

## ***Ciaccona* in D minor from Partita II for solo Violin (BWV 1004) by J.S. Bach and *Ciaccona* for solo Violin, in B minor, op.21 by R. Barth. Comparative analysis**

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**Abstract:** *In my study for the solo violin repertory and by trying to find works that are unknown and rarely interpreted, I found the score of a Ciaccona for solo violin, in b minor, op.21, composed by Richard Barth in 1908. Studying the score in detail, I discovered a monumental work, that tests the technique of any violinist, an extremely valuable work which should become well known and played a lot more often. Being a tribute addressed to J.S. Bach's Ciaccona, I tried to study them in parallel, in order to see which are the composition tools used in each of them and what are their technical and performative challenges. It is amazing to discover that, with different means (derived from different stylistic periods of composition) there can be composed 2 valuable art masterpieces.*

Key-words: *Ciaccona, solo, violin*

### **1. Composers J. S. Bach and Richard Barth**

About J. S. Bach it has been done a great deal of talking, his works have always been in the attention of the musicians, therefore there is no need for further disambiguation. His geniality managed to give to the entire world undeniable masterpieces, which will be performed until the end of time. One of them is *Ciaccona* in D minor from Partita II for solo violin (BWV 1004). A true touch stone for every violinist, and genuine technical and interpretative challenge. Yehudi Menuhin stated about *Ciaccona* that it is the “most important structure for solo violin that exists”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Menuhin, Y. 2001. *Unfinished Journey*, new edition. London: Pimlico

Johannes Brahms, in a letter to Clara Schumann dated June 1877, stated about Ciaccona: "On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind"<sup>3</sup>. This monumental work was the starting point for Ciaccona for solo violin of Richard Barth. Although very little known and studied by the violinists, Richard Barth was a virtuoso violinist that managed to master the violin, despite the fact that he was left-handed and played using his right hand to hold the violin and the left to lead the bow. A violinist with real interpretative skills, has managed to become concert-master of Munster, Krefeld and Marburg<sup>4</sup> orchestras. In addition, his pedagogical talents qualified him as one of the important violin teachers of his time. He also distinguished himself as a conductor, composer and manager of the University of Music from Marburg and later on of the Hamburg Conservator.

Contemporary with Johannes Brahms, Richard Barth remained in the history of Music with the composing of Ciaccona in B minor, op. 21, for solo violin, work dedicated to Ciaccona for solo violin composed by J. S. Bach. "Barth's 1908 Ciaccona in B minor reflects the virtuoso violin of the post-Paganini era and speaks in a rich tonal language"<sup>5</sup>.

### 1.1. Ciaccona

Ciaccona is a dance of Spanish origins from XII century, which has a ternary beat. The majority of Ciacconas from Baroque period used as primordial and defining element, the Ciaccona base, which is represented by a descending tetracord beat. The harmony scheme of this tetracord is of the form T-D, reaching, by the continuous repetition of this base, a melodic ostinato. The Ciaccona themes are very complex and are always preceded by a long chain of variations which, usually are grouped in 3 basic sections, depending on the tonality changes. The pillars of the ostinato plan are very important, representing cantus firmus, that will always blend with the structure and personality of the variation plans.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Schumann, C. and Johannes Brahms. 1927. *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, 2 vols., edited by Berthold Litzmann. London: Encore Music Editions.

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<sup>6</sup> Valentin Timaru, 1997. *Compendium of shapes Chi minh city Musical Analyses*. Braşov.

## 2. The compared analysis of the two *Ciacconas*

Unlike J.S. Bach's *Ciaccona*, which is compared in baroque manner, Barth's *Ciaccona* has a completely new breath, full of effervesces met in the romantic period. From the tonal point of view, the two *ciacconas* are in total opposition, Bach preferring the D minor tonality, whilst Barth, the expansive B minor tonality. From the construction point of view, the basic theme of *Ciaccona* has 8 measures, having therefore a double length as compared with Bach's *Ciaccona*. Complex from the dynamic and harmonic point of view, brings from the start technical passages that demand an advanced violinist technique.



Fig. 1. Barth's *Ciaccona* theme (no harmony)

Ciaccona

The image shows two staves of musical notation for Bach's *Ciaccona* theme. The top staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a complex harmonic structure with multiple voices, including a prominent bass line. The bottom staff is also in treble clef with the same key signature and time signature, continuing the harmonic structure. The word "Ciaccona" is written above the first staff.

Fig. 2. Bach's *Ciaccona* theme

Barth's *Ciaccona* variations are 30 in number, each of them being demanding from the technical and musical point of view. The Variation I is a very simple and in a small nuance (*p*) resume of the main theme of *Ciaccona*. If the main theme was presented in *mf*, being harmonically dressed, the first variation brings a main structure of the theme at a superior octave, filled with simplicity and calm. This time the chromatic movement that in the main theme has a descendent direction, in the first variation, the way is descendent, helped by the crescendo that reaches

maximum colour in forte, to return towards the end in the lower register, similar with the theme.



Fig. 3. First variation from Barth's "Ciaccona"

Unlike Variation I of Barth's Ciaccona, variation 1 of Bach's is a lot more complex and developed, with chords where the theme is found in the median voice, fact that tests the technique and skill of the artist. The second variation, resumes the same melodic material, at a superior octave, a little simplified, by the renunciation on the chords and the harmonization with the exclusive help of the doubles.



Fig. 4. First variation from Bach's "Ciaccona"

Barth brings in variations 2 rhythmic variations by the apparition of the eights, and later on of the triplets, which, with the help of the chromatics, suggest a sinuous melodic drawing, in ascendant and descendant form which are also resumed in variation 3. In this variation big interval leaps appear, not encountered at Bach (decima interval, undecima, that make a sudden passage from a medium register to an acute one, bringing thus a pitch change).

The variation 4 continues with its sinuous line of triplets, this time introduced in the clear form of developed arpeggios, in g minor, d# minor, b minor, a# Major, D # major and d# minor. The end of variation 4 brings an octave interval leap, in the high register, throw a flageolet, which is immediately resolved at the inferior octave, from which it came. The octaves introduced by the flageolet are attributes of the romantic period, which will be used several times in Ciaccona's score, the pitch change is a lot more sudden and upfront, as compared to the one used in Bach's Ciaccona.



Fig. 5. The last 2 measures from variation 4 from Barth's Ciaccona

Bach too brings in variations 3 and 4 rhythmic change by the introduction of eights, here and then embellished with doubles, their lower voice creating a different melodic line that take from the thematic material the second interval, descendant and ascendant. The eights unfold later on during the same variation (3) in sixteenths which, swing calmly reintroducing the chromatic semitones and the small thirds. Variation 4 brings back the equal rhythm of eights, which creates a dialogue between the superior voice and the answer from the lower voice, reintroduced this time by the diatonic semitone.

Variations 5, 6 and 7 are based next on the dialogue between the superior voice and the lower voice on a constant rhythm of sixteenths. This equal rhythm of sixteenths will be interrupted in variation 8 by the apparition of thirty-twos, that come with answers of descending range form. As we move further on towards variation 9, the values of thirty-twos are wrapped in wave like movements that sway from one register to another.

The sixteenth value appears also at Barth starting with variation 5. In *pp* note, with a pedal on the acute register on D sound, we have a descendent melodic line introduced by the sequencing of the thematic material. The pedal sound changes on the way on C#, C natural and respectively b#, growing in colour and developing the sound intervals in order to introduce the variation 6.

This brings another element that Bach never used in his Ciaccona, the groups formed by the ascending and descending waves of 5, 6 and even 15 thirty-twos, which, between the base rhythmical pillars (eights with point), ornate the 6th variation in an original way. In this variation the romantic breath of the composer Richard Barth is very much present.

The grand finale (nuance of *ff*) prepares the variation 7, is formed by a marked rhythm, repeated obsessively, we can day during the eights variation, with doubles and chords of three and four sounds.



Fig. 6. Variation 6 from Barth's Ciaccona

The next variation (7) is one of the touch stones for every violinist that approaches this music score. The material is very dense, the punctuated rhythm that does not leave room to catch a breath and the density of the harmonic writing, prepares variation 8 that begins in nuance of *ff* and is based on another obsessive rhythm, of sixteenths that lead developed eights from the medium register, by multiple sequencing, up to the highest register of the violin. The sudden descend of 3 octaves from the beginning of variation 9, reminds us about the romantic profile of the composer.

Therefore, if with Bach we have 3 variations based on the same rhythmical material, Barth manages in exchange to bring much more diversity between its variations, proving this way his romantic breath and, by the complexity of each variation's labour, comes close to the great Paganini's violinist style, which, otherwise was his model.

Coming back to the classic Bach, we can't help noticing a natural and gradual passage from a variation to another through a sixteenth towards thirty-twos, in variations 9, 10 and 11. The thematic labour of the variations is based mainly on the ascending and descending sequencing, in a calm and silent atmosphere that prepares the variations 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. These are introducing the bariolages, very difficult, that hide a dialogue between a pedal that changes constantly and a thematic movement dedicated to the lower register voice. Barth also introduced the bariolages, inspired of course by Bach, but a lot more towards the end of Ciaccona, in variation 26.

In the meantime, Barth constructs variation 9 on sixteenth rhythm, on a system of continuous between 2 voices that argue one by one the thematic walk on a harmonic base that is represented by the B, A, F, E#, F# and respectively B. The passing through variation 10 will be made through a crescendo on the duration of a measure. The furioso character and the nuance of *ff* give an imposing feature to

this variation that continues the dialogue from the anterior variation, with the difference of accentuating it with a triole rhythm. The sixteenth come back in variation 11, but there is a new element, that creates a special timbre effect, unencountered by the classical music specialists, but only starting with the romantic period. This effect is created by the pizzicato realized by the left hand.



Fig. 7. Variation 11 from Barth's Ciaccona

In variation 12 also, the accentuated chords appear together with the more and more obvious exploration of the acute register of the violin, in nuance of *pp* and *dolce* note. Of course, that all the effects and musical labour procedures need the mastering of a very good violinist technique.

Variation 13 brings back in a suave and tern nuance, the main theme, which appears dressed in doubles in the beginning and, later on, on an increased crescendo up to *forte*, introduces the three sound chords that chain successively in a great technical and interpretative difficulty. The end of this variation continuously calms, giving room to variation 15, which, in its *dolce* and the *pp* nuance, changes the atmosphere and the tonality (G Major). This association of a *pp* nuance and of a *dolce* and sad character, with a tonality of 5 #, is much rarely met, but without a doubt that R. Barth manages to realize this musical demarche and create a unique atmosphere, quiet and very melancholic, that will go on otherwise in variation 16 also, on the constant march of cells consisting of two eights linked, which realize leaps of sixths, fifths and developed septets.

Major change of tonality and of character (B major – homonym tonality) brings Bach also, starting with variation 21, where, in the major tonality, the initial theme is exposed, with short melodic variations, but on the basic rhythm. The atmosphere is a quiet, calm one, that is achieved by the absence of vibrato and the very constant and calm leader of the bow. After the gloom atmosphere where it seemed that nothing moved, variation 22 brings out a different character, punctuated, realized by the succession of double cords and chords of three and four sounds. Variations 23, 24, 25 and 26 on rhythmical layout of sixteenths,



managed to bring in attention the dialogue between the three voices, on ascendant and descendant melodic arpeggios, on sequences and the harmonic dress-up with doubles and chords.

Coming back to Barth's Ciaccona we can't help associating the silence and the calm of variations 13 and 15, with the gloom and melancholic state of variation 16 from Bach. The difference consists in the fact that Barth passes a lot quicker from one state to another (fact that is specific to the romantic style in which it was composed).

In variations 16,17 and 18, R. Barth continues with the same rhythm of successive eights, which, in a continuous dialogue between the voices, oscillates continuously between the lower and acute register of the violin, dressed in doubles and chords.

The nuance raises gradually from variation 16 towards 18, to become calm at the moment where, on the beginning of variation 19, appear the cells consisting of two linked sixteenths with the p nuance's calm. The sequencing is obvious, until it reaches complete passages of descending successive sixths.

Variation 20 brings a major rhythm change, measure 9/8 being the one that on a p nuance and with a *grazioso* character, gives a dancing character, of waltz, on short, marked values. After this short incursion in the waltz world, Barth brings back the initial tonality of g minor, in measure of  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The theme reappears in variation 21 in base with a big third later on, dressed harmonically in doubles and chords in acute, fragmented with the help of eight pauses. Whilst in variation 22, the sixths values that ornate a gradual descending and accentuate in the medium register walk reappear, accompanied by an ostinato in acute pedal, variation 23 brings back in attention the groups, this time combined with the trills, also with the arpeggio agreements. This way, Barth managed in one variation, which is otherwise pretty short (8 measures), to combine three musical effects that give effervescence and dynamism to this variation.

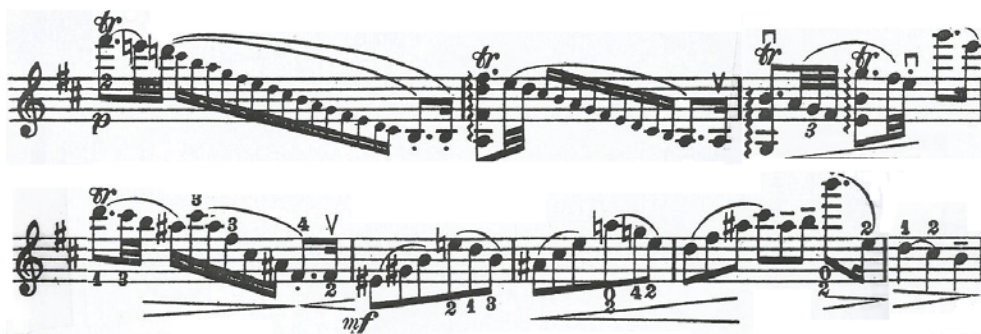


Fig. 8. Variation 11 from Barth's Ciaccona



Variations 24 and 25 bring back in attention the triolets, with their chromatic and sequential pace, in a powerful accumulation that conquers the acute register of the violin, as a victory cry. At this point, Richard Barth introduced, following Bach's example, the bariolages. Therefore, on the 16 measurements duration (variations 26 and 27), passing through sixteenth values, in a continuous accumulation, it reaches smaller values of thirty-twos, the turmoil intensifies and then diminishes toward the end of the variation, exactly how Bach structured his bariolages. The difference between Barth and Bach is that the last used this composition procedure on a duration of 6 variations, and the first, as I reminded, only during 2 variations. The 6 variations of Bach's *Ciaccona* are 13-18 and variation 30.

Variations 28 and 29 of *Ciaccona* by Barth represent a difficult labour from the technical point of view, that proposes to bring back, in a fragmented manner, the *Ciaccona* theme. This appears in base, ornate in doubles, with chords that are interpreted from acute towards the base moment (that challenge the violinist), in a powerful imposing dynamic (ff). The theme, the triolet, the chromatic come back and they exploit at maximum the acute register of the violin, as the tension diminishes to be brought back for the last time, in the last variation 30, the *ciaccona* theme (the first 2 measures), conclusive, like a reminder of what was exposed in variation 1. At the end, in tempo largo, the sixteenths that rise higher and higher towards the highest positions of the violin, the violinist plays in a ppp morendo, a last ascension to the sky. The finale comes as a surprise, powerful, conclusive, fortifying the basic g minor tonality.

Bach's *Ciaccona* too has a similar ending, variations 32, 33, 34, and 35 developing the sixteenth pace, using numerous pedals, chromatic thematic paces in base. A last but one variation used, as well as Barth the unfolded on triolet arpeggio values with ascending and descending sequenced paces. The last variation (36) brings also the *Ciaccona* theme, but, unlike Barth, the composer Bach decided to expose it entirely, just like in the beginning. The end is conclusive and imposing, and as expected, in the basic b minor tonality.

### **3. Acknowledgements**

The two *Ciacconas*, although composed in different periods and styles, are pretty much resembling. For instance, both develop a musical theme with a very strong power of expression. Variations are numerous, both having a different number of variations, (*ciaccona* by Bach 36 respectively 62 in the variant of numbering of the measures strictly from 4 to 4, and the one by Barth 30). The developmental tools are different, giving the fact that Barth was a romantic and already had the inspiration from the

classics, but also from the romantics (for example Brahms, Paganini, that served as source of ideas).

In Barth Ciaccona we find very often timbre changes (by the use of glissandos, of flageolets, of pizzicatos with the left hand – used in the romantic period). Furthermore, we have an entire variation built entirely on double cords and chords of 3 and 4 sounds, that represent a great challenge in realizing the right digitation for the completion of the phrase continuity and the highlight of the theme.

Both Bach as well as Barth used the bariolages as variation method. Bach's harmonies are classic, with rare dissonances, but with Barth, more daring harmonies are visible, with more delayed dissonant resolutions.

From a technical point of view, I find both Ciacconas to be very complex, each of the variations challenging the interpret. Beside the technical aspect, the complexity and dynamics of the 2 masterpieces make the artistic enterprise difficult, but which offers an intense spiritual and interior reward.

The violinist Joshua Bell sustained that Ciaccona „is not only one of the greatest musical works ever realized, but also one of the most important achievement of any man in history. It is a powerful work from the spiritual and emotional point of view, but also perfect from the structural point of view<sup>7</sup>.

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