artistic interpretation. Questioning can also prevent a student from becoming fixated on a single recorded performance being correct.

Listening to Variety

Another technique that can prevent imitation of one performance is listening to a variety of interpretations of the same piece. This was another significant common thread between each of the teachers interviewed. Still listening critically to what the differences are in each performance is highly important, states Wasson, as is questioning why a particular decision is made. Catharina Meints writes that “YouTube is a great opportunity to compare interpretations which is also an educational thing to do.” It exposes students to infinite possibilities in interpretation, as it’s logical to state that no two recordings are exactly the same. Peter Slowik gives the practical example of having students “listen to Bylsma, Ma, Rostropovich, Meisky, Casals etc. for Bach suites.” Listening to many different takes on a piece can also help a studying musician find patterns in what playing suits them and touches them. This, in turn, will help in discovering one’s own take. Through this whole process, though, there should be an “underlying belief that there is no such thing as a definitive performance, and that all performance, like all writing, is provisional” (Alegant).

Listening with Goals

A third way listening to recordings can be helpful is to answer specific questions. For example, if one is playing a contemporary piece with a non-standard notation not explained, it can be very helpful to listen to a recording for instruction in how to play this, as long as multiple recordings are still consulted. Likewise, Alegant points out that if there is a piece, particularly for piano, with many ledger lines, confirming with a recording that one is playing the correct notes is a smart step to take.

While practicing, a student may also come across more abstract problems that are difficult to solve. For example, if there is a transition that does not seem to flow logically, Jimenez suggests listening to how other performers have addressed it. In this way one can brainstorm possible solutions.

A practical example of consulting recordings to answer an abstract question took place over the summer as I practiced Piazzolla’s *Le Grand Tango*. Because it is a dance, the piece is incredibly repetitive.

However, performing it without dancers means one needs to find a way to retain the audience's interest despite the repetitiveness. So after learning the piece, I listened to a variety of recordings with the intention of finding how other performers dealt with this issue. The result was fascinating. I discovered that Rostropovich, for whom the piece was written, made some significant cuts. Ma played the piece more or less as written, with a consistent clear sound. I found this rather boring, which pushed me towards taking some personal artistic liberties. Another take by Eckart Runge changed the octave of certain passages and added ornamentation in others. I found this the most engaging and exciting to listen to. After listening for these suggestions, I was better able to come to my own take which includes a small cut at the end of the piece, some added ornaments, and one passage where I take the register up an octave because I find it more convincing. Of course in pieces of a more traditionally classical nature, such as by Beethoven or Brahms, this type of liberty in terms of taking from and adding to the piece is not as possible. However, the basic premise of finding a specific question and going to recordings to hear possible solutions can still apply.

Listening to Exercise

Perhaps one of the most surprising insights on using recordings as a tool came from Catharina Meints who suggested listening to intentionally copy. She wrote the following:

At one point my husband suggested it would be a good idea to carefully study the playing of someone I admired by totally copying a recording. I chose Rostropovich's slow movement of Rachmaninov sonata. It was a revelation. I played it phrase at a time and tried to sound exactly like him. It taught me about bow changes, glissandi, vibrato. It was a great exercise and I recommend it highly.

This exercise, though not suggested for a piece one is currently studying, is beneficial in expanding a musician's palate of sounds. It is also a fantastic way to practice hearing a musical phrase and then finding how to technically play it. In the end, this is the exact process that should be happening for any musician finding his or her own interpretation. One needs to first hear in his head how he wants the phrase to sound and then find how to technically make that happen on the instrument.

An additional practical exercise with recordings is to use them as a mechanical aid. Jimenez, as a conductor, recommends playing with recordings to practice the feeling of playing with an ensemble. Though this makes the most sense for practicing orchestral playing, it may also help in getting the feel of a polyrhythmic phrase or a complicated entrance in any ensemble from a full size orchestra to a duet.

Listening to Composers

A final aspect of using recordings as a tool involves recordings in which the composer was either present or is performing. Depending on the composer, these recordings could hold higher value for a student because one is able to hear the composer's intention or take. While this does not mean the student should play exactly as is in the recording, it is helpful to take suggestions for intended tempi, phrase direction, dynamics, etc. For example, Benjamin Britten's cello sonata was written for Rostropovich. There is a recording of the sonata on YouTube with Britten on piano and Rostropovich on cello. It is a

fantastic resource for the meaning of various markings in the music, such as tenuto markings which can be ambiguous. In the end, a student's own voice should come through the piece, not Rostropovich's, but being able to listen to the composer and the piece's dedicatee gives a clearer picture of the piece's intended meaning.

Case Study 1: Learning without Professional Recordings

What will be the effect of not consulting recordings while learning a piece?

A significant number of music students incorporate listening to a new piece as one of the first steps in their learning process. Taking away this stepping stone of familiarization seems a daunting task. In doing so, though, one has a completely clean slate for sound possibilities. Additionally, it forces one to focus on background research and scores study as there are no other shortcuts for interpretation.

This is the resulting process of learning the Prelude from Ernest Bloch's Suite No. 1 without consulting recordings.

Background Research

Bloch was born in Switzerland in 1880 with a strong Jewish background (Lewinski). He studied composition at the Geneva Conservatory and with Francois Rasse in Brussels and violin at the Geneva Conservatory, the Music Academy of Geneva, in Brussels with Eugene Ysaye and Franz Schorg (Lewinski). He took particular interest in the Young French School of which Debussy and Chausson were part and also greatly admired Mahler (Lewinski).

Bloch's first and second cello suites were written after retirement at the end of his life in 1956, three years before his death (Lewinski). By that time he had been living in the United States for a number of years in a house that overlooked Agate Beach in Newport, Oregon and was working from a studio above his garage (Kaser). The first two suites were written in March and April respectively, for the cellist Zara Nelsova. Nelsova had lived and studied with Bloch for a month in 1948 and 1949 and recorded *Schelomo* with the London Philharmonic. She was the one who suggested Bloch write a solo cello suite. Upon prompting from Bloch on how to do this, she demonstrated some of Kodaly's solo cello sonata and some of Reger's second cello suite; Bloch responded to both with "No, no, that's not my style" (Simeone). In the end it seems Bloch used the solo J.S. Bach suites as influence. Bloch was hospitalized in September and October of that year and revised the suites in December after his return. On May 28, 1957, Nelsova premiered the first suite (Lewinski).

In translating this information into interpretation, importance can be placed on Bloch's Jewish heritage as these types of melodies and harmonies would influence the music. The fact that he was a violinist means that he understood notation for and elements of string instruments. Bloch's fascination with the Young French School could bring an impressionistic element into the piece. His distaste for the Kodaly and Reger suites and the impact of Bach give a structural and stylistic idea. Upon further investigation, one can discover that Bloch's first suite does very much resemble a Bach suite, starting with a prelude

and ending with a gigue like dance. Bloch's connection with the cellist Zara Nelsova is also intriguing as there must have been something about her playing that inspired him. If one listens to Nelsova's recordings of Bloch's *Schelomo* or *From Jewish Life* it can be heard that she played with close attention to the bow directing phrases and ends of notes (with many tapered nicely), portamento in the left hand, and precision in left hand articulation (her fingers can be heard hitting the fingerboard). She also had a very consistent almost buzzing vibrato. The idea of using portamento and the attention to bow control could prove a particularly helpful resource in interpreting Bloch's Prelude. The final detail that may aid in interpretation was Bloch's place of residence, on a beach. It is possible that the tranquility of the beach sites or the motion of waves could come out in the music.

Of course, these thoughts on how this background information may influence the suite are not facts on which to base all interpretation. They are merely ideas to consider. Greater importance should be placed on score study as that is a primary documentation of how Bloch wished the Suite to be performed.

Score Study: First Impression and Structure

Bloch's first suite is set up in four movements: a Prelude attacca to an Allegro, a Canzona, and a final Allegro. In an initial read, the final movement seemed most accessible. Its six-eight time signature and the C major chords in the opening line made it reminiscent of a Bach gigue. The third movement, as the title alludes to, is a song. The second has sort of a moto perpetuo feel. However, the first movement, though a prelude, did not have an immediate appeal.

Structurally, the Prelude is fairly straightforward. From dynamics alone, one can find the movement's climax. It starts piano, builds to forte about two thirds of the way in and dies back down to pianissimo. The forte climax is reinforced with a poco allargando to the top, a fermata over the high Ab, and the fact that this note is the highest in the movement (image 0.1). With this in mind, one can derive four distinct sections: the opening, a development in the form of a piu appassionato (bar nineteen), a recapitulation where the theme is slightly altered (bar twenty-eight), and a coda where the opening rhythm articulation returns in bar 32 (image 0.2). So the movement's form is A B A' Coda.

Because the movement is harmonically complex, one can turn to the tempo directions to discover smaller phrases within these larger sections (marked orange in image 0.3). Through the thirty-six measures in the Prelude, Bloch writes poco ritardando, allargando, ritardando, poco rallentando, poco allargando, and rallentando. Each of these is followed by "a tempo" or "Tempo I," clearly marking smaller phrases and cadences within the larger structure. Since Bloch chose such specific words for the end of each phrase, it is important to know the difference. Ritardando is to gradually decrease the tempo of the music. Allargando is to widen or gradually broaden the tempo. It can also be defined as "a slow rallentando that retains a full prominent tone." (Kraemer) Rallentando is slowing down with more of a rolling stop effect. An additional definition is "a lazy deceleration that has less certainty and drama than ritardando." (Kraemer) So in a sense, ritardando is to intentionally slow down, rallentando is to sort of slow down, and allargando is to slow down while widening the notes. These minor distinctions could aid in interpreting each phrase's direction.

With the underlying framework in place, the next step is to investigate nuances that will hopefully lead to the creation of a unique and artistically satisfying final take.

Investigation Explanation

To delve deeper into the Prelude, I began searching for additional details. These could include distinct articulations, intervallic relationships, rhythmical alterations, time-signature changes, and dynamic specifications, among others. Once these were noticed, experimenting with exaggerating the various markings, sometimes past the point of comfort, added a new palette of artistic possibilities. From there, I began informally recording myself to see how the various details would come across to an audience. These recordings could be any length, from a few notes to the entire movement. The importance was actively listening back to them in the same previously explained manner of listening to pre-existing professional recordings, particularly:

Listening critically – comparing my take to the score and questioning if the details are coming across naturally to enhance a particular aspect in the movement.

Listening to variety – recording (and listening to) passages multiple ways in order to form an opinion of what is most effective.

Listening with goals – knowing what aspect of the score my recording is investigating.

The listening focus was not on accuracy of notes, intonation, and rhythm. The purpose of this process of score study, recording, and listening, was to arrive at a moving artistic interpretation. What follows are excerpted details from this investigation as it pertained to the Prelude.

Prelude Investigation

Phrase 1

Score

The first phrase of the Prelude goes from measure one through measure four. Though the measures have differing dynamics, being composed entirely of eighth notes creates the potential for monotony. Adding to this challenge, the articulation in three out of four measures is identical: slurred groups of two with a tenuto on the first of these slurs, marked purple in image 1.1. Measure three still leaves tenuto markings on every other note in the measure, but groups the notes in a one plus three pattern. Somehow this difference needs to add interest to the phrase.

Listening

To address the aforementioned challenges, I first experimented with the articulation. Typically I have been taught that a tenuto means to draw out or slightly emphasize a note. Because these notes are so clearly set in groups of two, I played with not just drawing out the tenutoed note, but also shortening

the following note. An illustration of this approach can be heard in clip 1.1. However, I was not convinced by the detached feeling and lack of continuity in the phrase. To address this, I attempted to shorten the notes without tenuto markings while still allowing them to taper naturally (clip 1.2). This seemed to be a more viable direction to take in order to keep the overarching line.

Score

An additional aspect of the first phrase is the intervals. Much like the opening of the Prelude from Suite No. 1 by J.S. Bach, it has a low pedal point, in this case C (marked pink in image 1.2). Still in a Bach – like manner, Bloch continues to add layers of voicing through the phrase, each marked by a different color. An interesting feature of this composition is that the notes within these layers are frequently half steps (circled in image 1.2). This begins from the second note of the piece when, after the initial leap of a perfect fifth, the following three notes are related in seemingly eerie half steps. The phrase also ends with three notes in successive half steps. By listening to the relationship between the half steps and the various voices, the intervals could aid in deriving a sense of movement in time.

Listen

As I soon discovered, it is important to listen closely to intervals when investigating timing. Clip 1.3 shows a focus on trying to be free with timing without allowing the notes to lead the phrase. The take simply becomes tediously slow. There is no forward movement to make up for the time taken. On the contrary, clip 1.4 demonstrates a close focus towards the tension and releases between notes. The phrase has much more give and take motion, and if one is only considering notes, feels like a solid take on the piece's first phrase. However, further listening exposes that only focusing on intervals leaves the first measures with a one plus three feel in articulation, instead of the written two plus two lilt.

Conclusion

In the end, articulation and interval-based timing, in addition to the marked dynamics, should both be used to give direction and shape (clip 1.5).

Phrase 3

Score

Measures seven through nine compose the movement's third phrase. Dynamically, this phrase is one of the simplest to pace. Starting pianissimo, it crescendos to the middle of the second measure and then diminuendos to the time signature change. An allargando (instead of a poco ritardando as seen in the former two phrases) further emphasizes the diminuendo signaling the phrases end (image 3.1). This bar, bar nine, can also be seen as the conclusion of a long phrase composed of three smaller sections marked by poco ritardandos and a tempos: measures one through four, five through six, and seven through nine.

Listen

I first tried to find the line's arching shape. Clip 3.1 demonstrates this. Starting with an airy quality sets up the pianissimo color, and adding weight to the bow and moving closer to the bridge provides for the peak in the phrase. It ends by slowly returning to the starting color. While dynamically this is logically effective, it does not take into account the tenuto markings.

Score

This phrase is unique in the set so far because for bars seven and eight, the tenutos only mark the highest three notes: F natural, E flat, and D flat (image 3.1). Measure nine only has a tenuto on the first note. This, combined with the slur markings, once again sets the notes up in a one plus three pattern reminiscent of measure three. Unlike measure three, though, the slurred set of three notes leads up to the separate tenuto note.

Listen

When it came to practicing trying to bring out the top line, it was helpful to play that voice longer. In clip 3.2, the top notes stand out but don't relate to each other. There is too much time between them for the phrase to flow. In addition, the starting pianissimo color and crescendo is slightly lost because each group of three crescendos to the top note. Next I tried pushing the notes that lead towards these top notes (clip 3.3). This did create more balance in the motion, but because each repetition is quite similar in timing, it still lacks overall direction. The dynamics are also still no longer leading to the middle of the phrase's second bar but rather the beginning of that measure. To continue addressing this issue of motion and direction, I attempted to disregard the rhythm. In doing so, I still stretched the notes with tenutos but shortened the sets of three, some of them sounding almost as triplets. The resulting take proves to have both interest and motion (clip 3.4).

Conclusion

This last clip is perhaps more exaggerated than the final take I chose, but pushing this edge of freedom in motion opened the phrase up to greater possibilities besides simply dynamic shape. It also further draws one's attention to the top voice.

Phrase 4*Score*

Interestingly, phrase four starts with a change in meter. This is the first bar so far that is not in common time. Measure ten being a two-four bar further highlights the start of a new section after the preceding allargando. This bar also plays with syncopation as the emphases, both in terms of note value and tenuto marking, is on the "and" of one (image 4.1). This means that the downbeat is a point to bounce off from. The measure's final eighth note also should not be too heavy.

Listen

Because of the technical challenges in playing chords and double stops, it proved difficult to find a feeling of light heavy light for these three notes. The following three clips demonstrate a progression from a heavy upbeat to measure eleven to a light one: Clips 4.1, 4.2, 4.3. Note that in this case the process was possible because I already had an idea of a sound I was curious about. By listening back to the recording, I could then see if it was coming across effectively.

Score

After this solitary two-four bar, phrase four continues in two note groups with a tenuto on the first (image 4.1). In keeping with phrase three, the notes with tenutos highlight the phrase's top line. However, being in groups of two, the top line is much more closely spaced than the one plus three grouping in the previous phrase. This could suggest more energy and motion through the phrase.

Listen

My first few attempts at this offered little to no distinction between the top and bottom voices in the phrase (clip 4.4). Although I thought I was paying attention to the top line, at times the two voices are dynamically about the same. The hairpins in each bar are effective, but other than that there is little direction and interest. To help my ear be drawn even more to the top line, I experimented with removing the bottom voice (clip 4.5). Then, in adding the bottom voice back in, I intentionally swung the rhythm as an exercise to continue drawing my ear to the top voice (clip 4.6). Though a helpful exercise, the top line came out with a swell in each note, which was not something I wanted in the final take. The goal had been to lengthen the top note but not to add a swell within it. In continuing my focus on drawing attention to the phrase's top line, I practiced intentionally trying to play the top louder and the bottom softer. As clip 4.7 demonstrates, this was successful in measure twelve but more challenging in measure eleven's double stops and measure twelve's resonating open Ds. In general I felt it was now headed in a positive direction.

Score

The next addition to this phrase was discovering the timing. It is noteworthy that measure fourteen starts with a ritardando (image 4.1). This is the first time a genuine ritardando occurs in the movement as opposed to a poco ritardando. It is also interesting that the ritardando is written at the beginning of the measure instead of partway through the measure as is the case with all of the previous written ways to slow down. Such a large ritardando could signal the closing of a major section, but as the movement's development does not begin until measure nineteen, this hardly seems the case. It could also mean to push the tempo more before the ritardando. Considering the aforementioned closer spacing in the top line and the frequency in hairpins, this seems like a more logical solution.

Listen

The first couple takes that tested this idea involved changes in timing, but not ones that aided the ritardando. For example, in clip 4.8 time is taken at various points in the phrase. It is fairly interesting,

but because so much time has already been taken, the *ritardando* does not make much sense. I had to continue experimenting with pushing more than I felt comfortable with in order to break through the engrained concept of “no rushing.”

Conclusion

The final take goes in the direction of combining dynamic and length emphasis on the upper voice with forward energy and motion. I came to the decision that keeping the phrase moving forward until the *ritardando*, with slight time taken to acknowledge intervals along the way, was more effective than just paying attention to the top voice (clip 4.9).

Summation

I continued this process for each phrase and section of the movement. Though time consuming, it was richly rewarding to dive this deeply into a piece. The more I experimented, the more possibilities I discovered. I find my final take very convincing, giving me confidence in my abilities as an artist.

Clip 6.1

After recording this result, I allowed myself to listen to pre-existing recordings of the Prelude. Interestingly enough, I found the recordings rather dull. More than one lacked freedom in motion or seemingly ignored important aspects of the movement, such as tenuto markings. This further persuaded me in favor of my interpretation.

Case Study 2: Learning with Recordings

First Impression and Structure

The Canzona is the third movement from Bloch's Suite No. 1. It begins with a beautiful dolce melody in the cello's upper register. This melody returns four and a half more times throughout the movement (marked pink in image 7.1). Four times it begins on A in the original key (measures eight, thirty-four, forty-eight, and fifty-five), and one time just the first two bars occur beginning on a low E (measure 17). Identifying these six melodic occurrences first allows one to look for differences between them that may continue to point towards the movement's structure. For example, the melodic drop to the low E signals the close to the first section. This is also marked by a *ritardando* at the end of measure eighteen and a breath mark at the end of measure nineteen (image 7.2). When the melody returns in measure thirty-four it is characterized by a harmonic counter-part, adding fullness and complexity (image 7.3). The occurrence in measure forty-eight starts piano and crescendos to the only forte only forte in the movement. This crescendo, combined with a descending (A, G, F, E) and ascending (A, D, E, G) line of mostly quarter notes with tenuto markings, points to a climactic point (image 7.4). The melody's final

instance in measure fifty-five is in the original opening octave, beautifully closing off the piece as it started (image 7.5).

Investigation

Phrase 1

Listen

Because the opening theme is so central to this movement, it's interesting to first listen to it (clip 7.1). The motive in this clip, though beautiful in color and dynamic shape, is rhythmically very straight. Since the theme returns so many times, playing each one in this manner could quickly result in loss of interest or simply nice background music.

Score

Exploring the tenuto markings could help in finding a shape for the line. Bloch's use of tenutos in the Canzona is much sparser than in the Prelude (marked purple in image 7.6). They seem to occur at peaks in the line's shape or on interesting notes. Slightly lengthening these notes could help add interest to the melody. In addition, because no two occurrences of the theme have the same tenuto markings (image 7.6), paying particular attention to them would provide slight differences to incorporate.

However, as learned in the Prelude investigation, simply taking time without making up the ground results in a phrase slowing down and getting stuck. To account for this, one can look at the crescendo and diminuendo markings. Though these are dynamic markings, it is interesting to also consider them as markings for motion. It is possible to slightly push the tempo during crescendos and slightly decrease it during diminuendos. Because there is such an even balance of crescendos and diminuendos in this phrase (image 7.7), addressing the motion in this way still leaves the large beats rhythmical accurate.

Listen

Clip 7.2 demonstrates the first two measures with this concept of pushing through the crescendo in bar one and taking slightly longer for the tenuto in bar two. As can be heard, in this take the A on beat two of bar one is also slightly delayed and held so that the motion through the following beats feels even more natural. Continuing to play with this offers many possibilities for variation. A practice technique I tried for being more aware of balanced motion was playing with a metronome with the focus on lining up large beats (Clip 7.3). In this clip, the concept is most obvious in the first two bars. Also note that I still allowed the poco ritardando at the end of the phrase to happen naturally, temporarily ignoring the metronome.

Conclusion

By using give and take motion, based somewhat on dynamics, in addition to tenuto markings, the phrases could take on a natural flow.

Complete Movement

This recorded process of deep score study and active listening, while very effective for small details, can also be useful in obtaining a larger picture of a piece. Through a process of such minutely specific work, it can be easy to lose sight of a piece's overall flow. Recording and listening to the entire work will help one realize if the practiced and decided upon interpretations are effective in a larger scale.

Score

(image 7.6) In the case of the Canzona, based on score study and investigation, it should start in a sweet but flowing manner. The middle section beginning at bar twenty offers a calm and tranquility (particularly beginning in twenty-four) before the theme returns complete with an accompanying line. The brief dolce interlude from bars forty-one through forty-seven should not completely lose energy as bar forty-eight starts the final climb towards the climax. Bar fifty-four's B flat is the final turning point. In the concluding phrase, the melody and color should fade away.

Listen

Using these guidelines, I played through the movement (clip 7.4). While it is nuanced, the timing did not feel quite right. It seems to be lagging in tempo, coming in with the quarter around sixty beats per minute when the movement is marked seventy-two. This draws out the movement in such a way that I somewhat lost interest by the end. Clip 7.5 demonstrates the movement in a faster tempo, somewhere in the vicinity of the quarter note equaling seventy-five. The forward motion and length enable more flow, but some of the nuances are lost. Phrase endings in particular do not always feel natural or have time to breathe. I then had the idea of attempting the movement with a similar tempo and forward motion, but paying special attention to lengthening each of the notes marked by a tenuto (clip 7.6). The affect was exciting. Not only does the movement have motion and flow, but it gives clear purpose to Bloch's tenuto markings as they give goals within phrases for notes to stretch.

Conclusion

This particular day in the practice room was instrumental in my final take for the movement. It enabled me to discover a balance between motion and tenutos while also honoring Bloch's markings. Additionally, when I revisited smaller details in the piece, I had a better idea of how I wanted them to fit into the larger structure. It was like putting together a puzzle and suddenly finding out what the end product would look like.

Active Listening

Once I had a general idea of my personal opinions and take on the piece, I felt it was ok to consult other recordings. Unfortunately, Zara Nelsova, for whom the suite was written, did not create a professional recording of the pieces. Had she done so, this would fall parallel to the idea of actively listening to the composer as Nelsova worked closely with Bloch. There is, however, a YouTube recording of one of

Nelsova's former students performing the work: Brinton Averil Smith, a cello professor at Rice University in the United States. To increase variety, I also listened to professional recordings by Emmanuelle Bertrand and Chiara Enderle. By listening with the score, I was able to annotate how each artist interpreted markings or what he or she added that was not marked (image 7.7). I found Smith's recording to be slow, very precise, and at times aggressive. Bertrand explores more sustain through the sound, and Enderle plays the most with slight tempo fluctuations to give phrases direction.

In addition to listening for alternate interpretations, I also searched for answers to a few questions I had been struggling with from the score.

Two of these involved basic checks to ensure that I was playing the correct notes the correct way. Because harmonics are marked slightly differently by different composers, I checked that my way of interpreting the notation in measures twenty-four through thirty-three as the sounding pitches was accurate. Fortunately it was consistent with all three recordings. I also wanted to make sure that the C in beat one of measure fifty-two is meant to be arco, as this is the one time where the switch from pizzicato back to the bow is not marked. Again, it was consistent through all the recordings.

My other questions involved phrase pacing. I had been struggling with how to pace measures twenty-four through thirty-three as there is suddenly a lack of crescendos and diminuendos (image 7.8). These measures also switch between two bars of three-four time and three bars of two-four time. All three artists seem to sustain through the first two bars of the section and bars twenty-six through twenty-eight are felt in a large three. These three measures are particularly tasteful as played by Smith, who plays the second of the three softer and on a lower string to change the color. Bertrand and Enderle both take extra time in bar thirty-three for the transition back to the theme. However, I still was not quite satisfied with any of the artist's motion through the phrase. Despite being marked *calmo*, it seemed very static.

Influence

Actively listening influenced the end take in a few ways. In general, Bertrand's feeling of sustain through the sound seemed more appropriate to a movement essentially titled singing. I experimented with allowing notes to grow and maintain the sound, particularly at the peaks of crescendos, in addition simply allowing notes to nicely taper off. This sustain also applies to the previously discussed measures twenty-four through thirty-three, as it allows for the harmonics to be more easily heard and understood. In this section, though, I decided not to connect each of the notes as much as Bertrand. On a more detailed note, Enderle takes time in bar eleven that I appreciated as it provided room for the lower pizz. I incorporated this thought into my final take, though I end up stretching the time even more than Enderle. From Smith, I found it interesting that he did not roll the pizzicato chord in bar fifty-five as the piece came to a close. As other chords in the piece are either marked to or necessitate rolling, I had also been doing so here (as do Bertrand and Enderle). However, I found that playing the notes all together gives more of an acknowledgement to the start of the movement's final phrase.

Summation

Adding the element of professional recordings to the learning process provided additional inspiration in interpreting the Canzona. It was still just as important to do as in-depth of an investigation without recordings as I did with the Prelude as this gave me a clearer idea of what I wanted to take away from the recordings when I did finally listen. My final concept for the movement has a natural, expressive flow. I feel I have discovered a gem in the Canzona.

(Clip 8.1)

Intention

In the end, intention is the most important aspect in both the use of recordings and in forming one's own artistic interpretation. Clearly defining why one is going to recordings as a resource will enable deeper engagement, greater productivity, and stronger results. Clearly defining what one wants musically in a particular piece will also enable deeper engagement, greater productivity, and stronger results. My current private teachers both emphasize the importance of actively listening while playing. This comes from a place of first being able to hear the color and direction that one wants. Alegant also states "if you can imagine how you want it to go in your head... you can recreate your internal hearing." Once the intention is defined, listening in real time and to self-made recordings to reach this ideal sound will create results. With no intention, there is little direction for what to be listening for. According to Christian Tetzlaff, whose artistry often brings audiences to tears, "you invent the technique for a piece to make it sound like it should. There are not ten different strokes and colors, but 200! You have to try different bow grips and vibrati for different pieces. It's not easy. It's real work, but intensely rewarding." (Vanasse)

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