

Survival Guide for solo Bach (David Rose, 2015)



♪ Bach's solo string music is based on chorale writing. Generally speaking, each string is like a voice in a choir (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). Notice the individual stems....! □

♪ To this end, lower position fingerings are usually the better choice, as the voices remain distinct.

♪ Much of the time, the *speaking* quality is more important than the singing quality of this music. *Speaking* requires more variation in articulation and silence.

♪ Remember the unusual importance of the BASS. There should frequently be a slight space before a bass note.

♪ Typically, a slur is heavier at the front end, and lighter at the back end. This is a rule meant to be broken now and then, but it greatly helps the music to *speak*.



♪ The closer together the notes are, the smoother the bow stroke. As the notes get further apart, the bow stroke becomes shorter. This is not a rule for all time, but a good place to start, and helps give the music good diction.

♪ Up bows will often lift slightly (esp. in movements with pickups - Gigue, Courante, Allemande, etc.).

♪ Don't forget the *for-all-time* string truism. All sound problems and solutions are to be found in the **speed**, **contact point**, and **weight** in the bow. Often an adjustment to only one of these will solve a sound problem. In general, faster bow/less weight near fingerboard, slower bow/more weight near bridge.

♪ Don't fall mindlessly into the trap of using an automatic amount of bow. Deciding (in advance) if a bow is going to be slow or fast can be extremely helpful (esp. in sarabandes).

♪ In sustained double stops, it is a good general rule to favor the lower note (more weight). The upper note will almost always dominate as the ear better hears higher registers. Favoring the lower note will enrich your Bach.

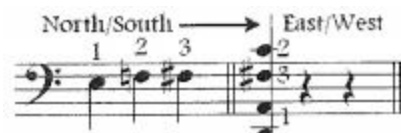
♪ **FOLLOW YOUR BRIDGE!** If you want to do something useful with your eyes while you play, follow your bridge. Your execution and fluidity will immediately improve, and you'll gain a true realization of just how much your right arm needs to move (it is almost always less than you think).

♪ As solo Bach moves across all 4 strings rapidly, it makes good sense (esp. in fast movements) to 'house' the heavy upper arm (shoulder → elbow) at the level of the middle strings. The faster forearm/wrist/fingers can find the outer strings more easily.



♪ Rolling a chord can be done in myriad ways. 2+2 (lower two strings, followed quickly by upper 2 strings) is rarely a good choice - as the middle voices are practically lost. Baroque violinist/teacher extraordinaire Stanley Ritchie calls this tendency, "ta-WHA!" (and *not* in a good way).

♪ When it comes to intonation, think of the fingerboard along two planes - East/West (across strings), and North/South (b/w scroll and bridge). The spacing of fingers in chords is simply a north/south decision with an east/west component. If you struggle with a chord, find the N/S position of fingers on one string, and then move the fingers to the proper string, in the same N/S position. This will get you in the ballpark.



...and most importantly, playing Bach is meant to "refresh the spirit". Never lose sight of that.