

Problems in the Neue Bach Ausgabe of the E Major Partita for Violin Alone

Joel Lester

A scholarly edition presents a musical work as close to the composer's intentions as possible. Among the criteria taken into consideration are the existence of an autograph score, the care taken in its preparation, the degree of supervision by the composer of the first editions, and the presence of several versions authorized by the composer. To this end, editorial emendations are sometimes necessary to correct errors in autograph scores. Several sources are often compared to arrive at a reading closer to this ideal than that found in any single source. In a *Kritischer Bericht*, the sources are evaluated, one or several are selected as most accurate, and all variants are listed. A musician consulting the edition and its *Kritischer Bericht* then has at hand the information he needs to make intelligent analytical and performance decisions.

As a violinist preparing for a performance of Bach's *Partita No. 3 in E Major for Violin Alone*, the present writer did not always find all this information in the edition edited by Günter Hauswald for the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*.¹ At a number of points, readings are not taken from the primary source, the autograph score; yet, the *Kritischer Bericht* neither notes that a change has been made nor explains the editorial decision. At other points, ambiguous notations in the autograph score are interpreted without an explanation of the source difficulties.

Three principal sources were used in the preparation of the NBA edition: a *Reinschrift* score in Bach's hand (listed as source A), a copy in the hand of Anna Magdalena Bach (source B), and a third copy in an unknown hand (source C). B is assumed to be a copy of A or an intermediary score copied from A, while C may well date from an earlier source.²

The autograph score is the only source in Bach's handwriting, and it was the model for the edition. "Only in a few cases in the textual criticism did one have to diverge from the absolute dominance of the autograph. In general, the deviations have to do with writing errors or imprecisions, as in the placement of bowings, which were sometimes clarified by other sources."³ The following is a listing of bowings in the NBA which do not follow the autograph and are not mentioned in the *Kritischer Bericht*:

1. Loure, m. 13, beats 4 and 5. Slur 1 + 3 in A, slur 4 in NBA. (fol. 20v, 9th staff, 4th measure.)
2. Gavotte, m. 33, beats 1 and 2. Slur 3 + 1 in A, slur 4 in NBA. (fol. 21r, 5th staff, 4th measure.)
3. Gavotte, m. 38, beats 3 and 4. Slur 3 + 1 in A, slur 2 + 2 in NBA. (fol. 21r, 6th staff, 2nd full measure.) See discussion below.
4. Gavotte, m. 76, beats 3 and 4. Slur 3 + 1 in A, slur 2 + 2 in NBA. (fol. 21r, 11th staff, 4th full measure.) See discussion below.

The most significant of these is m. 33 of the Gavotte (Ex. 1). The bowing is entirely clear in the autograph. It serves to articulate a relationship between mm. 32–34 and 34–36, a relationship which is obscured by any change in the bowing (Ex. 2). What is the source of Hausswald’s bowing? Since the *Kritischer Bericht* does not refer to the passage, one can only assume that the four-note slur is found in sources B and C. The 1879 Bach Gesellschaft edition was prepared without knowledge of the autograph score and was based on source B.⁴ This source, as well as source C, has the four-note slur. Source C, however, is highly inconsistent in bowings, particularly in those places where the autograph is most consistent. For example, in the Gavotte, C presents the rondo theme in an assortment of bowings at its different appearances (Ex. 3), in contrast to identical bowings found in the autograph. Did Hausswald alter the bowing to conform with source B because he thought Bach had erred in writing two bows against a sustained note? Hardly, for in that case a multitude of bowings would have had to be altered (e.g., see the Gavotte, mm. 86–87). To emend bowings and durations in order to make the solo sonatas and partitas more “violinistic” is to open a Pandora’s box. At two other points in the Gavotte, mm. 38 and 76, a two-note slur seems to have been emended to a three-note slur in the autograph score (Ex. 4). In both cases, Hausswald decided on 2+2 slurs. In these three cases, the *Kritischer Bericht* fails to mention the change or the problem.

EXAMPLE 1



Gavotte.	Same.
M. 33, beats 1 and 2.	NBA.
Autograph.	

EXAMPLE 2



Gavotte.	Both phrases have the same harmonic structure,
Mm. 32–36.	repetition pattern, and bowings.
Autograph bowings.	

EXAMPLE 3



Gavotte.	Mm. 1–5.
Source C	Mm. 16–21.
Bowings.	
	Mm. 40–45.
	Mm. 64–69.

EXAMPLE 4

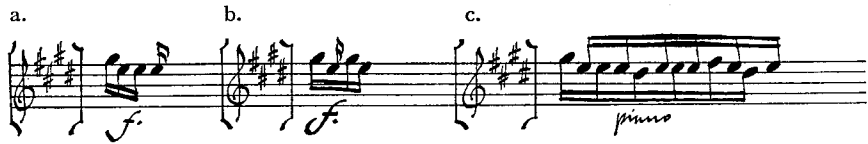


Gavotte.
M. 38. Beats 3 and 4.
Autograph.

M. 76.
Beats 3 and 4.
Autograph.

In the Preludio, the placement of the *f* in m. 13 and of the *pia(no)* in m. 15 is open to question. The NBA places both on the third sixteenth of the measure. The *f* is placed ambiguously in the autograph score (Ex. 5a). The *f* in m. 17 is written in approximately the same manner as that in m. 13 (Ex. 5b), yet is printed on the first sixteenth in the NBA. In the return of this passage in A major in mm. 63–67, the autograph clearly places all dynamics on the first sixteenth of the measure. If one reads the *f* in mm. 13 and 17 as occurring on the first sixteenth, then the source of the problem is the *pia(no)* in m. 15 (Ex. 5c). Since it is clearly placed at the beginning of m. 65, it may be a writing error here. The placement of these dynamics is an important determinant of the phrasing (Ex. 5d). If the *f* in m. 13 is placed on the first pitch, then the placement of the *pia(no)* on the third sixteenth must be a writing error. Once again, a full discussion is called for, and none is presented.

EXAMPLE 5



a.
Preludio.
M. 13.
Beat 1.
Autograph.

b.
M. 17.
Beat 1.
Autograph.

c.
M. 15.
Beats 1, 2, 3.
Autograph.

d.



Preludio.
Mm. 13–17.
Reduction.

NOTES

¹ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Neue Ausgabe Sämtliche Werke; Serie VI|1, Werke für Violine. Drei Sonaten und Drei Partiten für Violine Solo, BWV, 1001–1006*, ed. Günter Hausswald (Bärenreiter, 1958), pp. 54–62 of score; pp. 7–117 of corresponding volume in *Kritischer Bericht*.

² Bach's autograph is available in two facsimile editions:

- (a) *Sei Solo a Violino senza Basso accompagnato. Libro Primo. da Joh. Seb. Bach. Faksimile.*, ed. Bernhard Sprengel, with notes by Wilhelm Martin Luther, 2nd edition (Bärenreiter, 1958).
- (b) *Johann Sebastian Bach. Sonaten und Partiten für Violine Allein*, with notes by Yehudi Menuhin and Günter Hauswald (Insel-Verlag, 1962). This edition is reduced in size and is quite inexpensive.

Full information on all sources can be found in the *Kritischer Bericht*.

³ *Kritischer Bericht*, p. 66.

⁴ *Johann Sebastian Bach's Werke, Bach Gesellschaft*; Bd. 27, ed. Alfred Dörfel (Breitkopf und Härtel, 1879), Partita No. 3 on pp. 48–56; *Vorwort und Kritischer Bericht* on pp. xiii–xxx.