

Franz (František) Benda (1709–86):
Sonata in C Minor for Viola and Basso Continuo, Lee 3.137
Editorial Commentary

Sources: D Bsa, SA 3355 (copyist: Berlin 63; possessor: ?Georg Friedrich Schmidt [1712–75]), 3356 (Berlin 79), 3357 (SA 577, poss. Sara Levy). Another copy, B Bc T 26382 (F. W. Rust), gives the sonata in B-flat minor as a work for violin.

Benda as well as several other members of the family apparently started out as violists; in his autobiography he mentions learning from J. G. Graun especially how to write (play?) adagios, apparently also receiving help from him in writing bass lines. Phillip Schmidt, in the commentary to his edition (Beeskow: Ortus Musikverlag, 2018), argues that this work was originally for viola, inasmuch as the three sources are, in his view, independent of one another. In fact SA 3356 and SA 3357 are related more closely to one another than to SA 3355, and Bc is also relatively remote from the latter. Schmidt also notes that the violin version in B-flat minor could be made by just changing the clef and accidentals, but this would not be true of the bass.

An earlier edition by Michael Jappe (Winterthur: Amadeus, 2010) was actually a sort of reconstruction, based solely on Bc and disregarding the three SA manuscripts. Jappe mentions two transposition errors in the bass and awkward violin writing in Rust's version; Schmidt lists seven such errors or variants in the bass as well as seven passages in which Rust writes variants intended to avoid notes below C in the bass (these would have arisen due to the downward transposition). Schmidt regards SA 3355 as likely to be from the collection of Georg Friedrich Schmidt, court copper engraver and great uncle of Friedrich Wilhelm Zelter, friend of Goethe and founder of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. SA 3355 is also "probably" the earliest source and the principal one for the edition.

Previously the version of the sonata for violin and continuo in B-flat minor was the only one known. Scholars had been aware, however, that Benda had composed it as a viola sonata in C minor, as it was listed together with its opening theme in 18th-century publishers' catalogs. The viola version is numbered 3.137 in Douglas Lee's list of Benda's works, which names Bc as the only source. Lee found that another sonata, 3.127, has a version of the last movement in Bb major, but the two "versions" appear to share only the first two or three notes. Schmidt asserts that Rust "probably" made his copies of this and other sonatas by Benda during or after studies with the latter at Potsdam in 1763–64.

SA 3355 has the clearest provenance and is marginally more accurate than SA 3356 and 3357. This is despite the notation of SA 3355 as if in mezzo-soprano clef, which, as Schmidt noted, recurs in other viola pieces in SA and was meant to facilitate performance by a violinist. Thus the first note g1 is written on the second line from the top, where it looks like d2 if one reads it as if notated in treble clef. It sounds as g1 if played with the third finger on the third string of a viola.

I have followed SA 3355 for beaming and for written values of appoggiaturas (although these appear to be inconsequential). Variants in the written values of appoggiaturas are not listed below.

mvt. 1

Each dynamic sign in SA 3355 and 3357 appears only once, between the staves; SA 3356 sometimes includes signs for dynamics in the bs part as well.

- 11 va slur from SA 3357
- 14 va SA 3356–57: stac. dots on notes 1–3 (SA 3357 also has a slur); both sources also have variant rhythms for notes 4–8 and 9–13. SA 3356: 8th–triplet 32ds–8th (slur on 5–7), then 16th–triplet 32ds–16th (slur on 9–11) [*sic*]; SA 3357: 16th–triplet 32ds (slurred)–16th (twice) [*sic*]. As only SA 3355 gives a correct rhythm, it must be presumed to be accurate even though the other sources suggest that the lost autograph presented some ambiguity. The violin version (not seen here) presumably = SA 3355, as Schmidt reports no variants there.
- bs SA 3356 (only) gives “f” on the downbeat (but no “p” on beat 3)
- 16 va all sources: slurs on notes 1–2, 3–4 (no stac. stroke; likewise SA 3357 in m. 17), but cf. bass and m. 17; SA 3356–57: no app. (c2)
- 17 va SA 3356–57: no slur on notes 7–8, 10–11
- 18 va SA 3356–57: no slurs (instead SA 3356 has slur on 3–4)
- 21 va slurs in all three sources distinctly begin on the second 32d of each group
- 23 bs all sources lack natural on note 7 (A)
- 24 va all sources give last note as half, not quarter; SA 3357 also gives half the values of notes 1–5 (according to Schmidt, Bc ends with quarter eb2 on beat 3; d1 is omitted, as is m. 25)
- mvt. 2*
- 10 va slur and dots from SA 3356–57
- 12 va first slur from SA 3356; second slur by analogy to m. 11
- 17 va app. g from SA 3356–57
- 19 va last note (lower voice) bb (not ab) in all sources
- 20 va SA 3355–56: app. (lower voice) bb (not ab); edition follows SA 3357
- 24 va SA 3357: no stac. stroke, slur on notes 4–7 (not 5–7); in the second half of the measure SA 3355 lacks slurs and stac. stroke (as does SA 3357, although there the last slur falls only on the last two notes), edition follows SA 3356
- 42 SA 3355 has no indication of first and second endings; SA 3356–57 have only a fermata on note 1 in bs (second ending = editorial conjecture)
- 42 va SA 3355–56: app. (lower voice) bb (not ab); edition follows SA 3357
- 44–5 va SA 3356–57: no tie

- 52 va app. (f1) from SA 3356–57 (and Bc as reported by Schmidt); SA 3355–57 all have eb1 as note 3 (edition follows Bc as reported by Schmidt)
- 53 va stac. from SA 3357
- 59 va SA 3357: no “tr”
- 61–3 va stac. from SA 3356–57
- 69 va note 5 c2 not a1; edition follows SA 3356–57 (and m. 70)
- 72 bs notes 2–4 orig. = edition, changed to eb–d–c; edition follows SA 3356–57
- 77 va SA 3355, 3357: slurs on notes 1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–8 (SA 3356 has slurs on 5–6, 7–8); edition follows m. 5 (= Bc as reported by Schmidt)
- 83–5 va stac. from SA 3356–57
- 87 va SA 3356: possibly a stac. stroke on note 1; SA 3357: possibly a stac. stroke on note 5 (scans are unclear)
- 91 bs all sources indicate first ending with fermata on C; second ending is editorial conjecture
- mvt. 3*
- SA 3356–57: Moderato (no “Allegro”); likewise Bc (as reported by Schmidt)
- 4 va appog. from SA 3356–57
- 6 SA 3356, 3357: “p” placed ambiguously directly beneath treble barline
- 6, 8 va stac. from SA 3356–57
- 34 va SA 3357: slur apparently begins on note 2
- 37 sources lack indications for first and second endings; SA 3355 gives only the second ending, SA 3356–57 only the first ending (as shown in this edition, which follows Bc as reported by Schmidt, i.e., with a fermata on note 1 of the bs as in the second ending)
- 42 va slur from SA 3356–57
- 43 SA 3355 and 3357 place “p” on the downbeat of m. 44 (SA 3356 lacks this dyn.)
- 49 va slurs and stac. strokes omitted on beats 2 and 3 due to lack of space between staves
- 64 “p” from SA 3356–57

- 74 va note 2 lacks an accidental in SA 3355–57 (Schmidt reports that Bc has a flat here and a natural in m. 75)
- 91 all sources place “p” on the downbeat of m. 92, but cf. m. 6
- 95 va SA 3555: two slurs, on notes 2–8 and 10–12; edition follows SA 3356–57, in which the beginning and end of each slur is ambiguously placed (but cf. mm. 96–97, where SA 3555 clearly draws a single slur for the entire measure)
- 102 va SA 3357: slur apparently begins on note 2; SA 3356: slur extends to note 9 (g1)
- 105 SA 3357: no fermata (indicating second ending, which is editorial conjecture as shown in edition)