

***Information for Violin Teachers about
Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)
Concerto in A Minor
For Violin Solo and String Orchestra
Op. 3, No. 6; RV 356***

1. Historical Editions

- ◆ There is **no original manuscript (no Urtext)** in existence of this Vivaldi concerto.
- ◆ The **earliest sources** are
 - a. the **English edition** published by Walsh, London, in 1711
 - b. the **Dutch edition** published by Estienne Roger, Amsterdam, in 1711/1712
- ◆ Part of the „L'Estro Armonico“ collection
(12 concertos for one or more solo violins accompanied by string orchestra and basso continuo)

2. Modern Editions

There are more than 25 different editions available via the internet and in music libraries. The **musical texts of the violin solo** part revised by editors like K uchler, Franko und Nachez **differ considerably** as far as bow strokes, ornamentations and figurations are concerned. In some editions, but not in all, these changes compared with the historical editions have been identified.

The **figured bass** which indicates only the bass notes is fully written out in almost all editions, however with great differences among them.

3. Interpretation and musical notation in the Baroque era

Much was required of the performing musicians as far as approach to and realization of the written music was concerned; at the same time, however, they were given much freedom of choice.

Players were expected to **add their own ornamentations, figurations, bow strokes and even improvisations**.

The Basso continuo performer had to *realize* a continuo part by playing upper notes in addition to the indicated bass notes in order to complete the chords or to accompany in a more melodic style, depending on the type of music.

Moreover, most composers of the Baroque era did not write down the music with as much precision as composers did in later days. This holds true in particular for Vivaldi, a prolific composer who, as far as is known, created approximately 770 compositions during his lifetime.

J. S. Bach was an exception. He specified in some of his works even the smallest ornamentation, intending to counteract the sometimes totally inadequate and much too liberal performance practice.

4. Transcriptions during the Baroque period

No less a composer than **J. S. Bach** arranged half of the 12 numbers of Vivaldi's op. 3 (one for 4, two for 3, and 3 for 1 violin) as piano or organ reductions or as concerto for 4 cembali and string orchestra.

He transposed some pieces into different keys, changed basses, harmonies, made the figurations more artistic, cancelled or added occasionally a bar etc.

See the example on the right. The lower system is by Vivaldi, the upper one shows its arrangement by Bach.

The image displays a musical score comparing two versions of a piece. The top system is labeled 'Bach' and 'Largo'. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various ornaments and a more complex harmonic structure. The bottom system is labeled 'Vivaldi' and 'Largo cantabile'. It also has a treble and bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The notation is simpler, with a focus on the melodic line. Below the Vivaldi system, there are two more systems of music, which appear to be further transcriptions or arrangements of the same piece, showing different harmonic and melodic treatments.

5. The edition of Nachez in the SUZUKI VIOLIN SCHOOL

In Volume 4 we find the Vivaldi a minor concerto (1st and 3rd movements) edited by the Hungarian violinist and composer **Tivadar Nachez** (1859 – 1930, student of Joseph Joachim). This particular edition is merely one example of how violinists can realize this concerto.

Overview of the major changes in the violin solo part

In the Suzuki book you find the Vivaldi Concerto edited by Nachez. Below you will see only the passages of the **English edition published by Walsh, London, in 1711.**

1st movement: measures 24-27

Differences in bowing and notes

(some notes are transposed to the octave below or above)

1st movement:
measures 47/49/55-57

Only slight differences

(some notes are transposed to the octave below or above; one note is added in bar 57)

1st movement: measures 60-68

Differences in bowing and notes

(the figurations in the Suzuki book are much more demanding of the student)

3rd movement: measures
38/40/42/44

Only slight differences

(some notes are transposed to the octave below or above)

3rd movement: measures 75-90

Differences in bowing and notes

(the figurations in the Suzuki book are much more demanding of the student)

6. Bärenreiter is the most important among the publishers of Urtext editions. How does this renowned publisher deal with this subject?

Example from a Bärenreiter score (harpsicord part) of the sonata F Major, 3rd movement by Handel:

You find in the

1st line: the **original violin text**

2nd line: an **edited violin part** with bowing marks and ornamentation as **editorial suggestion**

3rd line: the **edited upper part of the figured bass**, fully written out as **editorial suggestion**

4th line: the **original bass text**

Please note the liberal ways of performing the **edited violin part** (2nd line) and the **edited upper part of the figured bass** (3rd line). This approach shows how this movement may have been performed when it was originally written.

Largo

The image shows a musical score for the 3rd movement of the Sonata in F Major by George Frideric Handel, marked 'Largo'. The score is presented in four staves. The first staff is the original violin part. The second staff is an edited violin part with bowing marks and ornaments. The third staff is the original figured bass. The fourth staff is an edited upper part of the figured bass. The score is in 3/2 time and F major. The first system covers measures 1-8, and the second system covers measures 9-16. The figured bass notation includes numbers 6, 6, #, 2, 6, 6, 8, 7, 5 in the first system, and 9, 8, 7, b7, #, 7, 6, 5, 6, # in the second system.

7. What do renowned Baroque specialists have to say on this subject?

Harnoncourt, Nikolaus:

An Urtext edition may be recommended only if a thorough knowledge of the **historically authentic performance in the 18th century** has previously been acquired.

Barthold Kuijken:

Those who stick strictly to the Urtext give the listener a **false impression** of the work . . .

The "pure" Urtext, the source itself, is **not meant for playing** but for studying – as a starting point, not as the ultimate goal of interpretation.

Sigiswald Kuijken:

The delight in playful variations was a basic feature of the Baroque approach to life . . .

We have to bear in mind that the composers did not put down every musical detail; practical decisions were often left to the performer and notations of current playing practice were omitted.

Résumé - not only for Suzuki Teachers:

The Aspect of Musicology

- ◆ An **Urtext** (original manuscript) of the above composition **does not exist**.
- ◆ The relevant literature (works listed at the end) as well as the historically authentic performance practice states clearly that: Vivaldi was a composer and performing musician at the same time. Like most composers of this period he expected other musicians who wanted to perform his works to add their own **ornamentations, figurations and bow strokes**, i.e. to act not only as performers but as **editors** of his music. Those who argue otherwise are confusing Vivaldi with *Johann Sebastian Bach*.
- ◆ In his music for solo violin Bach wrote down **very precisely** even the smallest detail and expected – **against the trend of his time** – his music **to be played as indicated by him and without any changes**.

However, this does not apply to his two sonatas for violin and basso continuo in the New Bach Edition (by Bärenreiter). This contains only the figured bass and thus requires the performer to work out his own interpretation within certain limits.
- ◆ At present, there are five different lists in use for Vivaldi's works. They are by *Peter Ryom*, (abbrev.: RV, first published in 1973), *Antonio Fanna* (F List, 1968), *Marc Pincherle* (P, PS or PV List, 1948), *Ricordi* (RC or PR for *Publisher Ricordi*), and *Mario Rinaldi* (RN or Op., respectively). The fact that a piece is included in one of these lists **does not give any information about whether it is an original manuscript (Urtext), a copy or an edited version**.

Up to now, complete listing of the entire master's works by Vivaldi has not been finished because in many cases their authorship has not been verified or is difficult to verify. Therefore, these lists have to be reviewed and changed again and again.

However, all this has nothing to do with an editorial work including a critical report – as, for example, the New Bach Edition published by Bärenreiter – but can, at best, be compared to the Köchel List for Mozart, the Hoboken List for Haydn or the Deutsch List for Schubert.

Unfortunately, such a works catalogue (it is not more than a numbered listing) is widely mixed up - also by Suzuki teachers – with a musicologically well-founded music edition, which does not exist for Vivaldi.
- ◆ **Transcriptions or practical editions** of the concertos by Vivaldi have a long and respected tradition (remember J.S. Bach's transcription). They want to give an example, how these pieces can be performed. The Hungarian violinist and composer *Tivadar Nachez* (1859-1930, student of Joseph Joachim) edited the Vivaldi a minor concerto, which we find in the Suzuki Violin School, and **changed some**
 - bow strokes
 - notes in figuration passages.

Nachez **did not change** like Bach in his transcriptions of the Vivaldi concertos or *Johann Philipp Hinnenthal* in the Bärenreiter edition

 - the rhythm
 - the harmonies
 - the keys
 - the instrumentation
 - the text of the piece (like adding or cancelling bars).

Compared to these works Nachez is the editor **who sticks the closest to the first edition**.
- ◆ **A piano accompaniment composed by Vivaldi does not exist**. The figured bass can be realized in many completely different ways and styles. In today's standard editions of the Vivaldi concerto it has usually been written out by the editors. This applies also to the Suzuki Violin School. That edition which has many bass octaves is particularly helpful as accompaniment for large groups. Every Suzuki teacher should be free **to choose a differing piano or cembalo edition** or even to accompany with only a bass string instrument.

Instrument-related Pedagogical Aspect

- ◆ The figurations in the Nachez edition (Suzuki book) are much more demanding of the student. He may be much more willing to practice the difficult passages for bow speed, string crossing, velocity and intonation than he would be if he had to do the same through exercises; because usually, children like this exciting piece very much. In addition, the grade of this edition is very well suited to the violinistic development of book 4.
- ◆ Under this aspect, too, the Nachez edition of the Vivaldi concerto is an instrumental-related advantage to the student. Therefore there is no pedagogical need to alter the edition of the Vivaldi concerto as it currently appears in the Suzuki Violin School.

Considering all musicological and instrument-related pedagogical aspects we can say that the Nachez edition of the Vivaldi concerto is not merely one good example of how violinists can realize this concerto, but rather a very useful teaching material.

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This article is based on internet sources as well as on the following literature:

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