

# Telemann Fantasias: a feat of ingenuity and inspiration

## Rachel Brown

In the eighteenth century there was a widespread belief, even amongst players and scholars of repute, that wind instruments could not and should not perform alone on account of their inability to create and sustain harmony. Even cadenzas, the shortest of solo forays, were considered best when limited to one breath! Three of the greatest baroque composers, however, namely J. S. and C. P. E. Bach and Telemann, took a more imaginative approach, creating substantial works during which there is never a moment when the harmony is not clearly implied.

Telemann published these twelve fantasias around 1727/8; he may well have prepared the plates himself and this would have been one of his first ventures in the field of engraving. Undoubtedly these are the flute fantasias mentioned in his autobiography, yet strangely, the only surviving copy of the first edition is mistakenly entitled *Fantasia per il Violino, senza Basso* and Telemann's name is only added in pencil. Telemann in fact published a genuine set for violin in 1735.

Though quite unlike anything else written for the instrument, clearly this earlier set is conceived for the flute; the range never descends below D above middle C, (the lowest note of a baroque flute), thus never using the lowest string of the violin. Surprisingly, whilst nothing is unplayable on the violin, some of the apparently string-like figures such as certain spread chords are somewhat unidiomatic. With multiple stopping each note would normally lie on a different string; where the notes have to be played on the same string they cannot be played together (ex.1). By contrast, the violin fantasias contain much sustained double stopping (ex.2).



Ex.1 Telemann Fantasia in C major, *Largo*, bars 5-8

Largo

Ex.2 Telemann Fantasia for violin in G major, *Largo*, bars 1-13

It is not known whether this earlier collection was intended for a specific flautist, but around this time Telemann composed several sonatas for flute or violin, including the second set of Methodical Sonatas for the Burmester brothers, Rudolf and Hieronymus of Hamburg, who had shown great appreciation of his works.

Each fantasia is complete in itself but the collection together creates a monumental whole. Telemann set each fantasia in a different tonality, ascending from A major through A minor, B minor, B<sup>b</sup> major, C major, D minor, D major, E minor, E major, F# minor and G major to G minor. This cyclic, almost encyclopaedic presentation was a popular mode of composition at the time; alongside the famous Forty-eight Preludes and Fugues and the Two- and Three-Part Inventions by J.S. Bach are lesser-known examples for flute such as Schickhardt's *L'Alphabet de la Musique*, twenty-four sonatas in all major and minor keys, published in London in 1735.

Composers and theorists of the day (such as Rousseau, Charpentier, Mattheson and Rameau) firmly believed that each tonality could assume its own character and produce certain *Affekts*. Telemann, who grew up playing the flute, clearly understood how to play with these powerful elements of Rhetoric. Thus contrasting moods of joy, brilliance, fun, passion, pride, seriousness, coldness, plaintiveness, serenity, tenderness, delicacy and charm as well as rustic and courtly dancing are reflected in not only the choice and juxtaposition of keys but also the chosen register and motives such as bold arpeggios, characterful rhythms or more lyrical legato lines.

The set opens in A major in a bright and at times playful mood reflecting the improvisatory nature of this most fragmentary prelude. The more pastoral and pensive qualities of A major appear in the closing dance, a *Passepied*. The contrast with A minor is stark; the opening arpeggios and implied suspensions of sevenths set a serious, plaintive tone (ex.3).

Grave

Ex.3 Telemann Fantasia in A minor, *Largo*, bars 1-4

B minor continues in a lonely and melancholic vein yet with elements of the bizarre such as the hints towards chromatic glissando in the opening gesture (ex.4).

Largo

Ex.4 Telemann Fantasia in B minor, *Largo*, bars 1-2

Making a glissando by sliding fingers off the holes was described by Tromlitz in 1791 and became more common in the nineteenth century with players such as Charles Nicholson. B<sup>b</sup> major is an inherently sunnier key which could, by turn, be proud or delicate, qualities so closely associated with the *Polonaise* dance of the *Allegro*. C

major brings music full of merriment. The alternating *Presto-Largo* sections leave one in anticipation of the cheeky canonic *Allegro* and the hearty closing dance, a *Canarie*. D minor could hardly be more serious, yet also sweet and tender and devout.

D major was traditionally associated with ebullient, animated, even war-like music. Telemann writes a grand overture in the French style (albeit with an Italian title) with characteristic bold dotted rhythms in the opening and closing sections. The central faster section is almost orchestral in its conception; one can imagine first violins introducing the theme, followed by second violins (at the upbeat to bar 19, and finally the bass entry (upbeat to bar 23). Taking the imaginary image further, the passage from bar 29 could be orchestrated with pairs of instruments, even horns and then oboes! In the E minor fantasia he returns to a plaintive, almost aggrieved mood. Rameau's assertion that E minor was never merry, even in an allegro, is certainly apt here; the central *Spiritoso* is purposeful yet too agitated to be happy. With the tender E major *Affettuoso* appears a translucent light, loving yet wistful, fragile and tinged with sadness. F# minor assumes a languid quality while G major returns to a cheerful disposition and G minor closes in an impressive display of solemnity and power, yet the more intimate moments reveal thoughtfulness and beatitude. Many of the descriptive words used here are taken directly from the theorists yet could have been written expressly for these pieces.

The one-keyed flute, with its tapering bore and eight unequally sized and spaced tone-holes produces a chromatic scale with an inherent unevenness which particularly enhances these contrasts. Most notes outside the home key of D major offer a mellow, pastel shade, yet sharp keys usually have strong resonant notes for their tonic, dominant and subdominant, whereas in flat keys these principal notes lie in the softer tones. Telemann sets these fantasias mostly in sharp keys and even the flat-orientated pieces in D and G minor have strong tonics and dominants, yet he constantly modulates, with an ever-changing array of colours. Even the introduction of one new accidental can subtly shift the balance between light and shade, happiness and sadness, hope and despair. The brief allusion to the introverted key of F major in the last fantasia makes the wild G minor finale all the more powerful. Here we catch a glimpse of the Polish music "in all its barbaric beauty" which so captured Telemann's imagination; "One would hardly believe what wonderfully bright ideas such pipers and fiddlers are apt to get when they improvise, ideas that would suffice for a lifetime".

Telemann might also have expected his performer to improvise stylish embellishments, yet Baroque ornamentation is generally associated with the adagio, and within the fantasias there are surprisingly few true slow movements, (the B<sup>b</sup> major *Andante*, the D minor *Dolce*, the E minor *Largo* and the E major *Affettuoso*) and none of these are exactly bare. Any ornamentation should enhance the style and the character of the piece.

The D major Overture could perhaps be distinguished by French-style *battements* (after leaps), *ports de voix* (appoggiaturas after ascending steps), more ornate trills

and extra roulades (ex.5) whereas some of the short improvisatory fragments might lend themselves more to the Italian-style melismas of irregular number of notes under a slur.

Alla Francese

Ti di - dl - di di - d'l Ti ti - d'l di di - d'l di ti ti - ri ti - ri ti -

ri di - ri - d'l di ti - ri - d'l di - d'l di - d'l di ti - ri di - ri - d'l di ti - ri - d'l di - d'l di - d'l di ti - ri ti - ri - d'l di

Ex.5 Telemann Fantasia in D major, *Alla Francese*, bars 1-6

The German style of ornamentation is governed by the harmony: any notes of the same harmony may be added (or taken away) and any passing notes introduced must be properly prepared and resolved. German ornamental figures are characterised by detailed articulation (harmony notes can be tongued or slurred whilst passing notes must be slurred from or onto harmony notes), rhythmic variety (triplets, demi-semiquavers, Lombardic snaps and syncopation) and nuances (Quantz indicated ornamental notes often softer than the main notes).

The *Adagio* of the A minor Fantasia is a fully ornamented movement in the German style and in that sense, it needs no additional embellishment; Telemann's music is lovely as it stands yet if one wanted to ornament here, it would be more a case of exchange, paring the music down to its basic framework before adding new ideas. Ex. 6 suggests possibilities incorporating some of Telemann's hallmarks; a turn-type figure on the first note, many harmony notes, passing notes with slurs, an occasional unprepared dissonance, a multitude of rhythms and early entry of the following upbeat. The opening of this movement bears striking resemblance to the C major Methodical Sonata Telemann (published just a few years later) and this has been included here for comparison. When adding many notes one must never lose sight of the character!

embellishments in the style of Telemann's Methodical Sonatas

The image shows a musical score with six staves. The top five staves are in treble clef and contain an embellished version of a piece. The sixth staff is in treble clef and is labeled 'bare structure'. Below this is another treble clef staff labeled 'Telemann Fantasia Ad(agi)o' with a '6' above it. The bottom staff is in bass clef and labeled 'imaginary bass part' with a '6' above it. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ornaments, and triplets.



Telemann Methodical Sonata in C major  
Andante

The image shows a musical score for a Telemann Methodical Sonata in C major, Andante. It consists of three staves: two in treble clef and one in bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ornaments, and triplets. The tempo is marked 'Andante'.

Ex.6 Telemann Fantasia in A minor, *Adagio*, bars 1-2 and Telemann Methodical Sonata in C major, *Andante*, bars 1-2

Several of Telemann's embellished movements in the Methodical Sonatas are at a more flowing tempo; Andante, Cantabile etc. There are certainly examples of ornamentation in fast movements, for example in the second movement of Bach's E

major Sonata BWV1035 (ex.7) and by Mozart's time, ornamentation was just as common in an allegro (ex.8).



Ex.7 J.S Bach Sonata in E major BWV 1035, *Allegro*, bars 1-8



Ex.8 Mozart Concerto in G major, K313, *Allegro maestoso*, bars 149-150 and 153-154

So perhaps the many dance movements with binary repeats in the fantasias are ripe for decoration. Both Quantz and Telemann left examples which were heavily ornamented from start to finish, yet Quantz added that “You must never do so in excess, lest the principal notes be obscured, and the plain air be unrecognizable. You must play the principal subject at the very beginning just as it is written. If it returns frequently, a few notes may be added the first time, and still more the second, forming either running passage-work, or passage-work broken through the harmony. The third time you must again desist and add almost nothing, in order to maintain the constant attention of the listeners”.<sup>1</sup> Such ornamentation was meant to be improvised, or at least sound as if it were freshly dreamt up.

The subject of articulation in these flute fantasias is fascinating. Slurs are sparse, surprisingly so. Some movements contain no slurs at all. This may be partially because of Telemann's relative inexperience with engraving; his *Methodical Sonatas* and subsequent publications contain many more. However, it is also true that Baroque composers generally notated fewer slurs than some modern editors would have us believe and that players made use of a wide variety of contrasting tonguing syllables instead.

Conventionally, various grades of *ti* and *di* would be used to differentiate between detached repeated notes or leaps and smooth melodic lines. Pairs of notes could be tongued with *di-ri* and extended to *di-ri-di-ri* or *di-Ri-di-Ri* depending on how the

<sup>1</sup> Quantz, *Versuch*, tr. E. Reilly, *On Playing the Flute*, chapter 14§14

notes are grouped or how you wish to group them. Ex.9 shows how the sort of tonguing patterns suggested by Quantz and Hotteterre can offer a variety of phrasing. The articulation may also play a vital part in bringing out one voice to the foreground and placing another in the background.

Allegro

di - ri di ti di - ri di - ri di - ri di

Allegro

di - ri di - ri di - ri di di - ri di di

Allegro

di ti - ri ti - ri ti ti - ri di - ri di

Ex.9 Telemann Fantasia in A major, *Allegro*, bars 1-2

A good way to practise this is to play the notes of the theme with shape, attack dynamics and hierarchy exactly as you want them. Then play all the notes with your fingers but only blow the thematic notes (shown in red in ex 10), retaining all the detail! Finally add the background (black) notes *pianissimo* and tongued more gently.

Allegro

Ti Ti Ti Ti Ti Ti Ti Ti ti Ti ti Ti ti Ti ti Ti ti Ti ti Ti ti

Ti ti ti Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti di-ri Ti ti ti Ti ti ti

Ex.10 Telemann Fantasia in C major, *Allegro*, bars 1-10

Very fast passages would be tongued with *di-d'l-di-d'l* (see ex.5) but upgraded to *Ti-d'l* for more emphatic moments and interspersed with *ti-ri* wherever the pattern leaps. As with ornamentation, the choice of tonguing should highlight the mood and the character. Of course, in certain contexts (very fast notes or passing notes) slurs are quite appropriate and may well have been added by players of the day. Ex. 5 shows some optional articulation.

The D major overture also raises questions of double-dotting over which there was some disagreement even in the eighteenth century. The single quavers in bars 13, 86, 88 and 93 may have been intended to be played as printed or as semi-quavers following a double dotted crotchet (since the notation of double-dotted notes had not yet been adopted). The notation of the groups of three fast notes in bars 7 and 8 and also at the end of bars 85 and 87 is imprecise. Modern editions usually print these as triplets (demi-semi-quavers in bars 7 and 8 but semi-quavers in bars 85 and 87). Telemann simply notates a dotted note (quaver or crotchet) followed by three fast

notes (semi-quavers, played late) and in all probability these were meant to be the same. It is also possible that he may have intended a dotted tied note! Quantz not only advocated exaggerating dotted rhythms but also actually leaving a gap where string players would need to retake the bow. (see ex.11).

bar 7

Telemann's notation



modern editions



another possibility



as Quantz describes



bar 85

Telemann's notation



modern editions



another possibility



as Quantz describes



### Ex.11 Telemann Fantasia in D major, *Alla Francese*, bars 7-8 and 85-86

Telemann is highly inventive in the many ways he creates or implies harmony, dissonance and counterpoint. As well as regular arpeggiation he notates spread chords (uncommon in flute music, ex.1) or implies double or triple-stopping with frequent use of Lombardic rhythms where the notes are sounded close together (ex.12).

Allegro



Andante



Ex.12 Telemann Fantasia in E major, *Allegro*, bars 43-50 and Fantasia in B<sup>b</sup>, *Andante*, bar 10

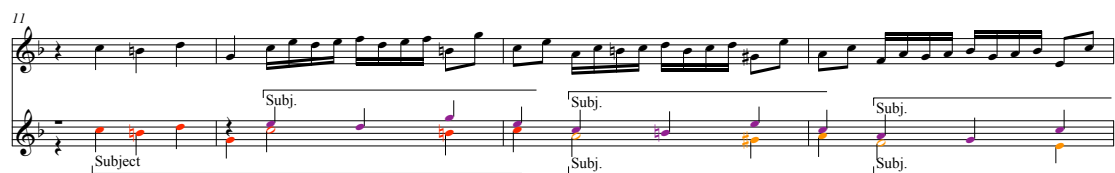
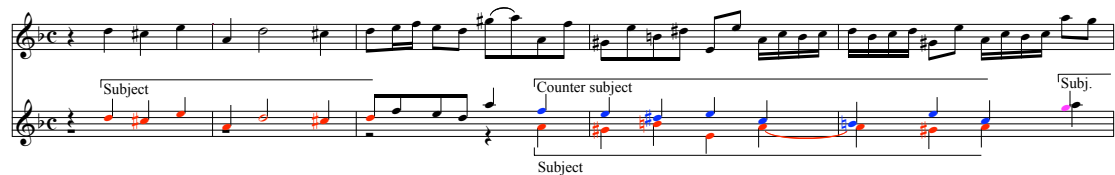
Treble and bass lines are created by interspersing high and low notes and we hear pedal points (ex.13) and suspensions (ex.3) through the clever deployment of the two parts.

*Allegro*



Ex.13 Telemann Fantasia in G minor, *Allegro*, bars 16-18

Telemann even constructs ambitious imitative contrapuntal movements such as a canon (C major *Allegro*, ex.10), many fugato passages and a strict fugue, the D minor *Allegro*, with audible subject, countersubject, modulation, development of motives, hints of inversions, and stretto (entries sooner than expected), concluding with the opening notes of the main theme in retrograde (backwards) (ex.14).



Ex.14 Telemann Fantasia in D minor, *Allegro*

Though none are labelled as such, many movements are composed in various forms of the dance suite, so popular at the time, and so easily recognisable to the eighteenth-century public. The tempo markings, therefore, may be seen as confirmation, qualification or modification of the norm. The F# minor *A tempo giusto* is an Italian *Corrente*, to be played ‘at the conventional speed’ with flowing quaver motion in 3 time and the typical opening gesture, whereas the following *Presto* is noticeably speedier than a normal Gavotte, with crotchet motion commencing half-way through the bar. According to Quantz a Gavotte would traditionally be played a little slower than a Rigaudon or Bourée which would be bar ( $\text{♩}$ ) = 80.

In his book, *Versuch eiener Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752), Quantz laid down guidelines for various tempi, measured (before the invention of the metronome) by the pulse beat of a healthy person, taken after lunch! He calculated this as 80 beats per minute, though he admitted “I do not pretend that a whole piece should be measured off in accordance with the pulse beat; this would be absurd and impossible”. A speed of  $\text{♩} = 80$  for the pieces in the style of a Rigaudon or Bourée, such as the A minor *Allegro* or the E major *Vivace* would be ambitious! Quantz suggests they should be played gaily, using a light bow-stroke. The *Vivace* marking suggests a lively but less hurried speed.

In his introduction to the *Musica Rara* edition, Barthold Kuijken lists many of the dances occurring in these Fantasias, including a slow Allemande (E minor *Largo*), a tender Sarabande (E major *Affettuoso*), several Bourées and rondeaus, a Minuet (F# minor *Moderato*) and slightly faster Passepiéd (A major *Allegro*), a Gigue (B minor *Allegro*) and related Canarie (C major second *Allegro*). To this list I would add the Hornpipe-like D minor *Spiritoso* and two Polonaises (B<sup>b</sup> major *Allegro* and E minor *Allegro*).

An eighteenth-century performer would have been well acquainted with the character of each dance. It helps to have a sense of pulse, to know where the strong beats lie and to have an awareness that whilst a few of these beats may have been heavy, such as the rumbustuous jumps in a Canarie, marked by short, sharp bow-strokes (at bars 8, 10, 30 and 32), many main beats in the music translate into poised steps up onto the ball of the foot (not a weighty downward accent).

The contrast in the stresses and characters of the 3-time dances is particularly interesting. Three beats in a bar typically produces a strong-weak-weak pattern in a Minuet, or a Passepiéd. In a Sarabande, a stately slower dance (E major *Affettuoso*), the interest sometimes falls on the second beat of a bar, with a higher or longer note (a minim or dotted crotchet) eg strong-Strong--. The Polonaise is a stunning dance to watch; proud, gutsy and exhilarating, marked by sweeping leg movements, but with graceful, more delicate, intimate contrasting sections. Typically, the phrases are four bars long, only resolving on the second or third beat of the fourth bar. At that point in the dance there may be a characteristic heavy jump (second beat) and a click of the heels (third beat).

Aside from these more formal structures, Telemann sometimes adopts a more vocal style for instance, in the B<sup>b</sup> major arioso *Andante*, the folk-song-like C major *Largos*, the quasi-recitative ending of the A minor *Adagio* and the rhetorical outbursts, whether questions (B minor *Largos*), or exclamations (G minor *Graves*). The *Adagio* before the *Vivace* in the G major Fantasia (ex.15) is so short (1¼ bars) that many modern editors have felt obliged to complete the bar themselves! There is nothing wrong in that but a sudden interruption may be even more effective. These little improvisatory fragments which pepper these pieces add a final touch of fantasy.

Adagio



Ex.15 Telemann Fantasia in G major, *Adagio*

Such originality and inventiveness are rare indeed. The ‘Music Tyrants’ who for a while persuaded Telemann’s mother to ban all musical activities had every reason to be jealous, predicting he would turn into a wandering minstrel, a charlatan, a tightrope dancer or a marmot catcher! The Telemann flute Fantasias were unique in their day,

and remain so, using the flute in an unorthodox way to create a compositional tour de force.

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