Gideon Lewensohn's *ViolAlive*: The Composer as Stage Director – Recontextualization of the *Concerto* as a Gestural Genre

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The current study explores musical gesture as the constitutive element in *ViolAlive,* a contemporary work for viola and ensemble. The piece is defined as "Theater Music," and consists of two gestural layers: overt and covert. The overt gestures, that is, the struggle that the viola undergoes, and the stage layout, are explicitly set out in the composer's instructions at the front of the score. The covert gestures are participants in a cultural discourse, which gains in dramatic quality as a result of the viola's existential struggle. These gestures are, in fact, very subtle musical allusions to the Western musical canon and, as such, function as sources of strength and endurance for the struggling viola and as musical locomotives. Thus, it can be said that *ViolAlive* re-contextualizes the *Concerto* as a gestural, theatrical genre.

In this study, we aim to explore musical gestures as a constitutive aspect of the compositional creative process in a contemporary work for viola and ensemble. The contemporary Israeli composer Gideon Lewensohn[1] gave *ViolAlive* the subtitle "Theater Music," a title that is intrinsically associated with gestures. When trying to classify these gestures, we find that the musical theater, in this piece, consists of two gestural layers: overt and covert. The overt gestures, that is, the "plot," which involves an existential struggle by the viola, is made visually apparent through the stage layout, explained in detail by the composer in the introduction to his score. The covert gestures, which are hidden in the music, are part of a cultural discourse that gains in dramatic quality as the narrative unfolds. These gestures, which are in fact very subtle musical allusions to the Western musical canon, function as sources of strength and endurance for the struggling viola. We will attempt to reveal some of these covert gestures through an exploration of the stylistic topics, tributes and allusions that are woven into the score, and we will demonstrate that the *Concerto* is re-contextualized, in *ViolAlive*, as a gestural, theatrical genre.

Unlike well-known hermeneutical interpretations of narratives in instrumental, so-called "absolute," music (by Newcomb, McClary, Maus, Monelle and Kerman, to mention a few), one cannot approach the narrative in *ViolAlive*, and its spatial aspects, in a hermeneutic manner, since it is precisely described in advance. However, the covert musical gestures, or the "musical childhood," to use the composer's terminology, are indeed open to hermeneutical interpretation.

[1] For a detailed biography, see:
http://www.peermusic-classical.de/en/composers/gideon_lewensohn/biography/.

We propose that the cultural discourse[2] in *ViolAlive* functions as an essential musical gesture in the work. Among the variety of tributes and stylistic allusions found in the piece, we would like to focus on the explicit, persistent allusion to the Prelude from Johann Sebastian *Cello Suite* No. 1 in G Major, BWV 1007. The Prelude acts as a fundamental gesture, even as *the* gesture, to which most of the thematic material and musical drama in *ViolAlive* are related. The structural concept of the piece is the vehicle that conveys the subtle allusion to Bach's work and its subsequent deciphering. We will therefore discuss this concept, first, as a constitutive, history-related, gesture in itself. Then, in collaboration with the composer, we will discuss whether, as a gestural work, *ViolAlive* can be a complete musical experience for a trained or lay listener, who has access only to an audio recording and is not exposed to the two gestural layers.

A "Non-Concerto" for an "Anti-Hero"

The work under discussion, *ViolAlive: Theater Music in Two Acts for Solo Violist, a Percussionist and 19 Solo String Players*, was written in 2004 and revised in 2006. The composer writes in the introduction to the final version:

> Using the term *Theater Music* rather than *Concerto*…evolves from an ongoing search for theatrical principles, which could well express the relationships and discourse between musical ideas and gestures….This has led me into casting this "opera" in a way which sets the stage for a dramatic existential struggle, to unfold in front of us. The language of this *Drama with no Plot* consists of musical gestures of all kinds...these allow me to shape and direct the "characters" who "perform" in my musical theater.[3]

In keeping with his stated intention to stage the performers, Lewensohn supplies very detailed instructions for the stage layout (see App.1), as well as numerous performance instructions that are scattered throughout the score. The most surprising aspect of his layout is that the string players, or what one tends to call the "orchestra," are not seated in the traditional way (some of them are actually instructed to stand throughout the entire performance). Indeed, the "orchestra" is constructed in the form of groups of chamber ensembles, some of which will change their position on stage while playing, as does the soloist:

[2] This discourse relates, *inter alia*, to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Beethoven's 7th Symphony, Oedoen Partos's *Yizkor* for Viola and Orchestra, Eastern Europe Jewish folk music etc., as well as to the historical conventions of the genre and the instrument.

[3] Gideon Lewensohn, *ViolAlive Music Theater in Two Acts for Solo Violist, a Percussionist and 19 String Players* (Hamburg, Peermusic, 2006), front page.

> Two string quintets are set in an arch form at the front of the stage, from left to right, first quintet: two violins, two violas and a cello, second quintet: cello, two violas and two violins. Behind the two celli, another third cello and a double-bass are located, forming together a central "bass section." Behind these 13 strings, a set of percussion instruments is arranged for one *solo percussionist*.
>
> A septet of standing violinists on risers placed at a distance of at least three meters are located along the back wall of the stage. This septet is tuned 1/4-1/3 tone above the rest of the ensemble, thus creating a sense of "another reality." Violin IV has also a percussion part performed on instruments located near the music stand. This part may also be given to a *second percussionist.*

The idea of constructing an army of "string regiments" echoes the plot, which terminates in the viola's victory over the violins, and creates obvious military associations (see the composer's instructions below). In another innovation, the title of the piece tells us that *all* the participants are soloists, which is a form of conceptual disordering of the genre. The concept, clearly, derives from the world of the theater, where every actor has a solo part, regardless of the importance of his or her role in the play. From the moment an actor speaks, he is a soloist! The resulting discourse between the soloists, combined with the military images, offers a potentially vast spectrum of expression. Indeed, a large variety of musical expressions is required for the narrative in this piece, as evident from the composer's specific instructions for the solo violist:

> The SOLO VIOLIST begins to play from within the percussion section and only after a few minutes relocates to the ordinary solo position.… In the final scene, after an almost desperate struggle for survival, the soloist leaves the stage while playing the final cadence of J.S. Bach's Prelude from the Cello suite in G Major, which was alluded to throughout the entire piece. The viola leaves the stage, but is not defeated by the army of fiddlers (all violins and violas who have joined the standing septet along the back wall of the stage). Its victory or survival, however, is silent, stemming from another source of strength. The viola is alive, back on stage...at least for the time being….

Given these preliminary instructions and background information, the performers are well acquainted with the narrative and its dramatic implications, i.e. its overt gestures, before even performing the music. This situation resembles that of actors reading a play (with directions setting out who is to do what, where and how), before beginning rehearsals.

We wish now to examine some associations, interpretations and definitions affiliated with the *Concerto* and its dramatic/theatrical connotations, which are as old as the genre itself. A look at one encyclopedic entry reveals the element of drama, in

its definition as: "an instrumental work that maintains contrast between an orchestral ensemble and a smaller group or a solo instrument or among various groups of an undivided orchestra." The word "contrast" clearly evokes dramatic tension (Hutchings et al., *NG* online). In the same entry, Leon Botstein writes:

> By the mid-19th century, as a result of the innovations of Liszt and the early Romantic pursuit of instrumental music as a medium through which the poetic, epic and dramatic could be expressed, the narrative *Concerto* developed, sometimes written in one-movement form and often possessed of an explicit extra-musical program.

Donald Tovey (1949, 6-7) also considered the solo-orchestra interaction to be inherently theatrical, describing the *Concerto* as a "highly dramatic and poetic art form." Over time, the genre's dramatic character became more explicit and, today, the use of theatrical rhetoric in an instrumental *Concerto*-like work appears very natural, in the wake of Bartók, Richard Strauss, Alban Berg and John Cage.

In *The Cambridge Companion to the Concerto,* Simon P. Keefe refers to the genre's dramatic qualities in contemporary music. In the chapter, "Theories of the *Concerto* from the Eighteenth Century to The Present Day," Keefe cites Nicky Lolleff's explanation of the broad-ranging musical and social significance of the confrontation and opposition characteristics of the *Concerto*:

> The dualities and opposition inherent in the virtuoso piano concerto makes it the most suitable genre in which to explore the struggle of subjectivity against the external world, since the encounter between lone soloist and orchestra is, in more than one sense, representative of conflict: between the single, elite individual and the group, and between a single instrumental part, which yet constitutes "half" of the music, against the very large collection of colors and timbres.

Keefe also cites Elliott Carter, who referred to the orchestra as "a crowd of individuals, each having his own personal expression, who are related to each other by either discipleship, companionship or confrontation" (Keefe 2005, 12-13). These contemporary views accord with Lewensohn's theatrical approach, even though the viola is *not* mentioned as a solo instrument in this critical literature.

In the same book, Arnold Whittall contributes a chapter in which he examines the *Concerto* after 1945, and comments on the contemporary tendency of writing *Concertos* without referring to them as such. He noted that, just as "*Concerto* composition was not confined to works called *Concertos*" in earlier epochs, "one of the results of modernist aesthetics is the play of expectation that the use or the avoidance of a generic title can create." In other words, a composition can be viewed as a *Concerto* even if it bears a different title. In the same essay, Whittall mentions works in which the soloist has to move on stage while playing, before reaching the

solo position (such as Carter's *Clarinet Concerto*), and he suggests an implied dramatic story to Lutoslawski's *Cello Concerto*, which "invites translation into a dramatic scenario, in which a Quixotic protagonist contends with all kinds of hazards and difficulties before finding a kind of resolution" (Keefe 2005, 165). Joseph Kerman, in his series of lectures entitled *Concerto Conversations*, considers virtuosity, contrast, polarity and reciprocity as the genre's principle qualities. Referring to the neo-classic composers Hindemith and Stravinsky, he notes that "…both modernist masters contributed to it generously, under the name '*Concerto*' or under other names, and the tell-tale fragrance of the Bach *Concerto* can be sniffed in much other music of the time" (Kerman,1999, 27). *ViolAlive* thus possesses well-established stylistic and aesthetic roots, although Lewensohn takes genre's traditional conventions one step further–toward the theater stage.

It is well known that the viola was considered "non-dramatic," or inappropriate for a major *solo* performance, until well into the twentieth century. A brief look at the entry for the viola in *New Grove Online* draws us immediately to the description, "instrument of the middle," which was given to the viola in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was used both for alto and tenor parts. For various reasons, demand for the viola decreased, as apparent in J.J. Quantz's comment in his work, *Versuch* (1752):

> The viola is commonly regarded as of little importance in the musical establishment. The reason may well be that it is often played by persons who are either still beginners in the ensemble or have no particular gifts with which to distinguish themselves on the violin, or that the instrument yields all too few advantages to its players, so that able people are not easily persuaded to take it up. I maintain, however, that if the entire accompaniment is to be without defect, the violist must be just as able as the second violinist. (Boyden & Woodward, *NG* online)

The principal work for solo viola and orchestra, written in the nineteenth century, is Berlioz's celebrated *Harold in Italy* (1834), which is an ambiguous work in terms of genre. As is well known, it was written as a programmed symphony after Byron, with a solo viola part. The work was commissioned by Paganini (for his fine *Stradivari* viola), who eventually refused to perform it on the grounds that it was not virtuosic enough (Langford 2000, 58).

It was only in the twentieth century that the viola became highly regarded as an instrument suitable for a solo *Concerto*. This breakthrough occurred largely thanks to the contribution of three viola masters, Lionel Tertis (1876-1975), William Primrose (1904-82) and Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), who raised the status of the viola as a solo instrument and inspired many new works, now firmly established in the musical repertoire. In England, through his talent and the very high standards of performance that he set, Tertis created a highly supportive environment for the solo viola. Consequently, English composers and conductors accepted the instrument as an instrument worthy of solos and, in the period between 1910 and World War II, the English school of viola-playing became increasingly influential. William Primrose, Tertis' most important successor and the leading violist of his day, strove to expand

the viola corpus: he arranged, transcribed and edited many works and also inspired and commissioned original compositions by leading contemporary composers. An outstanding example is the viola concerto he commissioned from Bartók in 1945.[4] Hindemith's greatest contributions are his compositions, over twenty of which were written for the viola. Hindemith launched his career as a concert violist and a major viola composer with the premiere of his *Sonata for Viola and Piano*, Op. 11, No. 4 (1919). He also premiered William Walton's *Viola Concerto* (dedicated to Tertis), and that of Darius Milhaud.

The contemporary repertoire for viola *Concertos* clearly demonstrates that the viola is, today, a respectable soloist, for which new works are constantly being written, sometimes commissioned by or dedicated to distinguished violists. Principle works include compositions by Malcolm Arnold, Samuel Adler, Edison Denisov, Morton Feldman (*The Viola is My Life*), Alexander Goehr, Sofia Gubaidulina, Morton Gould, Gordon Jacob, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Giya Kanchely (*Mourned by the Winds*). Some of the titles themselves, such as the works by Feldman and Kancheli, imply a drama or story.[5] In this respect, *ViolAliv*e adheres to a contemporary composition tradition for viola and orchestra. A contemporary programmed viola *Concerto*, entitled according to its narrative, is thus eminently suitable for a story of conflict, in which the viola undergoes and wins an existential struggle. Such a story also can be seen as a metaphor for the instrument's struggle to re-assert its image and role.

Musical Nostalgia

The idea that gestural discourse can play a constitutive role in a musical composition obviously relies on the supposition that such a function is possible. An argument for this possibility is presented in Robert Hatten's celebrated online lectures (2001), in which he stated that cultural discourse is an important source of gestural competencies and expression:

> The qualitative character of a musical gesture, and its continuity, typically enables us to infer a precise (if unnamable) expressive motivation or modality, and thus, in many cases, an implied agency (or in special cases a persona, or actant or character) in an enacted (or in special cases narrated) drama or "story."… What a musical style

[4] Along with the Piano Concerto No. 3, this is Bartók's last work, left incomplete at his death. The Viola Concerto premiered on 2 December 1949 in Minneapolis, with Antal Doráti conducting, and William Primrose playing the solo part. The work was completed three times, by Tibor Serly (1950), Peter Bartók (the composer's son), Paul Neubauer and Nelson Dellamaggiore (1995), and by Csaba Erdelyi (due to copyright laws, the Erdelyi version is only available in retail stores in New Zealand and on the Internet).

[5] For more see Boyden/Woodward, www.grovemusiconline.com

> clarifies and constrains is the identity of a gesture as a motive…its contextualization in terms of other musical events and cultural significance. What a musical work clarifies and constrains is the significance of a musical gesture in terms of its strategic role in the work. (Hatten 2001)

Even when research on musical gestures was in its inception, and long before such scholarly insights became established, the idea that "[there is] some kind of imaginative activity or construction of fiction figures in understanding music" was already in the air (Maus1988, 67). Indeed, parallels between non-programmatic instrumental music and aesthetic principles of literature/drama were explored as early as the late 1970s and early 1980s (Maus 1997, 293), not to mention Schumann's description (1840) of Schubert's great symphony as a four-part novel. In recent years, research on the subject has become more specific and in-depth, and musical gesture is recognized now as a scholarly discipline for musicologists, music therapists, educators and music philosophers. The scope of research, in this field, is constantly expanding and encompasses areas such as film music (Vitouch 2001, 70-83), cognition and perception of movements in relation to sound (Thompson, Russo & Quinto 2006), and even quantitative research on musical gestures, as in the project led by the University of Oslo (Jensenius 2004, 55-62). A recent gestural study of Carl Nielsen's piano music even viewed musical gestures as a feature (among others) of Nordic Identity in Nielsen's music (Grimley, 2005, 202-33).

It is, therefore, not surprising to find that *Music and Gesture* (2006), which summarizes current critical theories regarding musical gestures, mentions research on musical gestures in recordings (Gritten & King 2006). The book presents a large variety of scholarly approaches and methodologies relating both to overt and covert musical gestures. Among these, we favor Raymond Monelle's ideas on the role of musical quotations or allusions as gestures (Monelle, in Gritten & King 2006). Both Monelle and Jerold Levinson suggest that musical gestures are essential to musical drama. In "Music as Narrative and Music as Drama," Levinson describes the characteristic of a dramatic musical prototype similar to *ViolAlive*:

> Perhaps it would be best to admit that music can generally be heard as *either* strictly narrative or strictly dramatic, even if most music lends itself more readily to the latter…. When music is regarded as the utterance or voice of the composer, then constructing it as a narrative, one whose content consists of the gestures, actions, or emotions of the composer's alter ego, is natural enough. On that model, the composer is analogous to a lyric poet, and the performer to a recite or rhapsode. When music is regarded rather as the organized product of creative activity offered for our engagement [such as ***ViolAlive***], then constructing it as a drama, one whose content consists in the gestures, actions or emotions of various shifting personae, is arguably more natural. On that model, the composer is analogous to a playwright, and the performer to a director or producer [a producer seems more relevant for our piece]. (Levinson 2004, 436)

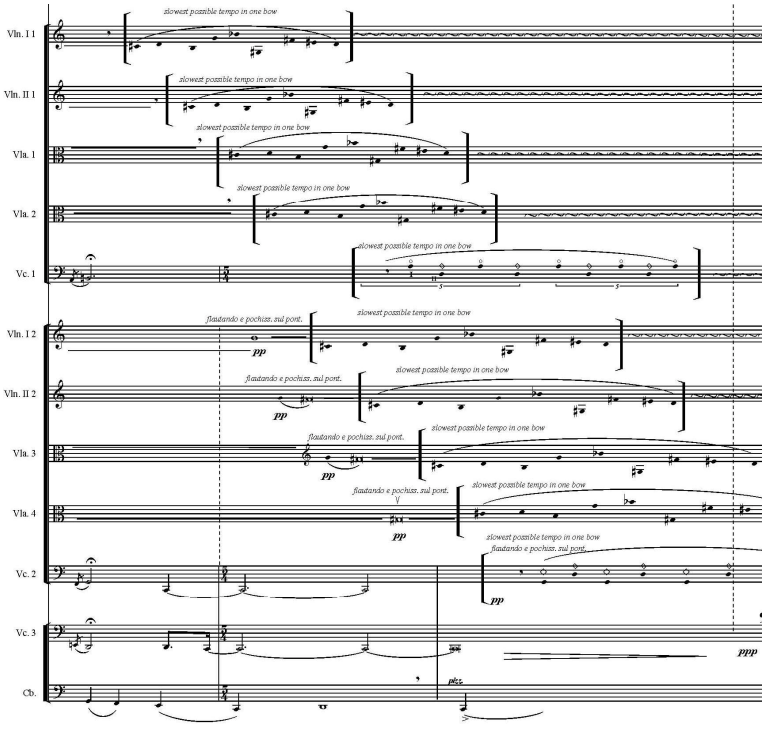
We therefore view the cultural discourse in *ViolAlive* and the allusion to Bach's *Prelude,* in particular, as gestures that contribute emotional signification to the music, a subject discussed recently by Edson Zanpronha in relation to contemporary music (Zanpronha 2005).

In *ViolAlive*, the stage is set with a small "army" of strings, supported in the rear by a battery of artillery, represented by a septet of violinists and percussion. The army awaits its "victim"— the violist, who will slowly reach his position at the front (see App. No. 1). The violist is going to fight mainly against family members, but the family dispute will turn into something of a betrayal when one of the violinists turns to a percussionist and joins the "other side." The stage layout reflects the narrative, which is recounted musically through "tales" from the past.

One of these "tales," which is reflected in the work's structural rhetoric, is the unusual treatment of the work's beginning and ending. It seems strange that the *Epilogue* is distinguished as such, while the *Prologue* is not, in spite of its definite existence before Act, Scene 1 (pp. 3-10, rehearsal number 3). Not naming the *Prologue* is a gesture in itself, and implies an element of ambiguity, since in music, as in theater and in literature, prologue, preface, introduction, overture, prelude and exposition differ slightly from each other in their functional nuances. The idea of not naming the opening section of the piece is, perhaps, part of a general strategy of manipulation through cultural expectations. This type of gesture is most evident when the title of a section differs completely from its standard, cultural connotation. Thus, for instance, in *ViolAlive*, "anti-*Cantilena*" music is entitled "*Cantilena*" (Act 1, Scene 1), and a scene that consists mostly of frantic, energetic music is entitled "*Cantabile ma pochissimo piangendo*" (Act 1, Scene 4). The tension between the title and its content is, evidently, part of the drama. In the particular case of *ViolAlive*'s opening, the un-named *Prologue* hints at the late revelation of Bach's *Prelude* toward the end of the piece. The *Prelude*, in *VioAlive*, thus ceases to be a structural definition and becomes the musical inspiration of the work.

However, in keeping with tradition, the un-named *Prologue* evokes the essence of the piece: it tells us that the viola and the percussion will be the principle protagonists and that we are about to observe a struggle, hinted at by the threatening, shot-like beats of the snare-drum. The "once-upon-a-time" quality is created by the slow movement of the violist, as he moves forward from the back, and by the quiet, contemplative nature of the music. Distant bells and the melodic fragments of the violins, together with the long, seemingly endless low C of the double bass contribute to this feeling. No conventional thematic material is introduced by the viola in this section, except for a Jewish, *lamento*-like, melodic figure, which appears right at the end (p. 9), when the violist reaches his solo position, and which augurs deep pain. Bach's *Prelude* is very sophistically alluded to in the exposition of the "army" of strings (p. 7, before rehearsal number 2, see Example 1: *ViolAlive*, p. 7):

Example No. 1. Allusion to Bach's Prelude, Strings.



which will be retrospectively understood later, when it will first flourish and then shrink during the *Epilogue.* The end of the piece shares the contemplative effect of the opening, but without its threatening element. During the last minutes of *ViolAlive*, the soloist plays against the long, silent notes of the low strings, and, as he slowly leaves the stage, a fade-out of musical light is created. As Bach's *Prelude* is modified and inverted in an incomplete G Major triad (but is still very recognizable after having been quoted precisely earlier on), the viola seems to declaim at the end, "this music is eternal and so am I."

Beginning and end meet in a traditional structural approach. The technique of resolving at the end issues that were presented at the beginning derives from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century aesthetics of instrumental music and opera. This traditional concept and the innovative treatment of Bach's *Prelude,* together with other musical allusions in *ViolAlive*, create a musical play that is based, nonetheless, on classical ideas. This cultural basis supports the viola in its struggle for survival, giving the impression that tradition functions as a form of assurance or approval. The overt story of the viola's struggle can be seen as a metaphor for the covert, aesthetical story of finding inspiration in an old narrative to create a new one in cultural history.

This narrative is recognizable in other structural aspects of the piece, which consists of two "Acts," each made up of "Scenes." The first act (duration 12 min.)

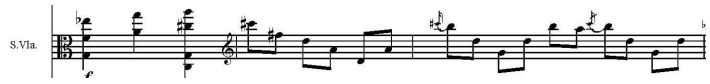
opens with the untitled introduction, mentioned above, followed by a sequence of seven scenes. The second act (duration 20 min.) begins with a very short, frantically paced preface, followed by ten scenes that terminate in an *Epilogue*. The two acts seem to be connected conceptually, although the composer's instructions to the conductor stress a difference in mood:

> The conductor should pause between the two acts in a manner which is most tense and dramatic. At the end of act I, the entire ensemble should be ready for an *attaca* entrance and wait in a "frozen" position for a length of time, which can maintain tension and prepare the forceful *tutti* which opens act II.

Even though the terminology is musically dramatic, one finds in the score well-known musical and structural features, such as the cyclical development of climaxes and their resolutions, or the presence of a "reprise" at the end of Act 1 (p. 48), where the repetition of material from the introduction is identifiable, although imprecise. Another homage to tradition are the *cadenzas* at the end of both acts, implicit in Act 1 (scene 5 "*Quasi una Partita*," Act 2, *Epilogue*) and explicit in Act 2 (Scene 4 "*cadenza a due*"), even though the latter is not in its traditional position. These *cadenzas* can be viewed as monologue-like gestures, which contribute a theatrical feature to the old *Concerto* component.

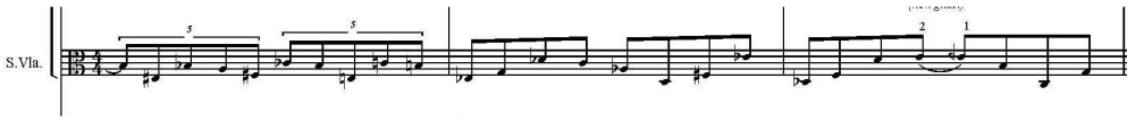
With these insights kept in mind, we will now explore some of the elaborations on Bach's *Prelude* from the Cello Suite No. 1 in G major (BWV 1007). It is only in Act 2, Scene 8, after 23 minutes of music (out of 32 minutes of total duration), that one becomes aware of the allusion, when it suddenly appears for a few seconds in the music of the soloist (Example 2: *ViolAlive*, p. 100).

Example No. 2. Allusion to Bach in Act 2, Solo Part.

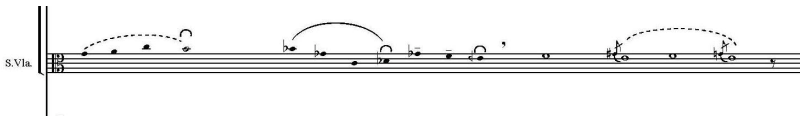


Strikingly, we retrospectively understand that the preceding music was mostly its derivative, modified and sophistically used as a compositional skeleton throughout the piece. With this realization, it is possible to identify Bach in almost any part of the work as, for example, in Act 1, Scene 1 (Example 3: *ViolAlive*, p. 12), Act 1, Scene 3, "war music" (Example 4: *ViolAlive*, p. 24 on ensemble parts), Act 2, Scene 3 *Scherzino* (Example 5: *ViolAlive*, p. 65).

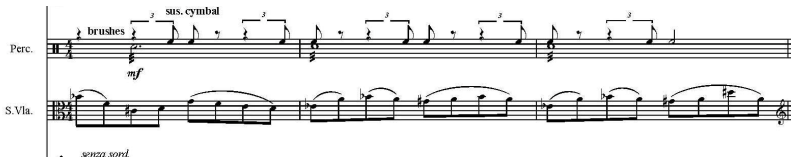
Example No. 3. Allusion to Bach in Act 1, Solo Part



Example No. 4. Allusion to Bach in "War Music", Solo Part



Example No. 5. Allusion to Bach in Act 2, *Scherzino*, Solo Part

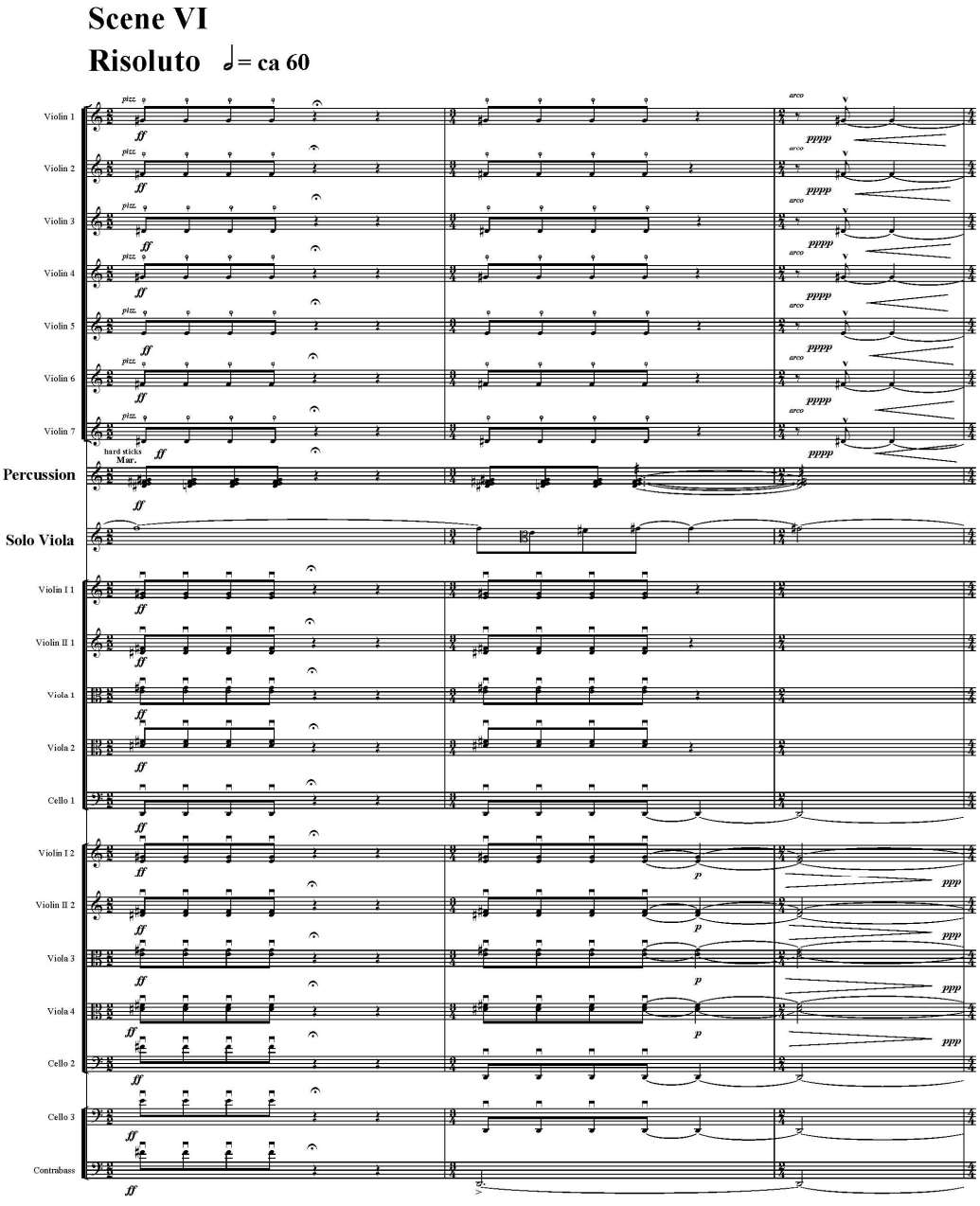


The modifications that Bach's music undergoes symbolize the narrative of the viola's struggle and, as such, reflect the entire concept behind *ViolAlive*. Both the *Prelude* and the viola are alternately present and absent, subtly hidden in the texture, unusual sound effects, and rhythm of the music. Both fight for survival, and both participate in a Jewish prayer (see Example 3), Jewish wedding dance and jazz party (Act 2, Scene 3: *Scherzino*) and converse with each other in numerous *parlando* viola sections. The retrospective revelation of the *Prelude* can be regarded as a theatrical event, a detective-story-like resolution and a prediction of the viola's victory. Similar musical events, such as Haydn's instrumental music, can be found in the history of Western music.

The work's structural approach and its subtle use of the *Prelude* as a constitutive gesture seem to be the principle aesthetic pillars on which *ViolAlive* reposes. Both pay tribute to tradition and are, at the same time, highly innovative. We would like to mention a few more tributes that, while less significant than the *Cello Suite* in function and scope, play an important role in the cultural discourse with the composer's musical "childhood." These gestures function as engines that propel the principle musical narrative forward, through the aesthetics of tension and relief, and the creation and resolution of climaxes. In addition to the Jewish allusions and the

jazz section, in the *Scherzino* mentioned above, we would also like to refer to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, which is alluded to in Act 1, Scene 6 (Example 6: *ViolAlive*, p. 43).

Example No. 6. Allusion to Stravinsky, Act 1, *Risoluto*

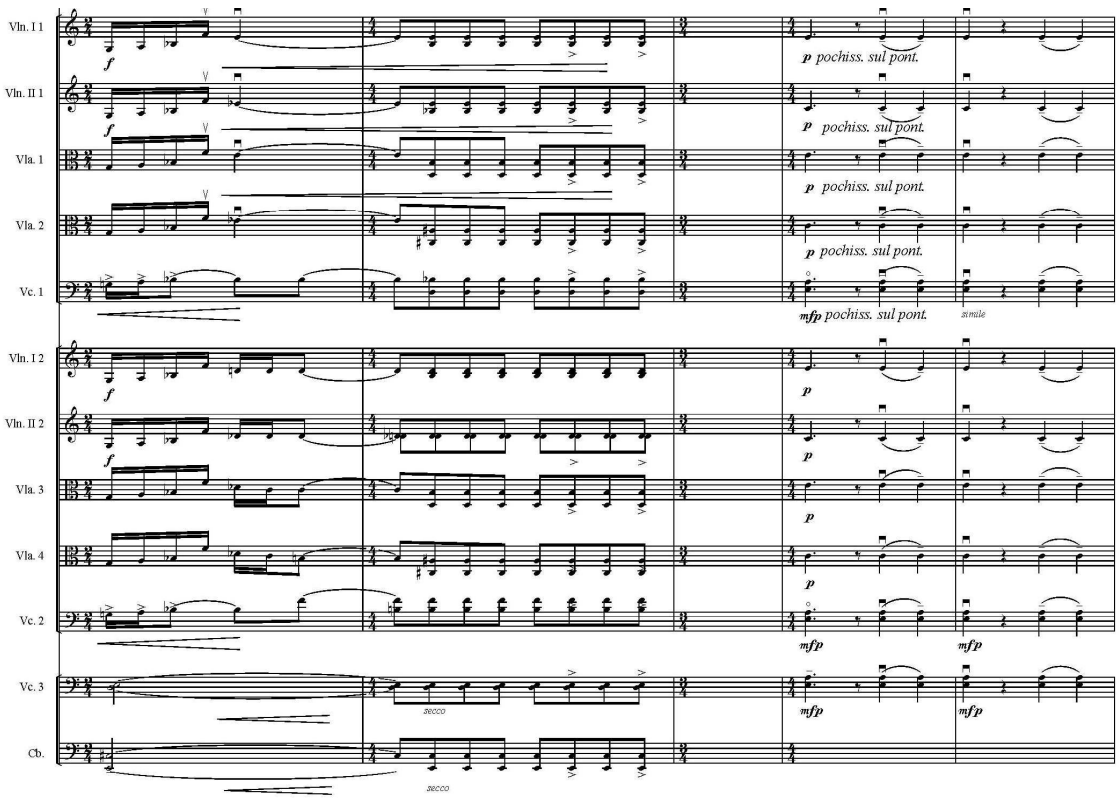


This "*risoluto*" music separates the free-style, so-called "*Cadenza*" (Act 1, Scene 5) from the quiet, thoughtful quasi "Reprise" (Act 1, p. 48, which concludes Act 1). It,

therefore, comes as a surprise, arousing the audience's attention and astonishment. This section is situated in an unstable structural location, right at the end of its first part (a crucial moment in sonata-form works, as well as in *Concerto Adagios*, *Scherzi*, etc.). The Stravinsky allusion appears again in Act 2, Scene 3, entitled "*Risoluto* 2," and similarly functions as a divider between the quasi "*Danse Macabre*," which terminates the stylistically colorful *Scherzino* (Act 2, pp. 69-76), and the following "*Cadenza a Due*" (p. 77). This is, of course, not a mere coincidence but a subtle, stylistic device, which reflects Stravinsky's significance in the composer's musical landscape and re-defines *The Rite of Spring* as a cultural icon.

Another image from this nostalgic landscape is an enchanted moment in Act 2 (Example 7: *ViolAlive*, pp. 54-55, Scene 1, mm. 11-13), when, for a few seconds, straight on the tail of acutely harsh music, the Allegretto from Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* suddenly appears, played by the "army" of five string quintets *sul ponticello* (also in A minor) but, nonetheless, amazingly clear. The magic is short and fades quickly, but it is undoubtedly present, like the sweet touch of a good fairy….

Example No. 7. Allusion to Beethoven, Act 2.



Music to be Seen?

We now understand how the dramatic elements in *ViolAlive* transform the work into a gestural piece of music. Some of the gestures are obvious to everyone, while others are covert, hidden in the score, and require a certain degree of musical knowledge. In addition, some of the overt gestures have to be seen in order to be understood. In a piece defined as "music theater," these gestures are as essential as others, and are an immanent part of the performance. Since most music is listened to on CDs, it would be interesting to know to what degree a recording of *ViolAlive* can be relevant to the lay listener, who is unable to perceive the musical gestures described above. At the same time, one can ask whether a professional listener, who is able to perceive the covert gestures but cannot see the overt ones, will gain a satisfying listening experience from such a recording. These questions challenge the idea of the relevance of musical gestures as meaningful expressions.

We posed these questions to the composer. His response stresses the importance of understanding musical expression intuitively, both from the composer's and the listener's points of view:

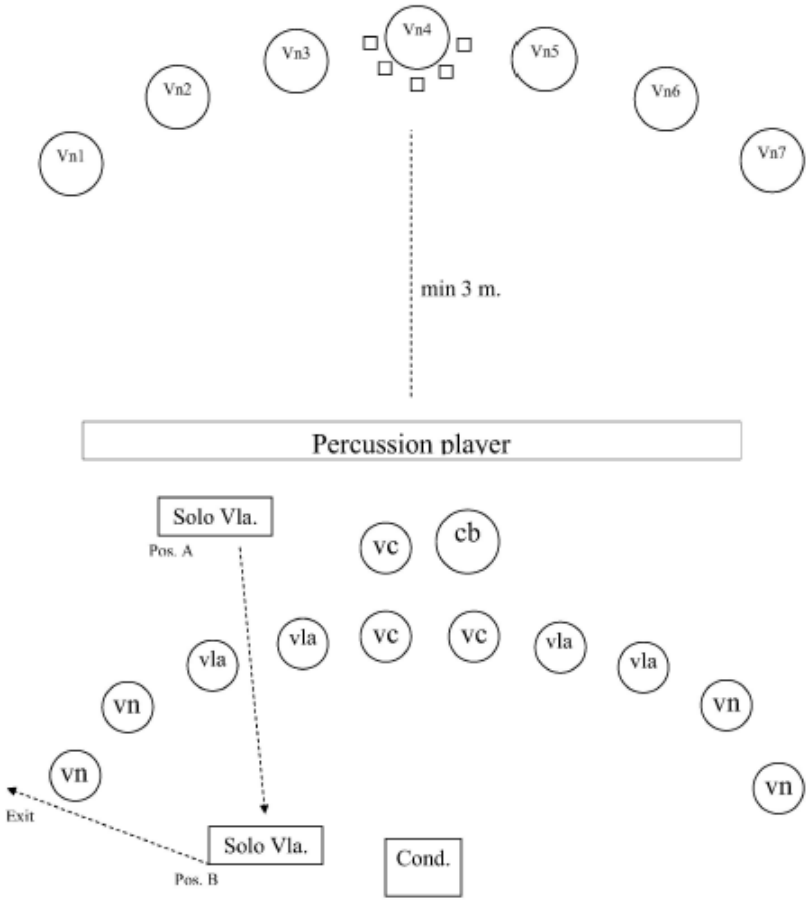
> I do not consider it an issue of musical training because musical gesture is the heart of what musical expression consists of. One is not meant to "hear" or identify the stage design but the conception of the piece was based on the idea and thus this concept reveals itself even in a recording.
>
> Similarly, all other characteristics of the dramaturgy in this piece ought to reveal themselves to a substantial degree in a recording. This may open a discussion about the not too rare confusion between a theoretical model for analysis and a compositional model. The compositional model is a tool in expression and reveals its function through the highly compound, mostly secret and untraceable (for the composer as well) personal procedures of the composition.
>
> A theoretical analytical model by definition must be traceable throughout the theoretical or analytical process. Musical gestures must be experienced at least to a considerable degree on the experiential audible level or else we may question their validity as musical gestures.

The notion proposed by Lewensohn, in his last sentence, raises a challenge for scholars, since the methodology for the theoretical analysis of musical gestures runs counter to their experiential dimension and philosophical implications. This may be the reason for the diversity of scientific approaches described above. In view of the difficulties in identifying unequivocal emotional signals in music, especially in a postmodern age, one realizes how and why reliance on tradition is part of the innovative compositional process of *ViolAlive*. The aesthetic approach of using tradition may, thus, come under the contemporary deciphering of "musical codes," defined by Peter Kivy:

> In sum then, the compositional, performing and listening practices that have defined the so-called classical repertory of instrumental music from the late eighteenth century to the present day consists in a prescriptive code that demands close, undivided attention to the phenomenological properties of music, a music designed to satisfy just the listening code, a concert space designed to house that kind of music, and an expressive linguistic code that provides perhaps the most easily perceived of the phenomenological properties of that music, hence those properties most relied upon by the lay listener in orienting himself in his listening experience. (Kivy 2001, 57)

Both Lewensohn's and Kivy's ideas lead one to the inevitable conclusion that the dramaturgy of contemporary instrumental compositions, such as *ViolAlive*, should be perceived and studied mostly through its phenomenology, i.e. through musical gestures, rather than through any listening model that stimulates musical expectations. It then becomes irrelevant who is listening, or what media in being used (live performance, recording, video, etc.). In this respect, we can say that *ViolAlive* re-contextualizes the *Concerto* as an imaginative gestural genre.

Appendix No. 1: Stage layout



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