

REPertoire

JUDICAEL PERROY

Prelude, Fugue & Allegro BWV 998



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*"THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE MUSIC...
BEING ABLE TO SING."*

LESSON DESCRIPTION

In this lesson, Judicael Perroy talks through his thoughts on interpreting, analyzing, and practicing Prelude, Fugue, and Allegro (BWV 998) by Johann Sebastian Bach. His approach is a very artistic and intuitive one- he provides several analogies from other art forms to convey concepts.

Perroy begins with how to transcend technical knowledge and convey an idea through your interpretation. An understanding of the structure of the phrases will inform everything from note lengths to fingering choices. He also shares several exercises to help with difficult techniques on guitar, such as steady crescendos and smooth shifting over many frets.

By the end of the lesson, hopefully you'll have insight into both Perroy's musical concepts and how to approach working on this beautiful composition.



ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Judicaël Perroy has become widely known as an extraordinary virtuoso classical guitarist and musician with several prizes to his credit. In 1997 he captured the prestigious first prize of the 15th Guitar Foundation of America International Competition and Convention.

Highly sought after and in great demand as a teacher, he is regularly invited to give master classes at many of the top conservatories and universities in the United States and abroad.

OUTLINE

1. Find an Idea
2. Proportions
3. Fingerings
4. Prelude
5. Bringing Fugues to Life
6. Fast Lines and Jumps
7. Conclusion

FIND AN IDEA



An analysis of BWV 998 reveals a very simple structure. The question becomes, what do we do with this analysis?

In the same way that one studies grammar at school and must apply it to their speech, studying this piece by Bach won't teach you much unless you apply the things you discover to your performance. In music school we are taught all the necessary theoretical elements, but it can often be very difficult to connect them to the actual art we are creating.

With any piece Perroy plays, he tries to find a strong idea or image that represents the piece- not necessarily something obviously related. It can be a place, a piece of art, a word, or anything else. This is very helpful for us to start connecting the theoretical information to the artistic concept.

Perroy is a fan of a Glenn Gould quote that says "Playing music is communication and illusion." The music's true purpose is to communicate the idea, but that idea is hidden behind notes and technique.



An architect once related a relevant analogy to Perroy. She told him that if the foundation of a building is completely flat, it's very difficult for her to imagine any kind of building ending up there. She has to find something- an image in the background, or something that the building will replace, in order to visualize the finished building. Perroy likes to carry this analogy into his music by generating an idea to base his interpretation on, before he begins practicing.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Your imagination is limited if your mind is lost in technique. Relate the music to an outside object to connect the music to your artistic side.

PROPORTIONS



Perroy thinks of his performance as a structure that needs careful proportions. Perhaps, if this full piece is six minutes, the Prelude will be a minute and a half, the Fugue three minutes, and the Allegro another minute and a half. Perroy builds his entire interpretation around that idea.

Jean Racine, a famous French playwright from the 17th century, wrote in a specific 12 syllable meter called *alexandrine* (similar to the way Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameter). Characters might finish their sentences and others pick up their sentence within the same "barline" of speech, but ultimately a very natural flowlike state is created.

This is essential, otherwise the language and vocabulary would be unnatural and forced.

In the same way, Perroy tries to end each phrase at the right time, without any unnatural rushing or slowing. His entire technique, including his fingering choices, is built around that goal.

FINGERINGS

While looking for fingerings, make sure they are logical. Perroy begins the Prelude on three strings, for example, but can't sustain it throughout the whole piece.



The image shows a musical score for guitar, likely from a piece by Perroy. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff is in the treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The music features a series of eighth notes with various fingerings indicated above them: 4, 3, 1, 4, 3, 2, 4, 2, 4, 3, 4, 2, 1, 3, 1, 2, 4, 3, 1. Below the staff, there are two chords: a D6 chord (labeled ⑥=D) and a half-second chord (labeled 1/2CII). The second staff is also in the treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 12/8. The music features a series of eighth notes with various fingerings indicated above them: 4, 2, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 1, 4, 3, 2, 3, 2, 4. Below the staff, there are two chords: a D2 chord (labeled (8)) and a D1 chord (labeled (8)).

There are always compromises that must be made between sound quality, ease of execution, and string choice. The decisions you make will be based on your personal strengths or weaknesses- perhaps you can execute wide stretches easily, or you truly desire the sound of multiple strings in one section so that the main tonality sounds full. A different technical decision may even give rise to a whole new interpretation.

PRELUDE



Perroy now dives into the specifics of the Prelude. He has many recommendations to generate colors and expressions based on the phrasing of the piece.

This piece was originally written for harpsichord, so the written length of the bass notes is much shorter than he likes to play it. He finds it sounds better to let the bass notes ring, not cutting them until the downbeat of the next bar.

Finding the beginning and ending of the phrase is crucial. To make sure he gets a consistent decrescendo, Perroy will start each bar at a lower dynamic, and will use the most rubato at the end of a bar. This clearly defines the phrase to be one bar.

On the da capo, he will allow the bass notes to ring out more. On the march-like section (sheet music 13), the music has more movement when you cut off the bass notes as written. The exact length he gives the notes depends on the acoustics of the room.

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled 'PRELUDE'. It consists of three staves of music, each with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff contains two measures of music with various fingerings (e.g., 4, 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1) and dynamics (e.g., 7, 2, 0, 2). The second staff contains two measures of music with fingerings (e.g., 1, 4, 2, 1, 0, 3, 1, 3, 0, 2, 1, 0, 2, 1, 4, 3, 1, 4, 3, 2, 1) and dynamics (e.g., 7, 4, 7, 10, 4, 7, 7). The third staff contains two measures of music with fingerings (e.g., 4, 3, 3, 1, 4, 0, 1, 2, 1, 3, 1, 1, 1, 4, 2, 4, 1) and dynamics (e.g., 7, 2, 7, 3, 7, 7, 2, 7, 3, 7, 1, 7). The score is marked with 'CII' and 'CIII' above the second and third measures respectively. The background is a light yellow color.

During the B pedal, he likes the color the phrases have when they each have the same shape on the fingerboard. To accomplish this, he can't sustain the low B very long. This is another example of compromise- where the performer must choose between two imperfect solutions.

Bar 19 begins a very long phrase, so he lets the bass ring.

At bar 26, he does the maximum campanella, meaning that he plays the notes on as many strings as he can. He does this to keep the sound less bright and more relaxed. Campanella requires a lot of time spent finding fingerings, but the effect created has more resonance than if the notes were all played on one string.



Be sure that the biggest crescendo of the Prelude starts in 36 and lands at the downbeat of 38.

The sixteenth note pattern in bar 40 of the Prelude often proves very stressful to play. Allow the stress to pass, and realize that you don't have to play it fast or slow for any reason. If you're not feeling very warmed up, you can take your time on it. He tries to play the very last note of the Prelude a hair after the beat.

BRINGING FUGUES TO LIFE



Bach's Fugues are often stressful as well, especially for students who might not be familiar with fugues. While they are more rare in more modern compositions, in Bach's time they were very common. Try to hear more than the individual voices- the voices by themselves don't contain the music. The brain will understand the music if everything is heard as one, rather than as polyphonous. Singing the voices works very well at bringing the music to life. Without singing, the polyphony might be clear, but the music may sound lifeless and theoretical.

Each voice has a certain amount of space in it to allow for other voices to be heard. Be aware of this space, but be careful not to force this space or you'll end up taking too much. The right amount of space comes when you don't try too hard to force it.

Perroy will play one finger for each voice on the fugue, it is a bit unusual but gives him a lot of freedom.

He doesn't necessarily recommend this though, so a good goal for a student might be to get the same exact sound with each of their fingers throughout.



CRESCENDOS



Perroy came across an exercise once to help create crescendos on guitar. Doing crescendos on the guitar is difficult because strings naturally decay. To practice getting the effect of a crescendo without accenting each note, place a dotted sixteenth before each quarter note of the opening of the Fugue. Then, imagine the extra note is there but without actually playing it. That will keep the line smooth and homogenous during your crescendo.



On the da capo, it's common to want to do something different for the repeat of the main theme. However, all that's necessary in this case might be changing the balance of the voices to give a bit of a new perspective.

FAST LINES AND JUMPS



The Prelude, the final movement, is difficult technically but very easily musically. If you sing the bass line and then follow its direction, the piece will naturally have a flow. Don't focus your ears on the fast lines or think about every note, but just learn the fingerings and let the bass dictate the phrasing and dynamics. Remember, of course, to stay relaxed.

Anticipate large jumps before they come, and keep your fingers ready to move a large distance. Similar to how a tennis player anticipates the direction they have to lunge, Perroy uses the weight of his hand to facilitate the skip. He never pushes into the neck, but shifts his hand's weight in the direction of the leap.



A common exercise he gives students to practice quick jumps on the fingerboard is chromatic scales in octaves. While moving down the neck, he lets gravity take control of his hand. While moving up the neck, his center of gravity has to move upward.



CONCLUSION

This piece is in the Eb tonality, and while many have written books on the symbolic meaning behind different tonalities, it's never been truly clear if tonalities represented anything to Bach and his contemporaries. Since guitar does not typically play in Eb (in this style), it's been transposed to D, a very full key on the guitar. This allows us to use the full range of the instrument to shape the piece.

Remember to sing the voices and shape each phrase to your singing. Happy practicing!



RESOURCES



Isaac Bustos' lesson on Prelude BWV 999 (Bach)

Ready for some more Bach? We thought so! Check out Isaac's in-depth lesson on the beautiful Prelude BWV 999 next.

Judicael Perroy's lesson on Sonata III (Ponce)

If you enjoyed Judicael's teaching style as much as we do, why not check out another lesson from him, this time on Ponce's Sonata 3.



