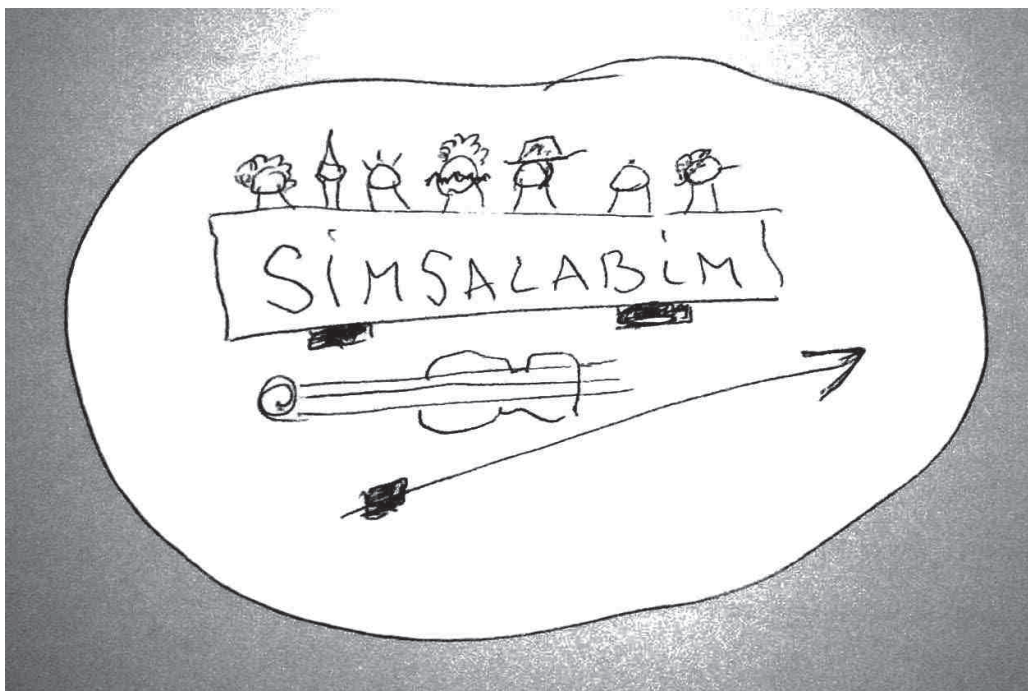


**Accademia Filarmonica**

**Bach's bowings in the Giges of the  
1st, 2nd and 3rd Cello Suites  
on the occasion of the 6th Amsterdam Cello Biennale  
on 27 October 2016, 10:15am  
Het Muziekgebouw aan het IJ**

**by Anner Bylsma**



## The Bowings in the first three Giges of the Cello Suites of Bach

A little essay, dedicated to Lidewij Scheifes, my longtime friend.

The virtuosity of the bow is very much what the first three Giges are about. In the Gigue of the fourth Suite the left hand is more the subject of study: E flat Major! (Learning is always part of the pleasure in Bach's music.) The fifth and sixth Suites are actually written for other instruments.

After two hundred years of conflicting opinions it is very important to try to return to square one: the music as a new piece. Luckily, cellists of today have a much better intellectual background than those of earlier times and can relish rationalistic beauties in slurring more than those in former generations were able to do. But, unluckily, they also have been fed horrible hoaxes during their upbringing, for instance, 1) the Big Line – all notes should be equally loud, and 2) Solfège – all notes should be metronomically alike whatever their psychological impact.

Please allow me to help liberate minds from tunnel-visions, such as the notion that Mrs. Bach's slurs have little meaning because she did not play a string instrument or that bowing in Bach's time was still a primitive affair. Soon you will come to know better.

Exercise:

Put your bow on the strings and don't move it except to cross the strings. **Think through** these Giges with the proper up- or down-bow feeling in your wrist.

### Welcome and unwelcome differences of color. About the open 'A' string

In a melody we will avoid , but won't mind .

We cellists don't know much, but there is nothing wrong with our intuition. When playing the violin or the alto, one can immediately choose to play an open string or use the fourth finger on the notes A or E. In 17th century Italy, the tuning generally used by cello virtuosi (C-G-d-g, as in Suite no. 5) gave cellists the same possibility for color differences.

The modern tuning in fifths requires little changes of position in order to bring off the same effect on our big machines. As Bach probably played the Cello Suites on his viola, he would not have been bothered himself, but he surely would have been aware of the problem. It is a simple matter of keeping the same color in voices.

The fingering of the cello as we know it, with its clear divisions in positions (handfuls), stems from a later time: from Jean Louis Duport, who, in the introduction to his famous book *Essai sur le doigté du violoncelle* (1800±), complains that a regular fingering on the cello doesn't yet exist.

In Bach's Suites the slurs are mainly over two or three notes, and hence one cannot escape the feeling that he did not like glissandi inside slurs. Longer slurs are rare anyway, and they always pass over open string notes (see Allemand I).

E - G - A on the D-string would quite often have been played 1 - 2 - 4 (with a low wrist, please).

Herewith you will find, scribbled in, some of my fingerings which I added in the hope not to irritate.

And at last I found the right slurs in the Gigue of the 1st Suite (I have to learn too, sorry!)

Please repair those places in my books *Bach, the Fencing Master* and *Droppings*.

Anner Bylsma

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*Gigue* 8

The first system of musical notation for the piece 'Gigue'. It features a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 3/8 time signature. The melody is written on a five-line staff with various note values and rests. The word 'Gigue' is written in a cursive script at the beginning of the staff.

The bass line for the first system, written in a bass clef. It includes fingering numbers (0, 4, 2, 4) and a trill (tr) marking above the final measure.

The second system of musical notation, continuing the melody from the first system. It shows a continuation of the treble staff with various rhythmic patterns and articulation marks.

The bass line for the second system, starting with a measure number '9'. It includes fingering numbers (V, V, 0) and a trill (tr) marking above the final measure.

The third system of musical notation, continuing the melody. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various note values and rests.

The bass line for the third system, starting with a measure number '18'. It includes fingering numbers (V, V) and a trill (tr) marking above the final measure.

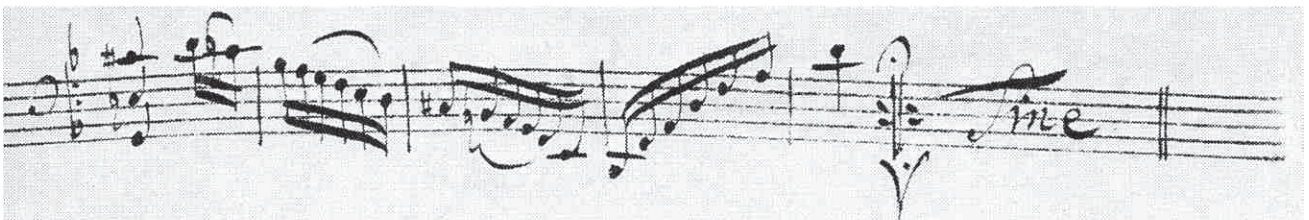
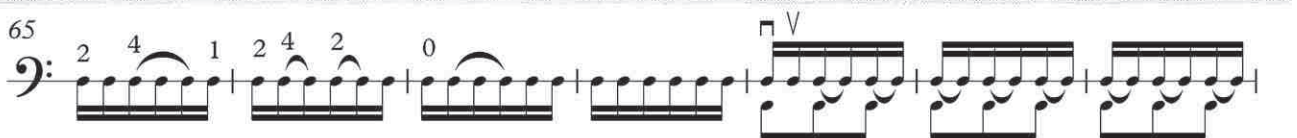
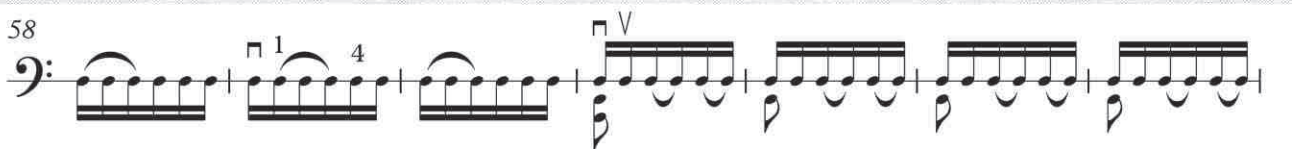
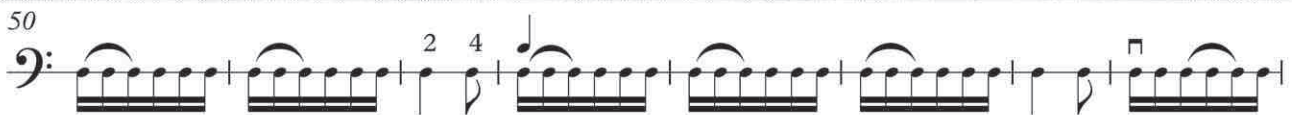
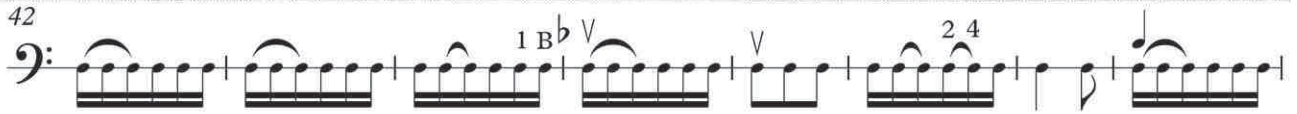
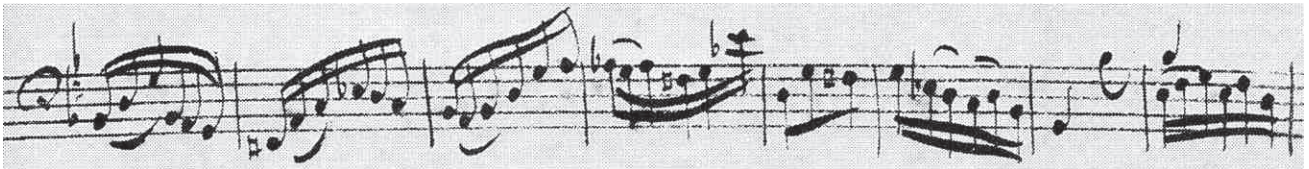
The fourth system of musical notation, continuing the melody. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various note values and rests.

The bass line for the fourth system, starting with a measure number '26'. It includes fingering numbers (V, V, 0) and a trill (tr) marking above the final measure.

The fifth system of musical notation, continuing the melody. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various note values and rests.

The bass line for the fifth system, starting with a measure number '33'. It includes fingering numbers (V, 0, 1, 4, 4, 2, 1) and a trill (tr) marking above the final measure.

For commentary on this Gigue, please see my book *Droppings*.



*Gigue*

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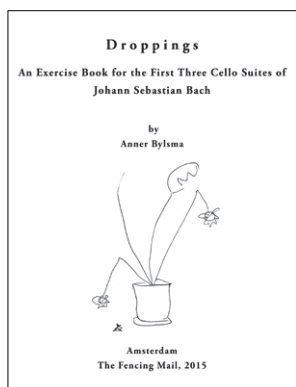
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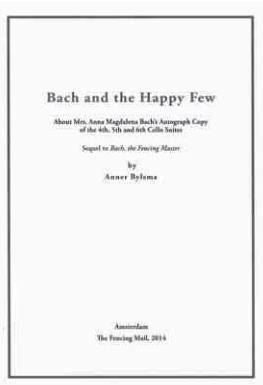
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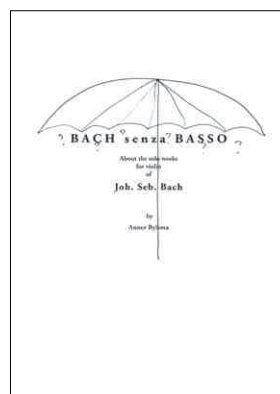
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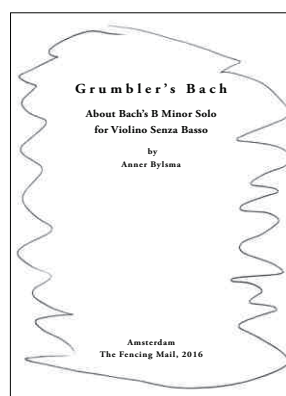
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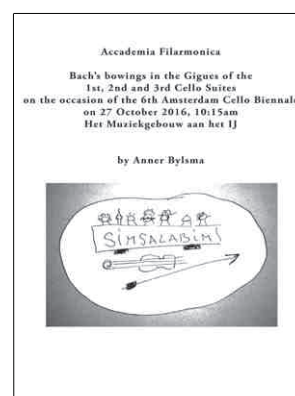
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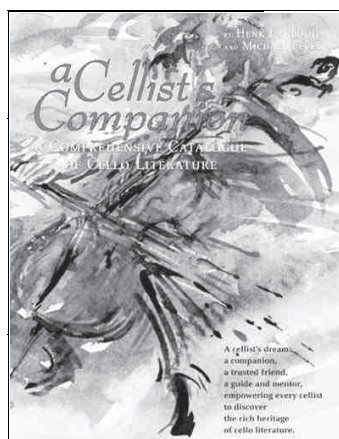
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