

February 2024

by Derek Katz

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) Sonata in A Major for Flute and Harpsichord, BWV 1032 (before 1736)

As is frequently the case for Johann Sebastian Bach's instrumental works, we have no idea why or for whom his flute sonatas were composed. The transverse flute was just beginning to supplant the recorder in Germany in the early 18th century, and Bach didn't start to use the flute in his cantatas until the 1720s. Perhaps Bach wrote some of his solo flute music for the player in the court orchestra of Cöthen, where Bach was employed from 1717 to 1723; perhaps some of it was intended for concerts directed by Bach at Zimmermann's coffee house in Leipzig, where he moved in 1723; perhaps some of it was for a fine French flutist at the court of Dresden, where Bach was appointed a court composer in 1736, and perhaps some was for his third son, Johann Gottfried Bernhard, an organist who was also an excellent flutist.

The Sonata in A Major presents problems of manuscript sources and musical structure of the sort that keep musicology journals supplied with material but are probably not of enormous interest to civilians. In short, the copy of the sonata in Bach's handwriting was written on the leftover portions of the score for another work in 1736. When the parts of the pages containing the flute sonata were cut out of the score, a piece containing about 46 measures of the first movement was lost. In addition, internal evidence strongly suggests that the flute sonata is a transcription of an earlier work, most likely a trio sonata for recorder, violin and continuo. Finally, the structure of the first movement sometimes more closely resembles that of a concerto rather than that of a sonata.

As far as the consequences for today's performance, slightly under half of the first movement that you will hear is a reconstruction, filling in the hole left by the missing manuscript piece. There are many different reconstructions, but all of them largely consist of transpositions and repetitions of material from earlier in the movement.

That is, you're probably not hearing the movement exactly as Bach wrote it, but pretty much everything that you're hearing was actually composed by Bach. The question of transcription also has audible consequences. Some of Bach's sonatas are pieces for an instrument with the accompaniment of continuo harpsichord, while others are essentially trios for two players, with the harpsichordist playing two distinct parts, one with each hand. This sonata, as hinted by its probable origins as an actual trio, is the second kind. The flute is playing the original recorder part, the right hand of the harpsichord is playing the original violin part, and the left hand plays the continuo bass line.

The relationship between the parts and instruments is slightly different in each of the three movements. The first movement opens with a complete musical phrase from the harpsichord that will be heard a number of times in the movement in the manner of a concerto ritornello. In this movement, it is sometimes easy to imagine that the flutist is the soloist in a concerto, with the harpsichord providing the orchestral accompaniment. In the elegant, minor mode slow movement, the flute and the right hand of the harpsichord are usually moving together in harmony, rather than engaging in contrapuntal dialogue. In the lively, triple meter final movement the flute and the two hands of the harpsichord return to a more independent relationship, with upper voices answering each other over an active bass line.

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Kryštof Mařatka (b. 1972)
***Melopa*, for Solo Harpsichord (2008)**

The Bach flute sonata that precedes this piece presents the harpsichord in its original natural habit as the primary keyboard instrument of the Baroque era. Although the harpsichord never completely disappeared from domestic music making (both Rossini and Verdi played the harpsichord as children) or from opera pit orchestras, it played no role in the public concert culture of the 19th century, aside from the exceptional historical recital. Instrument builders like Arnold Dolmetsch and players like Wanda Landowska and Violet Gordon-Woodhouse sparked a revival of the harpsichord in the early 20th century. Landowska, in particular, not only established the harpsichord on the world's concert stages but also inspired new music composed for the harpsichord, including concertos by Francis Poulenc and Manuel de Falla (the American harpsichordist Sylvia Marlowe also recorded a "Bach to Boogie-Woogie" album in 1940). Rather than a replica of a historic instrument (like those built by Dolmetsch), Landowska played a large, technologically modified, iron-framed instrument built to her specifications by the Pleyel firm. The musicologist Edmond Johnson has proposed a "third life" for the harpsichord starting after the Second World War, when a new generation of harpsichord makers (most famously William Dowd) returned to historical models for their instruments. These replicas also featured not only in the developing world of early music and historically informed performance practice but were also used for new compositions. This use of the harpsichord as a vehicle for both very old and very new music has continued to the present, with Kryštof Mařatka's 2008 *Melopa* part of the resulting contemporary harpsichord repertoire.

Elzbieta Chojnacka, the harpsichordist for whom *Melopa* was written, was especially known for collaborating with composers and performing new music. Her many premieres include György Ligeti's *Hungarian Rock*, for solo harpsichord. Mařatka was prompted to compose *Melopa* both by meeting Chojnacka and by the specific experience of spending three days in a luxurious apartment in Poland with an excellent harpsichord, but no heat. Mařatka kept himself warm by playing the harpsichord "tireless and fast, for prolonged periods." It is easy to imagine that *Melopa* is at least partially a recreation of that experience, starting out with very rapid cascading downward scales in the right hand, creating sheets of sound that persist almost to the end of the piece. These scales are combined with repeated chords in the left hand that intensify until the left hand joins in playing scales and both hands break into glissandi that sweep up and down the keyboard. There is a large-scale repeat of this process before the manic motion comes to a near halt as the piece comes to its conclusion. As the composer explains, despite the title suggesting that the work will be a lamenting dirge, *Melopa* is "a frantic, repetitive, haunting and unpredictable gallop with a mechanical virtuosity that aspires only to flee towards warm and contemplative landscapes."

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Christopher Cerrone (b. 1984)
***Liminal Highway*, for Flute and Electronics (2016)**

Christopher Cerrone has been a regular presence on recent Camerata Pacifica programs, with his *Hoyt-Schermerhorn*, for piano and electronics having appeared during the 2021-22 season, and his *Double Happiness*, for piano, percussion and electronics being performed last season. Like those works, *Liminal Highway* also involves electronics, but this time they are combined with sounds produced by a flute player, and there is no keyboard. The piece was composed for the Australian flute virtuoso and new music specialist Tim Munro, perhaps best known to American audiences as a member and artistic director of the contemporary music ensemble Eighth Blackbird. Although not a flutist, Cerrone did buy a cheap flute and learned how to play it in the course of composing this piece. The title refers to a poem by John K. Samson, front man for the excellent but currently dormant Canadian folk-rock band The Weakerthans ("Elegy for Gump Worsley" must be amongst the most moving songs about hockey). The poem describes the experience of falling asleep while being driven, and evokes multiple liminal spaces, including the uneasy and ambiguous boundary between sleep and consciousness and the feeling of suspension between the starting point and destination of a journey.

Liminal Highway has five movements, each preceded by a few words from the Samson poem, and arranged in a symmetrical pattern with the first and fifth being very similar, and the fourth also echoing the second. The movements are played without pause, but there is a distinct change in the method of sound production for each movement. The electronic effects are predominantly delays and reverbs, creating the illusions of multiple players performing simultaneously and of being in different large and resonant spaces. There are also some pre-recorded samples.

The first movement, "When you fall asleep in transit," is built on the technique of flutter-tonguing, a kind-trilled growl, used first on a piccolo and then on the flute, with the electronics building a whole ensemble of piccolos and flutes. The second movement, "a dream you don't recall," starts with the sounds created by clicking the keys on the flute. The very quiet sounds of the padded keys thumping against the body of the instrument are amplified and electronically augmented to create hypnotic fast repeated patterns and spectral tone clusters. Towards the end of the movement, the key clicks are combined with blowing through the flute as the section builds in volume and intensity. The central third movement, "Between Consciousness and Sleep," has the subtitle "Alternately savage and dreamlike." These extremes are expressed in multiple ways. The movement opens with the flutist playing isolated, high, loud stabbing notes that are electronically sustained into gauzy textures, and there is also a contrast between the stabbing high notes and lower, softer multiphonics (a technique in which the flutist uses special fingerings to produce two notes at the same time). As the movement progresses, the tempo accelerates, and the multiphonics are replaced by tremolos. Like the second movement, the fourth movement, "Liminal (Warning Signs)" is fast and rhythmic, with regular pulses created with the tongue and the key pads. These pulses become louder and are joined by sustained low notes and a prerecorded alto flute, eventually building a thick resonant sonority, with multiple recorded flutes packed into very small intervals. The final movement, "Suddenly it is needed," returns to the flutter-tongued piccolo and flute of the opening, with a new sound created by using a similar technique on five tuned beer bottles, producing one more dream-like collection of blown sounds.

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John K. Samson
Liminal Highway

*when you fall asleep in transit
you rarely wake up much closer
to where you want to be
and you've missed the song
you were waiting to hear
coming up after the ad for a
funeral home and the traffic and weather
in a town you'll never live in*

*or even see now that you've passed it
in a dream you don't recall*

*and you know there is a word
for those seconds between
consciousness and sleep where you
have arrived at your destination
accomplished your tasks and
concurrently settled into a
big old house that needs some work
next to the funeral home
with some endlessly interesting and
kind person you love unflinchingly
and traffic is moving well
weather is fair*

*you think that word might be "liminal"
but you are not certain so you don't
mention it to the driver who's name
you cannot remember*

*though you likely know him
as well as you know anyone*

*and you are so weary
with loitering between here
and there then and then
beauty and function you wish
you were a three hole punch
sleek shiny black and a
mysteriously pleasant weight
assisting children with their
school presentations while
slowly stockpiling confetti
for no particular occasion*

*just some average day
suddenly it is needed*

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Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Adagio in F Major, Hob. XVII:9 (pub. 1786)

Joseph Haydn's Adagio in F Major was published in Vienna in 1786 as part of a collection of ten "easy and pleasant" pieces for harpsichord or fortepiano. The other nine pieces are all abridged, "easy-to-play" transcriptions of movements from Haydn's symphonies, operas and one string quartet. This was an obvious way to take advantage of Haydn's international celebrity as a composer for larger forces and make his most popular music accessible for home use. The Adagio, however, is not a transcription, and may have been intended as the slow movement of a keyboard sonata.

The pianist and scholar Paul Badura-Skoda has pointed out the similarities between Haydn's Adagio and the slow movement of Mozart's keyboard sonata in C Major, K. 330, published two years earlier in Vienna, and suggested that the Haydn movement might be an unconscious homage to Mozart. Whatever the intent, the Adagio is a lovely little movement that is both easy and much more than pleasant. It has two parts, each one of which is repeated. The second part concludes with a lightly decorated return of the opening material.

André Jolivet (1905-1974) Chant de linos for Flute and Piano (1944)

André Jolivet composed *Chant de linos* (Song of Linus) as a test piece for the Paris Conservatoire. The first prize winner that year was a young medical student named Jean-Pierre Rampal, who went on to frequently perform *Chant de linos*, and to collaborate with Jolivet on other flute works, including the commission of a flute concerto (1949). Even beyond his friendship with Rampal, Jolivet was especially well-disposed towards the flute, describing it as "the musical instrument *par excellence*, because—endowed with life by breath, man's deepest emanation—it fills its notes with that which is at the same time visceral and cosmic within us." *Chant de linos* is one of a number of Jolivet's compositions from the middle of the century that deal with rituals, and, in a broader sense, that attempts to recover music's "original ancient meaning as the magic and incantational expression of human groups." The flute was a particularly useful instrument for Jolivet in evoking archaic worlds, thanks to its association with pan pipes.

Linus (or Linus) is a figure who appears in many different traditions in Greek mythology, mostly associated with Apollo, Orpheus and music. In some stories, Linus was the son of Apollo and the teacher of Orpheus, in others he was a rival of Apollo, and slain by him after challenging him in a musical contest. In many of these stories, Linus dies young and has dirges sung to him after funeral sacrifices (these dirges are called *linos*). According to Jolivet, *Chant de linos* is a lament for the dead, interrupted by cries and dances. These three ideas—lament, cry and dance—are each represented by distinct sections in different tempos, meters and characters.

The piece opens with an introduction in which rhythmic statements from the piano alternate with improvisatory descending figures from the flute. This leads to the first "lament," a slow and somewhat static section. All of the pitches are drawn from a single, slightly exotic gapped scale, and the piano part repeats the same gesture in each bar. It is also somewhat unsettled, as each measure has five beats, and the flute line meanders unpredictably against the piano rhythms. A rapid flute flourish up to the highest register heralds the next section. This is the first "cry," marked by the extreme register for the flute and by flutter-tonguing (used to very different effect than in *Liminal Highway*). The flutter-tongued passage slows and descends, and both flute and piano settle into a quiet low register to close the section. This is followed by a second "lament" section, with the same general characteristics as the first, and a second "cry," this time with more rapid passage work from the flute, and less flutter-tonguing. A short passage for flute alone leads to the first "dance." Like the lament, this is in an odd meter (seven beats per bar) and has a piano part made up of repeated bars. This time, however, the flute part is locked into the same groove as the piano part, starting with a long series of rapid tongued sixteenth notes and moving into slurred arpeggios and trills. This lop-sided "dance" eventually gives way to abbreviated returns of the "lament" and the "cry" before a final "dance" brings the piece to a brilliant close.