

J.s. bach flute sonata in b minor: the development of the baroque flute

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J. S. Bach Flute Sonata in B minor (BWV 1030): the development of the Baroque Flute, the flautists and the music Johann Sebastian Bach (J. S. Bach) is no doubt one of the greatest composers of all times. He composed many works for flute including works for solo flute, flute with harpsichord and/or continuo and, two flutes and harpsichord. However, there has been a controversy, over the flute works, whether they were composed solely by the composer, assisted by someone or under the guidance of J. S. Bach. In addition, some scholars doubted that some of works are not written for flute and they are actually transcribed for flute by the composer. Especially, the Sonata in B minor (BWV 1030) raises most number of controversies. The J. S. Bach flute compositions are standard repertoire for the flute even today. As a professional flute player, it is very important to have comprehensive knowledge on the background of these works because they directly affect the way of interpreting them.

By reviewing the development of Baroque flute and analyzing the time period of the compositions would greatly help flutists to have a deeper understanding on these important repertoire in flute especially the B minor sonata (BWV 1030). The development of the instrument, Baroque flute, plays no doubt very important role on influencing the work written for it. The difference in range, tonality, mechanisms greatly affect the compositions written for it. Unlike other wind instruments, the Baroque flute was developed later than others.

Since it is made differently, it is definitely impossible to apply the styles of other instruments on the Baroque flute. Some research suggested that J. S. Bach has little familiarity of the flute and flute players because, although the <https://assignbuster.com/js-bach-flute-sonata-in-b-minor-the-development-of-the-baroque-flute/>

style of the compositions are similar to the other pieces of the composer, the flute works do not show that he understands the characteristic and the quality of the instrument. 1 And, the lack of knowledge of the flute would probably be because the composer did not listen much works for flute and meet flutists in where he worked.

As mentioned above, the development of Baroque Flutes has great impact on how the pieces were written for it. Consequently, it is impossible to overlook this element when doing this research. " Flute" is a general term for a large and diverse woodwind instrumentalfamilyof which players blow air across the surface of any hollow object to produce sound. The appearance of the instrument, not only in western music, is found all over the globe like di-zi in China.

In Western music, flute plays an important role from ancient Greek music to contemporary music nowadays. The design, uses and playing styles keep changing even today. As one of the oldest instruments in Western music, " flutes" first appear in a picture of a shepherd playing the flute from the sermons of St Gregory of Nazianzus in a manuscript of early eleventh century.

It is mostly associated with nature and pastoral life. In Renaissance, flute was one of the instruments in mixed ensemble. More importantly, it played a notable role in sacred concerti or sacred symphonies. Johann Hermann Schein (1586-1630), one of J. S. Bach's predecessors, composed seven ensemble works that featured a transverse flute which is always assigned to the second voice. This tradition went on to the Baroque era and solo flute works became more popular from 1670. There were large changes in its <https://assignbuster.com/js-bach-flute-sonata-in-b-minor-the-development-of-the-baroque-flute/>

mechanisms. The new instrument is now built in three or four sections instead of one piece; it is modified from a large cylindrical bore to a conical bore in which the diameter of the headpiece was greater than the foot piece which improves the tuning of the upper notes; most importantly, one key was added in the foot piece so there is an extra note which the little finger of the right hand cannot reach originally and it produces the new note $d\#'$. These inventions are very important. However, there is a common misunderstanding, however, regarding "the flute" as a single instrument. In fact, it refers to an instrumental family in the Baroque Period. There are, generally speaking, eight different kinds of flutes including concert flute, descant flute and flute d'amour. Different kinds of flutes appeared in different pitches.

In the music that Bach wrote for flute, he did not, like all the composers at that period of time, specify the type of flute they writing for. In addition, there is a possibility that different flutes were used in different performances. All flutes were written as if they were in the key of D especially in the first quarter of the 18th century. As a result, it is difficult to judge which flute the composer had in mind from the music.

In the journal "J. S. Bach's Compositions for Solo Flute: A Reconsideration of Their Authenticity and Chronology" by Robert L. Marshall, he suggests: "It is still widely believed that Bach wrote eight works for the solo flute. But the view that has prevailed among Bach specialists for the past fifteen years is that the rather similar Sonatas for flute and harpsichord obbligato in G Minor (BWV 1020) and E Flat Major (BWV 1031) were probably composed by someone else-most likely Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach--and that the Sonata in <https://assignbuster.com/js-bach-flute-sonata-in-b-minor-the-development-of-the-baroque-flute/>

C Major for flute and continuo (BWV 1033) was written by one or two of Bach's students (one of them, again, might have been Emanuel Bach), presumably in part under the composer's active supervision and intervention. "

This suggestion probably comes from the lack of normal musical style in his writing. Moreover, his writing shows no understanding of the qualities of the instrument. However, this argument seems invalid when considering the type of flute Bach was written for. The first flute solo work by Bach, Partita in a minor (BWV 1013), was written between about 1720 and 1730. He was one of the first German composers who started composing music for solo flute. This may be stimulated by the new four-piece design of the Baroque flute. The instrument has an advanced feature to have an extended footjoint giving the note c' however, Bach did not use this new feature in his B minor flute sonata (BWV 1030). Also, its middle joint has different length and can be replaced so that the pitch of the instrument can be altered to accommodate different pitches in different areas. Moreover, it now has a clearer and accurate tone. Fast passages and big leaps can now be played with ease.

This is probably one of the reasons why there are more compositions for solo flute. In addition to the development of the instrument, flautists' involvement plays another crucial role in flute music composition. Bach first worked with flute players in Cothen. The Prince of Cothen happened to be a keen musician who was not in favor of elaborate church music, so Bach concentrated on instrumental music. Interestingly, the flautists were considered assets to the court because the salaries of the flautists in the <https://assignbuster.com/js-bach-flute-sonata-in-b-minor-the-development-of-the-baroque-flute/>

courts were around three times higher than other musician. And, in this Cothen period (1717-1723), flute appeared as a solo instrument in his Brandenburg Concerto No. 5 (1719) and the B minor Suite for flute (BWV 1067).

Later, the “ violinlization” of music in Paris was taken place of which a style characterized by constant semiquaver and arpeggiated passagework in Dresden. This style was achieved by the new Baroque flute. Bach moved to Leipzig in 1723 and he met new flautists there and started composing a large amount of flute chamber music. They begin with the Flute sonata in E minor (BWV 1034) dated c. 1724. Then, the later works are the C major (c. 1731), Eb major (1730-34), B minor and A major sonatas (c. 1736). These pieces seem match well with the larger-bored four-joint flutes with the most effective range.

However, two of Bach’s flute chamber works do raised some questions with the fact that if they were written for flute because there is more than one score written by the composer and they seem not written for flute. They are the sonata in B minor (BWV 1030) and sonata in G minor (BWV 1020). The sonata BWV 1030 is the most important one. There are two scores written for the keyboard part, one in B minor and the other one in G minor. Some Oboists claimed that the G minor is the original version of the sonata for oboe and it is transposed for flute later in B minor. However, there is evidence that flute was a transposing instrument and there is no reason for Bach to write two separate version of music for different instrument. But, as mentioned before, Baroque flute is a family of instruments. There is a possibility that the piece is written for flute but that is not the concert flute.

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Every instrument's ideal sound is to emulate the "singing quality" of the human voice - the music was written in a range that more suitable in lower range flutes. The sonata in B minor (BWV 1030) particularly has a strong vocal quality which may suggest that the flute part is actually written for the flute d'amour. Like his Church Cantatas, the flute obligatos part is intended for the d'amour.

Flute d'amour is an alto instrument tuned to D at French Chamber pitch. It sounds a major or minor 3rd below the normal pitch of harpsichords, and played at transpositions. But, this is a French tradition of transposing the pieces in the "Clef francoise" with the G on the bottom line. As a result, Bach wrote two separate scores for the flute and keyboard parts in his flute sonata in G minor based on the "Clef italienne". It is understood by the flautists who worked with Bach and they should recognize it at a glance.

To conclude, the B minor flute sonata (BWV 1030) by Bach is written for flute, Flute d'amour precisely. It raised much doubt about this because the composers of the time did not specify what kind of flute they wrote for. And, nowadays, with misunderstanding that "Baroque flute" is a term for a single instrument, people may suggest that this flute piece is not suitable for a particular Baroque flute. However, with a clearer picture of the development of the Baroque flute family, the intention of Bach to write two separate scores and the common practice of the flautists those days, the Sonata in B minor should probably be intended for the Baroque flute, the flute d'amour.