

The Secret of Unaccompanied Music for Strings: The Use of Bass Line

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Abstract

The performance of unaccompanied music has always been an important subject for musicians, especially violinists. Contemporary musicians have written extensively on the practice and performance of unaccompanied violin works and especially from the pedagogical approach. In interpreting unaccompanied music, performers are suggested to focus on the melodic lines, interpret the embedded harmonic pattern, and also attend the underlying bass line. Generally speaking, the bass line not only enriches the sonority of unaccompanied music, but also creates a multi-dimensional acoustic effect.

Since late 17th century, the genre of unaccompanied violin pieces became popular among composers and it reached the peak with *Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo* (Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, BWV 1001-1006) by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) during the 18th century. With the composers' interest diverted to other musical genres, compositions for unaccompanied violin works decline in number and it was not until the 20th century that saw its revival. This article examines Partita No. 2 (BWV 1004) by J. S. Bach and discusses the application and interpretation of the bass line in this work in order to generate new interest and perspective for the performance and appreciation of this work.

Keywords: unaccompanied music, bass line, unaccompanied violin, J. S. Bach, Partita No. 2 (BWV 1004)

無伴奏音樂的秘密：低音線的運用

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摘 要

演奏無伴奏音樂一直是許多音樂家的議題，對於小提琴演奏者尤然。近代有許多演奏小提琴無伴奏音樂的相關書籍，以及關於此方面的教學活動。小提琴演奏者在詮釋無伴奏音樂時，除了音樂當中的旋律線及隱藏的和聲線條之外，亦可以「低音線」觀點詮釋音樂；低音線不只豐富無伴奏音樂中的音響，也呈現聲音中的立體感。

從十七世紀晚期開始，音樂家題獻給無伴奏小提琴的作品陸續出現；十八世紀巴赫（Johann Sebastian Bach, 1685-1750）的六首無伴奏小提琴音樂問世之後，無伴奏小提琴音樂達到了高峰。繼巴赫六首無伴奏小提琴之後，作曲家的興趣逐漸轉向其他音樂型態。直到二十世紀，小提琴無伴奏音樂才又再度復興。此篇論文以巴赫無伴奏小提琴第二號組曲為例，探討低音線在音樂上的詮釋及運用。

關鍵詞：無伴奏音樂、低音線、無伴奏小提琴、巴赫、無伴奏小提琴第二號組曲

1. Introduction

The music of solo violin bloomed in the 17th century and reached the apex of its popularity through Johann Sebastian Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin (BWV 1001-1006).¹ After Bach's masterpieces, the attention of composers' interests turned to other music genres. Concertos and sonatas were the most popular violin genres in the 19th century, with the exception of the prestigious solo violin works in 1824 by Niccolò Paganini (1782-1840). In the 20th century, unaccompanied violin music was revived again through the music of Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931), Max Reger (1873-1916), Béla Bartók (1881-1945), Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953), and Paul Hindemith (1895-1963).²

Unaccompanied music is always a challenge for musicians. For unaccompanied violin works, violinists are required to have a full range of techniques and pay attention to the musical lines of polyphony music. It is crucial for violinists in unaccompanied music to comprehend different elements including the melody and the accompanying line, while simultaneously presenting the relationship of these elements through their playing. Furthermore, violinists need to combine every role in one instrument in terms of the appropriate style, music, and technique.

It is common that people tend to listen to the melodic line first when they hear music; this is also true for musicians. With the rise of historically informed performances towards the end of the 20th century, playing music in an authentic way became the concern of musicians, especially performing music from periods before the end of the 18th century. For performances of music from the Baroque period, the bass line takes an essential role for the whole structure of music; it is the center of the tempo, as well as a significant part of the dynamics, articulation, and characteristics of the music.³ To sum up, finding the bass line of

¹ Robin Stowell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 194.

² Ibid.

³ F. T. Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass: As Practiced in the XVII*

unaccompanied music is becoming an essential idea for musicians. Currently many articles discuss the techniques of playing unaccompanied music for strings. However, few writings focus on the application and interpretation of the music from the perspective of the bass line.

There are numerous literatures about unaccompanied violin works before the end of the 18th century. The books by Robin Stowell and David D. Boyden are the most complete literatures for violin repertoires pre-19th century.⁴ Both works not only talk about unaccompanied violin repertoires, but also include violin music and uses. Many more works deal with the subject of Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin by J. S. Bach, such as the books by Johann Nikolaus Forkel (1749-1818), Joel Lester, and Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel,⁵ and articles by Russell Stinson and Di Su.⁶ Among these references, Lester, Stinson, and Su mention Bach's manuscripts and publications. Forkel and David and Mendel revisit the life of Bach from the perspective of his works and letters. Rönnau edited Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin under G. Henle Verlag and discussed Bach's manuscript and its copies in the preface of the score.⁷

The three most prominent literatures that focus on the subject of bass line include treatises by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773), and Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) during the 18th century.⁸

and XVIII Centuries (Newburyport, MA: Dover Publications, 2013), 1:328.

⁴ Stowell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin*; David D. Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing from Its Origins to 1761: And Its Relationship to the Violin and Violin Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁵ Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art, and Work*, trans. Charles Sanford Terry (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970); Joel Lester, *Bach's Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, *The Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972).

⁶ Russell Stinson, "J. P. Kellner's Copy of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo," *Early Music* 13, no. 2 (May 1985): 199-211, <https://doi.org/10.1093/earlyj/13.2.199>; Di Su, "The Tardy Recognition of J. S. Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo," *American String Teacher* 61, no. 2 (May 2011): 24-28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000313131106100215>.

⁷ Johann Sebastian Bach, *Sechs Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo, BWV 1001-1006*, ed. Klaus Rönnau (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1990).

⁸ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans.

Among these treatises, C. P. E. Bach's work describes the complete application of bass line from basic concepts to performance practice. Treatises by Quantz and Mozart focus on flute and violin players though there are some chapters for basso continuo (bass line) players. The book by F. T. Arnold discusses the art of accompaniment including the history of basso continuo, principal treatises of basso continuo of the 18th century, music theory, performance practice, and musical techniques.⁹ Hidemi Suzuki presents a manuscript of sources and the bass line of cello unaccompanied music by J. S. Bach.¹⁰ Stanley Yates and Scott Workman's two articles discuss Bach's lute music and its transcriptions, and the method to analyze the bass line.¹¹ Yates describes the approach of transcriptions of Bach's lute work BWV 995 and unaccompanied cello suite BWV 1011; Workman introduces all lute works by Bach and focus on BWV 1006a for its uses of transcription.

2. Solo Violin Works before the End of the 18th Century

The genesis of solo violin works can be traced back to the late 17th century. The earliest known piece was the passacaglia by Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber (1644-1704) from the *Rosenkranz-Sonaten* (*Rosary Sonatas*), published in 1681.

William J. Mitchell (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000); Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. Edward R. Reilly (London: Faber & Faber, 2001); Leopold Mozart, *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, trans. Editha Knocker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹ Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass*, vol. 1.

¹⁰ Hidemi Suzuki, "Forming Dissonance with a Single Note," in *International Strings Literature Symposium*, ed. Sheau-Ping Hu (Xinzhuang: Fu Jen Catholic University Press, 2006), 163-176.

¹¹ Stanley Yates, "Bach's Unaccompanied String Music: A New (Old) Approach to Stylistic and Idiomatic Arrangement for the Guitar," *Classical Guitar Magazine* 17, no. 3 (November 1998): 24-29 and no. 4 (December 1998): 20-22; Scott Workman, "J. S. Bach's Lute Suite BWV 1006a: A Study in Transcription," *Graduate Research Journal* 1 (April 2014): 104-114.

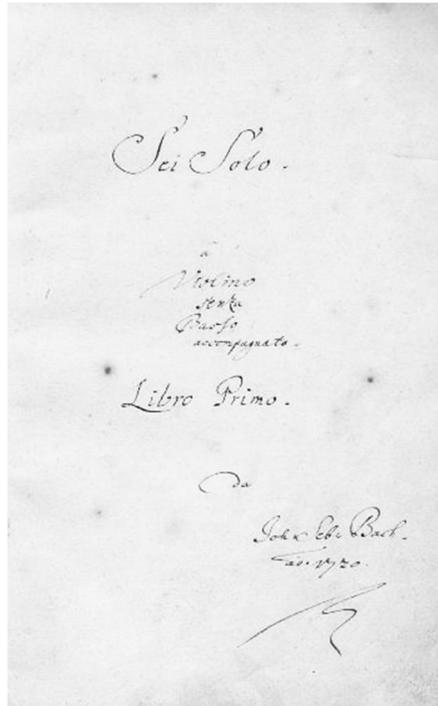
After Biber, the following works are composed for solo violin: Johann Paul von Westhoff (1656-1705), who published *Suite pour le violon sans basse continue* (*Suite for Violin without Basso Continuo*) in 1683 and *Six Suites for Solo Violin* in 1696; *The Division Violin* (1684) by John Playford (1623-1686/7); and *Ayres of the Violin* (1676/1685) by Nicola Matteis (c. 1650-after 1713). Johann Georg Pisendel (1688-1755), a virtuosic German violinist, wrote his *Sonata for Solo Violin in a minor* (dated 1716), which mixes German tradition with Italian style. Pisendel influenced numerous composers of his own generation and was the recipient of various dedications by Tomaso Albinoni (1671-1751), Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770), Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767), Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), and J. S. Bach.¹² After Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin* (1720), Telemann also published *12 Fantasie per il Violino senza Basso* (*12 Fantasias for Violin without Bass*) in 1735. This set of fantasias showed Telemann's brilliance of musical sophistication while at the same time demonstrating the mastery of violin techniques.

It is believed that Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin* were written for Pisendel or at least inspired by Pisendel's virtuosic skills after Bach listened to Pisendel's playing.¹³ The cover page of the original manuscript: "Sei Solo. | ã | Violino | senza | Basso | accompagnato. | Libro Primo. | da | Joh: Seb: Bach. | ao. 1720" (*Six Solos. | for | Violin | without | Bass | accompaniment | First Book. | by | Joh. Seb. Bach. | in the year 1720*), shows the year of these works (Figure 1).

¹² Bach's violin sonata BWV1023 (after 1723) was dedicated to Pisendel. This violin sonata is technically challenging. The technique in this sonata is not like the standard Baroque practice, which shows a sweet and short melody that is repeated. Bach's violin sonata starts with a cadenza, which was unusual during this period that is followed by strikes of an exceedingly awkward left-hand pose with back and forth changing between positions, and then takes it on a stepwise tour up and down the fingerboard.

¹³ Su, "The Tardy Recognition of J. S. Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo*," 25.

Figure 1. J. S. Bach, Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, cover page of the original manuscript.



However, there is speculation that the year of composition of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin is not 1720. Bach might have started writing these works in his Weimar period (1708-1717), when he was mostly known as a violinist.¹⁴ C. P. E. Bach described his father's abilities as a string player in a letter dated 1774:

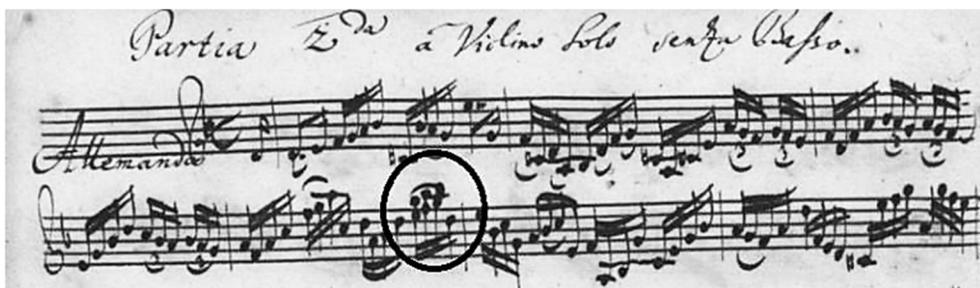
In his youth, and until the approach of old age, he played the violin cleanly and penetratingly, and thus kept the orchestra in better order than he could have done with the harpsichord. He understood to perfection the possibilities of all stringed instruments. This is evidenced by his solos for the violin and for the violincello without (accompanying) bass.¹⁵

¹⁴ Stowell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin*, 208.

¹⁵ David and Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, 277.

In Bach's manuscript, there are errors of missing notes, bowing, and articulation (Figure 2), which can be supplied from other manuscripts. There are some manuscript copies that are in existence including two that are considered the most convincing manuscript copies.¹⁶ The first copy is by Anna Magdalena Bach (1701-1760), Bach's second wife. This version is now kept at Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, SBB). The second copy of the manuscript is by Johann Peter Kellner (1705-1772), Bach's admirer, whose copy is also kept at SBB. However, Stinson suggests that Kellner changed and shortened Bach's composition.¹⁷

Figure 2. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Allemanda, notes error.



Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin is the perfect embodiment of Baroque music style and technique. It shows the high standard for violin technique requiring a polyphony of multiple stops and various bowing techniques.¹⁸ Violinists need to overcome the technical difficulties while playing the beautiful melody. Forkel, the 18th century musicologist, musician, and also a Bach admirer, observes:

So remarkable is Bach's skill that the solo instrument actually produces all the notes required for complete harmony, rendering a second part unnecessary and even impossible.¹⁹

¹⁶ Bach, *Sechs Sonaten und Partiten für Violine solo*, V.

¹⁷ Stinson, "J. P. Kellner's Copy of Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Violin Solo," 200.

¹⁸ Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing from Its Origins to 1761*, 349.

¹⁹ Forkel, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, 83.

Bach's Partita No. 2 (BWV 1004) is the example used for discussing the bass line in this article. This partita includes the movements Allemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Giga, and Ciaccona. The last movement "Ciaccona" is also called "the greatest structure for solo violin that exists" by the violinist Yehudi Menuhin (1916-1999).²⁰

3. Bass Line

The bass line (basso continuo or thoroughbass) is an instrumental bass part which usually runs through an entire piece, usually played on keyboard instruments, lutes, or theorbo.²¹ It was the most common accompaniment skill used before the end of the 18th century. During this period, music scores were usually written down with only a melodic line and the accompanying bass line by composers. The written bass line may be figured with accidentals and numerals to indicate the chords. Musicians need to be able to read the figures, play the bass line with their left hand and improvise the chords according to the figures with the right hand (Example 1).

Example 1. Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1665-1729), Cantata *Semelé* (1715), Prelude.

Semelé
Cantate
Marquez
Avec Symphonie

²⁰ Dors Venabili, "Itzhak Perlman plays Partita for Violin No. 2, BWV 1004 (Bach)," *Andante Moderato*, January 15, 2015, accessed July 29, 2019, <http://andantemoderato.com/itzhak-perlman-plays-partita-violin-no-2-bwv-1004-bach/>.

²¹ Peter Williams and David Ledbetter, "Thoroughbass," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, published 2001, accessed August 28, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27896>.

The bass line was used in every genre of music in the Baroque period, such as the opera, cantata, oratorio, concerto, etc. Besides keyboard instruments, lower-pitched instruments such as the Baroque cello, viola da gamba, or the bassoon were also doubled the bass line. The role of bass line is extremely important and is the heart of music. The 18th century flutist Quantz stated that the fundamental part (the bass line) is more important and has to be heard more than the other parts.²² The bass line leads the tempo, articulation, rhythm, and melody of the entire piece so that works would not be complete without a bass line. Performers must be a good continuo player in order to be a good musician. Mozart also mentioned that, “Therefore one must not play solo before one can accompany right well.”²³

Likewise, unaccompanied music also has its bass line. Figuring out the bass line from unaccompanied music helps the players’ understanding of the music and inspires players.²⁴ Suzuki (b. 1957), a cellist specialised in Baroque music, stated: “Finding the bass line in the cello suites is great fun for both player and listener. It appears sometimes just like a crossword puzzle.”²⁵ Bach indicated that the guideline for composition in his time was that everything is based on bass line and he always taught his pupils that they should learn the bass line when beginning a composition.²⁶ Bach’s unaccompanied string works are music with embedded polyphony, which means that the melody written on the score comprises the melodic line, counterpoint, and harmony.²⁷ Therefore, these works are “self-accompanied”, and every single melodic line is supported with the accompaniment.²⁸

²² Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, 176.

²³ Mozart, *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, 217.

²⁴ Suzuki, “Forming Dissonance with a Single Note,” 165.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

²⁶ Lester, *Bach’s Works for Solo Violin*, 145.

²⁷ Stacey Davis, “Implied Polyphony in the Solo String Works of J. S. Bach: A Case for the Perceptual Relevance of Structural Expression,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 23, no. 5 (2006): 423, <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2006.23.5.423>.

²⁸ Yates, “Bach’s Unaccompanied String Music,” no. 3 (November 1998): 25-26.

To find the bass line, it would be helpful to think about the harmonic progression besides the basso continuo. The bass line does not mean the root note of chords. However, it would be helpful to look at the chords. Bach realized the embedded bass line through arpeggiation, melodic leaps and multi-stop chords.²⁹ From this method, one should look at the existing notes of the music, followed by finding the lower notes of conjunct motion on the melody through chords progression. Example 2 and 3 show the method Bach used for his lute work BWV 1006a from his unaccompanied violin work BWV 1006: Bach himself had chosen bass line of first two bars through the method of multi-stop chords; the bass line is from melodic leaps in the third bar, and arpeggiation and multi-stop chords in the following bars. It is also the method used in this article.

Example 2. Bach, Partita No. 3, BWV 1006 (1720), Gavotte en Rondeau, bars 1-8 in violin part.



Example 3. Bach, Partita No. 3, BWV 1006a (1735-1740), Gavotte en Rondeau, bars 1-8 in lute part.

The image shows the first two staves of the Gavotte en Rondeau from Bach's Partita No. 3, BWV 1006a. The top staff is the lute part, and the bottom staff is the bass line. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The lute part is written in a style that includes multi-stop chords and arpeggiation. The bass line follows the harmonic progression of the chords.

²⁹ Workman, "J. S. Bach's Lute Suite BWV 1006a," 106.

Bach's Partita No. 2 (BWV 1004) is used for this research to discuss the bass line and its application for interpretation.

4. Bass Line in Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

Partita No. 2 is Italianate in form, with five movements, Allemanda, Corrente, Sarabanda, Giga, and Ciaccona, all based on d minor.

(1) Allemanda

At the very beginning of Allemanda, the bass line starts with a D. D is also the root note of the tonality of Allemanda. In the second half of the first bar, the bass line changes to C-sharp and then comes back to D again in the second bar. When it returns to the second bar, two different options for bass line can be chosen: first, the bass line could be D and B-flat for crotchet plus A for minim; second, the bass line could be D and A for quaver, then B-flat for crotchet plus A for minim (Example 4).

Example 4. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Allemanda, bars 1-2 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays a musical score for the first two bars of the Allemanda movement from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. It consists of three staves: a Violin staff at the top, a Bass line 1 staff in the middle, and a Bass line 2 staff at the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The Violin staff shows a melodic line starting with a quarter note D, followed by eighth notes E, F, G, A, B, C, and a quarter note D. The Bass line 1 staff shows a sequence of notes: a quarter note D, a half note C-sharp, a quarter note D, a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, and a quarter note G. The Bass line 2 staff shows a sequence of notes: a quarter note D, a half note C-sharp, a quarter note D, a quarter note B-flat, a quarter note A, and a quarter note G. The first bar is marked with a '1' above the first note, and the second bar is marked with '2' above the first note and '3' above the last two notes.

In the following bar 3, the bass line remains on D then moves to E and the bass line achieves F on the fourth bar. These three ascending notes, or sometimes four notes (from C-sharp in the previous bar) especially in the Allemanda, appear here and there in all Partita No. 2, like a little hint. Indeed, these notes might not only be “bass notes”, but they also make a melodic line. In bars 9 and 10, a pedal

E remains until bar 11. This pedal supports the whole major chord and the melody, makes a strong cadence from E major to a minor, and also implies to audience that the first half of Allemanda will be landing on the fifth chord scale: a minor (with the third note sharpened). Below (Example 5) a recommended bass line version of the first half from this study is shown.

Example 5. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Allemanda, the first half in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays a musical score for the first half of the Allemanda from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. The score is presented in seven systems, each consisting of a violin part (Vln.) and a suggested bass line. The music is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The violin part begins with a single eighth note in the first bar, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, including triplets. The bass line provides harmonic support with sustained notes and moving lines. The score ends at bar 14.

(2) Corrente

The second movement, Corrente, is fast three beats dance music. When looking for the bass line of Corrente, the first two beats should be focused due to the Corrente style. In the first two bars of Corrente, the bass line starts energetically from crotchet D and minim C-sharp, moves to the second bar with the same rhythm D and A then achieves G on the third bar. The first three bars show the spirit of the whole Corrente: very energetic, spiritual, and cheerful. The following bass line stays as single notes in every bar, A – D – A – B-flat – F – B-flat – E until bar 11(Example 6).

Example 6. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Corrente, bars 1-12 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the Corrente movement. Each system consists of a Violin (Vln) part and a suggested Bass line. The music is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. The first system covers bars 1-4, the second system covers bars 5-8, and the third system covers bars 9-12. The violin parts feature intricate rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The suggested bass lines are simple, consisting of single notes in each bar, which serve as a harmonic foundation for the more complex violin parts.

A pedal F appears in bar 11 and 12, then the music is brought into a different key. Different lengths of rhythm bring out the characteristic varieties of music and give hints to articulation (Example 6). From the beginning of this movement, the

lively bass line rhythm provides violinists with the style of the melody while the following calmer bass line also suggests that violinists should play more legato.

Some of the bass line is not obvious, but attention to the chord progression is helpful. For example, there are many dissonant notes that interfere with the chords in bar 21. In Example 7, it is hard to judge which bass note or bass line it should be. The bass line should be decided through chords. Firstly, it could be a leading tone (C-sharp) to dominant tone (D); secondly, B-flat provides another hint for the bass line. As a result, the bass line could be D.

Example 7. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Corrente, bar 21 in violin part with suggested bass line.



The image shows a musical score for bar 21 of the Corrente from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. It consists of two staves: a Violin (Vln) staff and a Bass line staff. The Vln staff contains a melodic line with three triplet markings. The Bass line staff shows a single note, D, which is the suggested bass line for this bar.

Example 8 is another example from bar 40 to bar 43. These four bars are mainly comprised of descending notes. To find the bass line, scales and chords can be thought through. In bar 40, C-sharp is a hint for the bass note A, D or G which could be the bass note of bar 41 followed by A and B-flat in bars 42 and 43. In conclusion, the bass line from bar 40 to 43 is A – D (G) – A – B-flat.

Example 8. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Corrente, bars 40-43 in violin part with suggested bass line.



The image shows a musical score for bars 40-43 of the Corrente from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. It consists of two staves: a Violin (Vln) staff and a Bass line staff. The Vln staff contains a descending melodic line with four triplet markings. The Bass line staff shows four notes: A, D, A, and B-flat, which are the suggested bass lines for bars 40, 41, 42, and 43 respectively.

(3) Sarabanda

Sarabanda is a relatively slow dance music. The second beat of Sarabanda is usually accented or used by dissonance. Example 9 clearly shows the bass line at the beginning of Sarabanda. It starts from crotchet D and minim G with a strong second beat then C-sharp and G with the same rhythm in the first and second bars. Bar 3 includes the descending bass line D – C – B-flat, then arrives at A in bar 4. Surprisingly however, the bass line does not reach A immediately but moves to a very unusual and unpredictable note, E-flat, then back to A in the second beat. This surprising note gives violinists a hint—it is a note which stands out. Different dynamic textures, articulations or bow strokes should be brought out through playing these two bars.

Example 9. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Sarabanda, bars 1-5 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays a musical score for the first five bars of the Sarabanda from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows bars 1 and 2, and the second system shows bars 3, 4, and 5. Each system includes a violin part (Vln) in treble clef and a suggested bass line in bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4. The violin part features a melodic line with various articulations and dynamics. The suggested bass line provides a harmonic foundation, starting on D, moving to G, then C-sharp and G in the second bar, then D-C-B-flat in the third bar, and A in the fourth bar. In the fifth bar, it moves to E-flat and back to A.

The bass line of the second half shows incredible tone colors as Bach uses many chromatic ascending and descending bass notes to enrich the texture. In Example 10, the bass line from bar 9 to bar 11 is a descending line from A – G – F-sharp – F – E; the bass line from bar 18 to bar 20 is an ascending line from F – F-sharp – G – G-sharp – A. When violinists play the melody with the chromatic bass line, the melody needs to be emphasized and played more like an embellishment.

Example 10. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Sarabanda, bars 9-11 and bars 18-20 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system covers bars 9-11, and the second system covers bars 18-20. Each system consists of a violin (Vln) part on a treble clef staff and a suggested bass line on a bass clef staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The violin part features a characteristic sarabanda rhythm with a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The suggested bass line provides a simple harmonic accompaniment using quarter and eighth notes.

(4) Giga

There are many bass line note and rhythm options for Giga. In the first and second bars, D – C-sharp – A – D, D – E – C-sharp – D or D – A – A – D could be chosen for the bass line (Example 11).

Example 11. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Giga, bars 1-2 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image shows the beginning of a Giga piece, covering bars 1 and 2. It features a violin (Vln) part on a treble clef staff and three different suggested bass lines (Bass line 1, 2, and 3) on bass clef staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 12/8. The violin part starts with a grace note on the first bar and a first fingering (1) indicated above the first note. The suggested bass lines offer different rhythmic and harmonic options for the accompaniment, all using quarter notes.

The following two bars have a descending bass line: D – C – B-flat – A – D, plus a cadence that returns to D (Example 12). From the bass line of the first four bars as presented in Examples 11 and 12, the whole notes are built on the d minor chord with variation.

Example 12. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Giga, bars 3-5 in violin part with suggested bass line.



The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Vln' and contains a complex, fast-moving melodic line with many slurs and a triplet of eighth notes in the first bar. The middle and bottom staves are labeled 'Bass line' and contain a simple, descending sequence of whole notes: D, C, B-flat, A, D. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

In Bach's manuscript, slurs are indicated on the notes which express an interesting rhythmic pattern. The first two bars show the quiver that is the basic beating for Giga. However, in bar 7 (Example 13) there are semi-quiver notes that are grouped together with slurred dotted quiver. Therefore, there are two playing options: first, there can be only simple descending notes B-flat – A – G – F; second, if this interesting pattern from Bach is to be emphasized, the bass line could be dotted quiver B-flat – E – A – D – G – C – F – F.

Example 13. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Giga, bar 7 in violin part with suggested bass line.



The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Vln' and contains a melodic line with a dotted quaver followed by a slurred eighth-note quiver. The middle and bottom staves are labeled 'Bass line 1' and 'Bass line 2' respectively. Bass line 1 shows a simple descending sequence of whole notes: B-flat, A, G, F. Bass line 2 shows a dotted quaver sequence: B-flat, E, A, D, G, C, F, F. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4.

These two options show different results: the first would have a smoother melody and bass line that would present more legato while the second would result in a more vivid and lively style. Some of the semi-quaver notes are not slurred so that the bass line rhythm can be considered a quiver. The combination of the bass line rhythm extends the musical tension and makes Giga more colorful.

(5) Ciaccona

Ciaccona, the last movement of Partita No. 2, is the longest movement among Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin with 64 variations based on an eight-bar ground bass. Before the end of the 18th century, a Ciaccona generally used the variation technique but not the "necessary ground-bass variation".³⁰ It is widely known that the eight-bar ground bass of Bach's famous Ciaccona is D – D – C-sharp – D – B-flat – G – A – C-sharp – D. Example 14 shows that the rhythm of the ground bass is not a traditional Ciaccona rhythm. Bach had complicated the rhythm, melody, and music form of Ciaccona in Partita No. 2.

Example 14. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Ciaccona, bars 1-8 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays musical notation for the first eight bars of the Ciaccona movement from Bach's Partita No. 2, BWV 1004. It is presented in two systems. Each system consists of two staves: the upper staff is for the Violin (Vln) and the lower staff is for the suggested Bass line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system covers bars 1-4, and the second system covers bars 5-8. The violin part features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The suggested bass line provides a steady accompaniment with a specific rhythmic pattern that deviates from the traditional Ciaccona ground bass.

³⁰ Alexander Silbiger, "Chaconne," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, published 2001, last modified September 3, 2014, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05354>.

The bass line of the entire Ciaccona is based on the first eight bars (Example 14), is rich in melody and owns great variety in melody and rhythm. Example 15 shows the original bass line and one of its variations from bar 9 to bar 16.

Example 15. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Ciaccona, bars 9-16 in violin part with suggested bass line.

Different types of bass lines unfold characteristics of the top melody. There are four different types of bass lines in Bach's Ciaccona of Partita No. 2.

The first type involves the use of syncopation where the bass line from bar 9 to bar 16 (Example 15) is more rhythmic and syncopated, and thus the melody could be lighter and more active. The bass line from bar 17 to bar 24 returns to a regular rhythm. Therefore, the melodic line can be played more seriously. After bar 24, the melody becomes more active and is more on the upbeat again from bar 25 to bar 32. Violinists can interpret this passage with a jazzy mood.

The second type of bass line involves a long-grounded note: the bass line rhythm becomes calmer from bar 65 to bar 72, bar 121 to bar 124, and bar 153 to bar 168. With the bass lines in the second type, the top melody is more of an Italian style of embellishment,³¹ the interpretation can be more flexible and free.

³¹ Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music: With Special*

Example 16 shows an example of the second type of “firm rhythm” from bar 65 to bar 72.

Example 16. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Ciaccona, bars 65-72 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays four systems of musical notation, each representing a two-measure phrase. Each system consists of a violin (Vln) staff in the upper position and a suggested bass line staff in the lower position. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The violin parts feature complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth-note runs and slurs. The suggested bass lines are simple, often consisting of a single half note or a dotted half note, providing a steady accompaniment to the violin's intricate figures.

The third type is the pedal bass line. This type of bass line was typical of the Baroque style. Examples 17 and 18 deal with the Violin Sonata, Op. 5, No. 1 by Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) and the violin concerto *La Primavera* by Vivaldi, with both showcasing the use of the pedal bass line.

Emphasis on J. S. Bach (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 544.

Example 17. Corelli, Violin Sonata, Op. 5, No. 1 (1700), 2nd movement (Allegro), bars 58-61.



Example 18. Vivaldi, *La Primavera* (1725), 3rd movement (Allegro), bars 1-3.

Musical score for Example 18, showing multiple staves for different instruments. The score is in G major and 12/8 time. The tempo is Allegro. The music is titled "Danza Pastorale". The instruments are Violino Principale, Violino Primo, Violino Secondo, Alto Viola, and Organo e Violoncello. The score includes tempo markings such as "Allegro Danza Pastorale" and "Allegro con Sordine". The music features a series of eighth notes in the violin parts and a corresponding bass line in the organ and cello parts. The score ends with a fermata over the final notes.

In Ciaccona of Partita No. 2, Bach used the pedal bass line A – D from bar 169 to bar 176 to make an organ-like sound which generates a harmonic acoustics (Example 19).

Example 19. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Ciaccona, bars 169-177 in violin part with suggested bass line.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Example 19. Each system consists of two staves: a Violin (Vln) staff in the upper position and a Bass line staff in the lower position. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The first system covers bars 169-171, the second covers bars 172-174, and the third covers bars 175-177. The violin part features a complex, rhythmic melody with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, while the suggested bass line provides a simple, steady accompaniment of quarter notes.

The fourth type is the harmonic bass line. Bach used the harmonic progression technique from bar 89 to bar 120 and bar 201 to 208. The rhythm of this type of bass line is square. The meaning of the word *arpeggio* marked by Bach shows the tone of harmonic variation (Example 20).

Example 20. Bach, Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 (1720), Ciaccona, bars 201-209 in violin part.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Example 20. Both systems are in a single treble clef staff. The first system, starting at bar 201, is marked with the word 'arpeggio' above the staff. It shows a sequence of chords, each with a different voicing, moving from left to right across the staff. The second system, starting at bar 207, continues the arpeggiated harmonic progression with similar chordal structures.

The four types of bass lines in the Ciaccona of Partita No. 2 shows that Bach does not use the traditional Ciaccona bass line. The various bass lines not only indicate different tempo, dynamics, articulation, and bow strokes, but also provide multi-color and multi-character options for performers.

5. Conclusion

The first unaccompanied violin music appeared in the 17th century and achieved its apex in Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin in the 18th century. There are many similar works of this genre during the Baroque period, such as works by Biber, Westhoff, Playford, Matteis, Pisendel, Bach, and Telemann. Bach's solo violin works were undoubtedly the most significant unaccompanied music for strings as his music involved more complicated structures and demanding techniques than other compositions at the time.³² After the apex of unaccompanied violin music marked by Bach's works, composers turned their interests into other music forms such as sonatas and concertos. It was not until the 20th century that saw the revival of the genre with works written by composers such as Hindemith, Bartók, and Ysaÿe.

Playing music from the perspective of the bass line is one of the characteristics that was extremely crucial during the Baroque period. The bass line plays a key role because it interweaves the tempo, rhythm, harmony, articulation, and style. When playing the bass line, treating the bass line as the melody can create the effect of a "duet". As Quantz says: "Every note belonging to the harmony must coincide with the bass."³³ The bass line is the source of musicality upon which musicians should build their interpretation.

³² Christine Kyprianides, "Review. Georg Philipp Telemann, *Twelve Fantasias for Viola da Gamba solo*, ed. Thomas Fritzsch and Günter von Zadow: The Evolution of a Genre," *Journal of the Viola da Gamba Society of America* 49 (2015-2016): 80, 82-83.

³³ Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, 179.

Bach uses a wide range of different bass lines in his Partita No. 2, BWV 1004, especially in the Ciaccona. In the Allemanda, where the bass line shows *affects* of the whole Partita, conveys feelings of melancholy. After the Allemanda, the rhythm of the bass line in Corrente is energetic and brisk with Italian characteristics. The chromatic feature in the Sarabande displays a melancholy *affect* through the application of the bass line and harmony. The bass line of Giga features different rhythm patterns, bringing out more variety of *passage* groups. The last dance movement, Ciaccona, includes 64 variations with diverse types of bass lines based on an eight-bar ground bass. The different types of bass lines indicate different *affects* of melody and also provide variations in acoustics.

How should solo violin works be interpreted today? This is a question, which challenges many violinists. Solo violin works, especially those of Bach's, require not only a high standard of technique, but also a more than average receptivity from the audience. Besides requiring a high level of technique, violinists need to be able to interpret both the analytical structure and emotional sensibility in music. Moreover, the knowledge of techniques and background of the composition is essential. Performers should accurately comprehend the ideas of composers in their works while at the same time deliver them correctly in their performances. Simultaneously, performers should be able to present good taste in music choices through connecting the original idea by composers with their own creativity. As Quantz says: "The good effect of a piece of music depends almost as much upon the performer as upon the composer himself."³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., 120.

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