

Baroque Adaptations in Jazz and Rock

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Incorporating elements of Baroque music into later popular forms has proven to be of interest to many musicians over the years. The melodic line shapes, counterpoint, and harmonic rhythms of Baroque music, besides having their own intrinsic value, are particularly amenable to adaptation and interpretation. Harmony can be modified, reharmonization is a staple of development sections in classical music and is fundamental to jazz. Melody is the one true constant threading from the Baroque era to today. We see several Baroque melodies that not only survive but thrive in modern adaptations.

The composer Jeremy Walker said "I think both musics [jazz and early Baroque] are particularly performance-based. Improvisation is at the root of development. Both could be seen as stemming from the bass and an improvised accompaniment ... It was really challenging to bridge the timbrel (sic) differences and especially the rhythmic differences. Jazz is singular in its approach to the beat. But the through-line for me, and it really runs through all music from all genres, is melody. That was the bridge between centuries, languages and genre."

It is also worth noting, as Jordan Smith wrote in his CMUSE blog, "It's sometimes forgotten that most of the greatest composers in classical music were also superb improvisers. Bach amazed audiences with his improvisational keyboard skills...." This point is reemphasized by Vaughn Ormseth who observes at Minnesota Public Radio that "On the surface, early music and jazz don't appear to have so much

in common. The former has origins in the urbane chambers of church and court, the latter in more boisterous zones of the street and cabaret. But in fact, the two share a deep kinship — in spirit as well as in practice. Jazz's connection with Renaissance and Baroque music, all propelled by improvisation, is more fundamental than they are with later genres of classical music....”

There are numerous examples of adaptations of Baroque music in jazz, pop, and rock music available for consideration. Much of the heavy metal and prog rock genres exhibit aspects of Baroque influence in a general sense, especially harmonic and melodic material inspired by the Baroque. For the purposes of this paper we will eschew consideration of more generic ideas of Baroque influence and confine our attention to wholesale adaptations of discrete Baroque works.

A unanimous agreement that such an undertaking is artistically valid or satisfying cannot be found. Reinterpreting the music of the past invites a degree of criticism from the reactionary “purist” camp equal in passion to the criticism from the camp of forward-lookers who don’t wish to relive the past, but there is no doubt that a lively tradition exists of merging Baroque elements with subsequent musical genres. This is not a recent development. While not an exhaustive catalog, we will trace a lineage extending centuries past the widely accepted end of the Baroque era circa 1750.

There are many different metrics for determining success, after all, and an argument can be made that popularity and record sales totals are a persuasive measure of musical success. The music of J.S. Bach, in particular, has been adapted over the years to take advantage of changing tastes and styles while reverently

connecting contemporary performance practice with the greatness of the past's musical heritage, while proving commercially viable. Please note that J.S. Bach headed a musical family which gave us other composers named Bach. Since J.S. Bach is such an important figure in Baroque music, the reader should read any occurrence of the Bach name as referring to J.S. Bach. Any other Bachs will be identified in the text.

Charles Gounod's "Ave Maria" was published in 1853 as "Méditation sur le Premier Prélude de Piano de S. Bach." His setting of the Latin prayer "Ave Maria" became quite popular and has been recorded many times. 137 years after Bach's composition, Gounod created a new melody which he superimposed over a nearly intact version of the Prelude No. 1 in C major, from Book I of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier (WTC), nearly intact as he included the notorious "Schwencke measure." This is a measure inserted after measure 22 in editions appearing after 1783 and attributed to Christian Friedrich Gottlieb Schwencke, a copyist. This attribution is not certain but has become common among musicologists.

Ferruccio Busoni published the Bach-Busoni Editions in two collections. The 25-volume Busoni Ausgabe was published beginning in 1894, and the Bach-Busoni Gesammelte Ausgabe was published in 6 volumes in 1916, and subsequently in 7 volumes in 1920. A separate publication in 1916 of six Bach transcriptions was titled *Sechs Tonstücke*. Filled with piano transcriptions of Bach's keyboard music and performance suggestions, practice exercises, musical analysis, and an essay on the art of transcribing Bach's organ music for piano, these editions were a pioneering

adaptation of the keyboard practices of Bach's time acknowledging the ascendancy of the piano as the predominant keyboard of the post-Baroque eras.

Although now attributed to Christian Petzold, the "Minuet in G major" from Bach's Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach was long believed to be Bach's own composition. Regardless of the actual composer, the piece is inextricably linked to Bach in the public's mind. The minuet was the musical source material for "A Lover's Concerto," first popularized by bandleader Freddy Martin in the 1940s. The addition of lyrics by American songwriters Sandy Linzer and Denny Randell gave us the pop hit of the 1960's. The melody is unmistakable despite being changed from the original 3/4 meter to 4/4. The meter change was certain to appeal more to teen dancers in the 1960's who were not waltzing as often as twisting. The 1965 release of "A Lover's Concerto" by The Toys was a hit in the United States and United Kingdom, peaking on the US Billboard Hot 100 chart at number 2, eventually selling more than two million copies and receiving gold record certification by the R.I.A.A. Subsequent recordings were released by many, including Cilla Black, Kelly Chen, the Delfonics, the Fleetwoods, Audrey Hall, Doyle Lawson, the Lennon Sisters, Mrs. Miller, the Peanuts, the Pearls, Perrey and Kingsley, the Supremes, Carla Thomas, Tight Fit, Leslie Uggams, and Sarah Vaughan. The tune achieved international popularity as Karina released a Spanish version, "Concierto para enamorados" in 1966. A German version, "So Fängt Es Immer An" was also released in 1966 by Alma Cogan. Kai Lind released a Finnish version, "Aamukonsertto." A Japanese version was released by the group SA under the title "Delight." American singer Neil Sedaka released an Italian version, "Lettera bruciata." "A Lover's Concerto" appeared in the 1995 film Mr.

Holland's Opus when Mr. Holland uses the song to demonstrate the importance of classical music to his 1960's high school orchestra students.

"Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" is the common title for music from Bach's cantata "Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben," BWV 147 ("Heart and Mouth and Deed and Life"), composed by between 1716 and 1723. The English pianist Myra Hess published transcriptions in 1926 for piano solo and in 1934 for piano duet. An adaptation for rock instruments was released as "Joy" in 1972 by Apollo 100 and was a top ten hit for them. On same album is their arrangement titled "Air for The G String."

The well-known "Air on the G String" is a late-18th century arrangement by August Wilhelmj of the second movement of Bach's Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068. This melody was transposed by Wilhelmj to the key of C major to take advantage of the violin's open G string. Besides the earlier Apollo 100 example, this piece has been adapted as "Everything's Gonna Be Alright" by the German band Sweetbox.

The French pianist, Jacques Loussier, deserves notice for his numerous jazz recordings of his Baroque musical adaptations beginning in 1959. His many releases include:

- 1959 – Play Bach No. 1 (Decca SS 40 500)
- 1960 – Play Bach No. 2 (Decca SSL 40 502) (n/a 2003)
- 1961 – Play Bach No. 3 (Decca SSL 40 507)
- 1963 – Play Bach No. 4 (Decca SSL 40.516)
- 1964 – Play Bach No. 5 (Decca SSL 40.205 S)

- 1965 – Play Bach aux Champs Élysées (Decca Coffret, two albums, SSL40.148)
- 1986 – Bach to the Future (Start CD SCD2)
- 1987 – Bach to Bach (Start CD Original Live in Japan SMCD 19)
- 1988 – Brandenburg Concertos (Limelight-Japan CD 844 058-2, Decca)
- 1988 – The Greatest Bach Partita No.1 in B Flat major BWV 825 – Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor BWV 1067 (Limelight CD 844 059-2, Decca)
- 1993 – Play Bach 93 Volume 1 (Note Productions CD 437000-2)
- 1993 – Play Bach 93 Volume 2 (Note Productions CD 437000-3)
- 1994 – Play Bach Aujourd'hui Les Thèmes en Ré (Note Productions CD 437000-4)
- 1996 – Lumières Messe Baroque du 21ième siècle (Note Productions CD 43707)
- 1997 – Jacques Loussier Plays Vivaldi (Telarc CD 83417)
- 2000 – Bach's Goldberg Variations (Telarc CD 83479)
- 2001 – Baroque Favorites. Jazz Improvisations: Works by Handel, Marais, Scarlatti, Marcello, Albinoni (Telarc CD 83516)
- 2002 – Handel: Water Music & Royal Fireworks (Telarc CD 83544)

There is a lack of consistency in some naming conventions across my examples. I have attempted to make these as consistent as possible but much of my source material is presented as found.

Ward Swingle holds an enormous space in the history of jazz adaptations of Baroque music. An American vocalist and pianist living abroad in Paris, France, he

founded The Swingle Singers in 1962. The group of eight singers began as session musicians providing background vocals for acts including Charles Aznavour, Michel Legrand and Edith Piaf. They sang through Bach's WTC as a sight-reading exercise and found that the music had great potential for jazz adaptation. Their first album, "Jazz Sébastien Bach," released in 1963, included Swingle's arrangements of Bach's pieces for SATB with a jazz rhythm section:

- Fugue in D minor, Contrapunctus 9 from The Art of the Fugue
- Prelude for Organ Chorale No. 1
- Aria from Suite No 3 in D
- Prelude No 12 in F minor from The WTC, Book II
- Bourrée II from The English Suite No 2
- Fugue No 2 in C minor from The WTC, Book I
- Fugue No 5 in D from The WTC, Book I
- Prelude No 9 in E from The WTC, Book II
- Sinfonia from The Partita No 2
- Prelude No 1 in C from The WTC, Book II
- Canon (4-Part Canon BWV 1073)
- Two Part Invention No 1 in C
- Fugue No 5 in D from The WTC, Book II

The Swingle Singers followed this up in 1964 with the album "Going Baroque." This set of Swingle's arrangements was not confined to the music of Bach, other Baroque era composers of note were represented among the tracks:

- Badinerie from Ouverture H-Moll, BWV 1067 (Bach)

- Aria and Variations ("The Harmonious Blacksmith") from Cembalo suite in E-Dur (G.F. Händel)
- Gigue from Cello suite Nr. 3 C-Dur, BWV 1009 (Bach)
- Largo from Cembalo konzert F-Moll, BWV 1056 (Bach)
- Praeludium Nr. 19 A-Dur BWV 864 (Bach)
- Praeambulum from Partita Nr. 5 G-Dur BWV 829 (Bach)
- Fuga from Concerto Op. 3 'L'Estro_Armonico' Nr. 11 D-Moll (Vivaldi)
- Allegro from Concerto Grosso Op. 6 A-Moll (G.F. Händel)
- Praeludium Nr. 7 Es-Dur BWV 876 (Bach)
- Solfegietto C-Moll (C.P.E. Bach)
- Frühling (Spring) (W.F. Bach)
- Praeludium Nr. 24 H-Moll BWV 893 (Bach)

1964 also saw the release of "Collaboration" by the Modern Jazz Quartet (MJQ) with guest guitarist Laurindo Almeida. John Lewis was the pianist, principal arranger, and composer of the MJQ. This album includes Lewis' arrangement of Bach's Fugue in A minor. Given the MJQ's own interests in Baroque interpretations, their later collaboration with Swingle was almost inevitable, more on this later.

The Swingle Singers released "Rococo Á Go Go" in 1966. This album featured Swingle's arrangements of many notable Baroque era composers:

- Concerto for flute, violin & strings in E minor ("Concerto à Sei"), TWV 5 (Telemann)
- 21e ordre for harpsichord (Pièces de clavecin, IV) (Couperin)

- Overture: La Lyra, suite for strings & continuo in E flat major, TWV 55
(Telemann)
- Work(s) ~ Unspecified Fugue in D minor (Muffat)
- Trio for flute, violin & continuo in E major (Essercizii Musici No. 9/1) (Telemann)
- Concerto for oboe d'amore, strings & continuo in A major, TWV (Telemann)
- Le Coucou, rondeau for harpsichord in E minor (Pièces de clavecin, Suite N
(Daquin)
- Sonata for recorder & continuo in E minor, SF. 764 (Op. 2/4 or in D min)
(Marcello)
- Sonata in C minor: Allegro (Quantz)
- Sonata in C minor: Andante Moderato (Quantz)
- Sonata in C minor: Vivace (Quantz)

Recorded in 1966 and released in 1967, "Baroque Sketches" by Art Farmer contains several adaptations arranged by Benny Golson. According to the Penguin Guide to Jazz, "Art Farmer enjoyed playing pieces with strong melodies, and the original concept of *Baroque Sketches* was to adapt the music of Johann Sebastian Bach into a jazz setting..." The track "Fuja XI" is credited to Bach although this is not a title which Bach used. Another track, "Sinfonia" is also credited to Bach. Sinfonia is a title used frequently by Bach although Farmer was not more specific about which Sinfonia served as the source in the liner notes or track listing. The track, "Jesu" is clearly an adaptation of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," which this paper covered earlier in more depth.

The collaboration mentioned earlier finally happened when the Swingle Singers recorded with the MJQ in 1966, giving us the album "Place Vendôme." This set includes:

- Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, (aka "Air on the G String") BWV 1068 (J. S. Bach) (another frequently utilized Bach melody)
- "The Musical Offering" (Musikalisches Opfer), for keyboard and chamber instruments, BWV 1079 (J.S Bach)
- "When I am Laid in Earth" (from *Dido and Aeneas*), soprano aria ("Dido's Lament") (Henry Purcell)

The year 1968 saw "Switched on Bach" released by Walter (later Wendy) Carlos a transcription of Bach's music for the Moog synthesizer. Synthesizers were new and cutting-edge in 1968 and this album was a technical *tour-de-force* at the time. It was also a big seller, earning Platinum record certification in 1968 for selling over one million copies. The recordings include Bach's:

- "Sinfonia to Cantata No. 29"
- "Air on a G String" (some versions of this melody are called "Air on the G String")
- "Two-Part Invention in F major"
- "Two-Part Invention in B-Flat major"
- "Two-Part Invention in D minor"
- "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" (one of the most frequently adapted melodies of Bach)
- "Prelude and Fugue No. 7 in E-Flat major" (From Book I of The WTC)
- "Prelude and Fugue No. 2 in C minor" (From Book I of The WTC)

- "Chorale Prelude 'Wachet Auf'"
- "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major - First Movement"
- "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major - Second Movement"
- "Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major - Third Movement"

The Swingle Singers revisited Bach with their 1968, "Back to Bach. This album contained Swingle's arrangements of the following Bach compositions:

- "From Concerto for 2 violins, strings & continuo in D minor," BWV 1043
- "Prelude and Fugue, for keyboard No. 10 in E minor" (WTC I), BWV 855
- "Choral" from Cantata No. 147, "Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben," BWV 147
- "Gavotte" from Partita for solo violin No. 3 in E major, BWV 1006
- "Prelude and Fugue, for keyboard No. 1 in C major" (WTC I), BWV 846
- "Fugue" from Prelude and Fugue, for organ in G major, BWV 541
- "Adagio" from Sonata for violin & keyboard No. 3 in E major, BWV 1016
- "Prelude and Fugue, for keyboard No. 3 in C sharp major" (WTC I), BWV 848
- "Prelude" from "Nun komm der Heiden Heiland" (II), chorale prelude for organ (Achtzehn Choräle No. 8), BWV 659
- "Prelude and Fugue, for keyboard No. 21 in B flat major" (WTC I), BWV 866

The English band, Jethro Tull, was led by flautist, singer, guitarist, and composer Ian Anderson. He arranged Bach's "Bourée in E minor" for the band and included it on their second album, "Stand Up" in 1968. This arrangement was a staple of their live shows for decades. Anderson and Jethro Tull released alternate versions of the piece on subsequent albums, "A Little Light Music" (1992) and "The Jethro Tull Christmas Album" (2003).

The MJQ continued exploring their interest in Bach's music with the 1973 release of "Blues on Bach. Lewis' contributed five arrangements for this album based on Bach's melodies:

- "The Old Year Has Now Passed Away" became the track "Regret?"
- "Sleepers Wake" became the track "Rise Up in the Morning"
- "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" became "Precious Joy" (and is another testament to the popularity of this melody)
- "Klavierbüchlein für Wilhelm Friedemann Bach" as "Don't Stop This Train"
- "The WTC" (unspecified) as "Tears from the Children"

Wendy Carlos followed up her earlier success with 1973's "Switched on Bach II," a further exploration of Bach's music performed on synthesizers. Her arrangements this time were:

- Selections from Suite No. 2 in B minor, BWV 1067: Badinerie, Minuet, and Bourrée
- Two-Part Inventions: in A minor, BWV 784, in A major, BWV 783
- "Sheep May Safely Graze", from Cantata No. 208, BWV 208
- Suite from Anna Magdalena Notebook (attribution to Bach is questionable):
Musette in D major, BWV Anh. 126, Minuet in G major, BWV Anh. 114 (one of the most popular Baroque melodies reimagined for popular music)
- "Bist du bei mir", BWV 508
- Marche in D major, BWV Anh. 122
- Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 in D major, BWV 1050: Allegro, Affetuoso, and Allegro

The Cuban band, Tiempo Libre, combined jazz and Bach with Afro-Cuban stylings to create the album “Bach in Havana,” released in 2009. Their arrangements, and the Baroque sources for them, included:

- Fuga Cha-cha-chá (Sonata in D minor)
- Air on a G String Bolero (Orchestral Suite in D major)
- Clave in C minor Guaguancó (Prelude in C minor)
- Gavotte Son (French Suite in G major)
- Mi Orisha 6/8 Batá (French Suite in C minor)
- Guaguancó (Minuet in G) (another example of the enduring popularity of this melody)
- Olas de Yemayá Batá (Prelude in C major)
- Baqueteo con Bajo Danzón (Cello Suite No. 1)
- Timbach Timba (Prelude in D major)
- Kyrie Batá (Mass in B minor)

This brings us to 2018 when I have undertaken my own project with Bach’s music. After identifying pieces in the Two-Part Inventions and The WTC which were good candidates for my treatment, I arranged them for jazz bass duet. Bach’s melodies are preserved with occasional octave transpositions or switching voices between the parts for increased playability on the double bass. Certain sections are inserted as space where jazz improvisation takes place. These sections utilize a harmonic structure derived or inspired by Bach’s harmonic rhythms. These arrangements are playable as

concert works or can serve advanced students as etudes. My completed arrangements are

- Preludio II from The WTC
- Fuga X from The WTC
- Invention I from the Two-Part Inventions
- Invention III from the Two-Part Inventions.

Researching this topic has increased my understanding of the rich history of adapting Baroque music for modern styles. There is such a wealth of material from the Baroque period that there are practically unlimited possibilities for the modern arranger. Many previous efforts have also been very popular ensuring that fear of commercial failure need not deter this undertaking. There is always the chance that an encounter with a modern adaptation will kindle an interest in the casual listener. This adaptation may well introduce Baroque music to an audience that would otherwise remain oblivious to it. Anything which keeps the music of Bach (and Handel, Vivaldi, Couperin, Telemann, and Marcello, among others) relevant should be welcome.

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