
BAROQUE MINIMALISM IN JOHN ADAMS'S VIOLIN CONCERTO

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Abstract: This study explores Adams's interpretation of Baroque genres and his creative methods that draw on a relationship between past and present in the Violin Concerto. In this composition, Adams not only revives Baroque musical language through new performance practices, but also draws together diverse musical idioms, creating a way to communicate with our society. Repetition plays a large part in the Violin Concerto, but more in the sense of variation and sequences than of literal repetition. On the other hand, techniques such as the Lombard Snap and 'unequal-note' (*notes inégales*) are not treated in a traditional way. Structurally, although there is no trace of motivic connexion throughout the work, the music does not lack stylistic unity. The 'harmonic' language is generally consonant, which reflects Adams's honor of conventional musical sound. The Concerto certainly demonstrates the composer's creative imagination.

John Adams (photo: Margareta Mitchell,
courtesy Boosey & Hawkes)



Introduction

Baroque music is not only related to a florid, precious and decorative style, but also has a close relation to 20th-century minimalism. Indeed, mechanical music such as minimalism can be complex and stylistically reflective of the idiom of a past era, and therefore Baroque's influence on 20th-century music should not be overlooked. Suffice to mention its strong influence on 20th-century minimalist composers such as Steve Reich, who never fails to remind us that Bach was a formative influence in his music.

It must be stressed, therefore, that Baroque music cannot be thought of as something static and inflexible. Rather, the music of minimalism suggests a familiarity with the stylistic characters of Baroque music, and thus the similarity between the two provides an interesting subject for investigation.

The aim of this essay is to draw a connexion between John Adams's Violin Concerto (1993) and Baroque music, aiming to examine how Adams transforms old or traditional genres into new forms. Adams once wrote, 'the second and third movements [of the Violin Concerto] are tropes on two musical artifacts from the past, the chaconne and the toccata'.¹ What musical characteristics has Adams captured and altered in these two traditional genres, and what other baroque musical normative traditions can be found in this Concerto?

As in minimalist compositions, repetition plays a large part in the Violin Concerto. But it is repetition more in the sense of variation and sequences than of literal repetition. Besides repetition, one finds further musical traits in the composition in common with Baroque music.

¹ John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction: Composing An American Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 175.

Ornamentations that are discovered in Baroque music are employed in the composition, but they play different roles. Indeed, most of the Baroque musical characteristics have been absorbed and transformed in this composition.

One also witnesses pop rhythms that form part of the musical language. What is intriguing about the composition is that it is both traditional as well as contemporary, which provides an effect that is interesting, demanding and sophisticated. Not surprisingly, the music incubates a new kind of listening to a traditional genre in the late 20th century.

In an interview dated 24 October 1995, Adams remarked that: ‘The Violin Concerto ... in some ways is the most rigorous worked-out piece that I have composed in terms of its internal design, its generic structure and the way in which the larger structures reiterate’.² To some extent, the composition shows an approach to musical architecture that links the music from Baroque to the late 20th century. Thus, in this study I shall also investigate the structural designs that have been incorporated into the music, and discuss how Adams challenges the formal structure of a traditional genre in the composition.

Baroque and Minimalism

Recently, significant contributions to the study of baroque and minimalism have included Robert Fink and Jonathan Scheffer. The latter claimed that ‘baroque and minimalist music sound alike; they belong together’.³ Suffice it to mention Bach’s Prelude in C from his *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I. In addition, it is not difficult to draw a connexion between Vivaldi’s music and minimalism. One easily witnesses in his compositions the tendency to overdo that handy compositional method of Baroque musical continuity, the sequence. Luigi Dallapiccola spoke of Vivaldi as ‘the composer not of six hundred concertos but of one concerto written six hundred times over’.⁴ For example, at the opening of Vivaldi’s *Sonata da Camera a tre*, op 1 no. 4, a variant of the same idea in sequence happens too often and lasts too long in the music. Moreover, in Vivaldi’s music the rhythms are usually presented in bright energy, and the rhythms of the fast movements always sparkle. There are also moments where a continuation of two repeated notes, a fifth and/or sixth apart in the bass line, give a taste of Alberti bass-like motion. An example can be seen in Vivaldi’s *Sonata a Violino e Basso per il Cembalo*, op. 2, no. 3 (Example 1). Indeed, the technique of repetition forms part of Vivaldi’s musical individuality.



Example 1

² John Adams, Rebecca Jemian, Anne Marie de Zeeuw, ‘An Interview with John Adams’, *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 34, no. 2 (Summer, 1996), 91.

³ Jonathan Scheffer, *Perceptible Process: Minimalism and the Baroque*, ed. Claudia Swan (New York: Eos, 1997), iv.

⁴ Jonathan Scheffer, Marc Pincherle, trans. Christopher Hatch, *Vivaldi: Genius of the Baroque* (New York, 1957), 68.

Other comments on the minimalism of the Baroque period include Harold C. Schonberg, who wrote in the *New York Times*:

Bach and Handel excepted, most baroque music is, like Minimalism, music of pattern. Your typical Corelli, Vivaldi, Locatelli, or Geminiani concerto grosso is virtually devoid of personality or imagination. It moves in a purely sequential pattern, its harmonies circumscribed largely to tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords. Everything in this is predictable ... As such, it is wallpaper music ... Part of the attraction of baroque music was that one did not have to think while listening to it. Its excuse for being was that it wrapped the listener in innocuous sound, the busy patterns moving up and down without ever really saying anything. Diddle diddle diddle, diddle diddle diddle ... Thus it is with Minimalism.⁵

Not surprisingly, on the surface minimalism and Baroque music both share a cyclic patterned repetition. Adams once asserted that 'the obvious connection between baroque and minimalist styles lies in the motoric, periodic nature of the musical discourse', explaining further that 'both baroque and minimalist styles offer a more regular, more predictable, more reasoned universe'.⁶

Although most minimalist music is like a working part of a machine, not an organism, there is nothing machine-like in the music of Adams's Concerto. Indeed, despite the fact that Adams was influenced by minimalism, he has never thought of himself as a true minimalist composer. His use of repetitive activity served other purposes than to achieve the psychological or meditative effects. He once said:

What sets me apart from Reich and Glass is that I am not a modernist. They are, in the sense that they still use very pure, single systems. I am not a pure composer; I embrace the whole music past, and I don't have the kind of refined, systematic language they have ... I rely a lot more on my intuitive sense of balance ... I've stopped worrying about intuiting if a structure is right or not; as far as I can tell, most nineteenth-century composers write on intuitive levels.⁷

Here, Adams establishes a link with the past musical quality by utilizing a traditional technique of repetition such as sequences in the first movement of the Concerto.

Adams's Violin Concerto

The Concerto was co-commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the New York City Ballet. Adams began writing the Concerto in 1992, and the work was premiered in January of the following year in Minneapolis by Jorja Fleezanis. The composition has attracted many world-class performers such as Gidon Kremer, Vadim Repin, Leila Josefowicz, and Midori to perform it in their concert series. Today the work remains one of the most popular performed pieces in the United States and Europe. The piece is without doubt one of Adams's greatest works.

Since its first performance, the Violin Concerto has received many positive appraisals. A music critic, Pierre Ruhe, wrote that 'the Violin Concerto's most arresting section comes in the middle, where the slow movement is a chaconne, characterized by a slowly repeating bass line that reminds the listener of Pachelbel's ubiquitous Canon in D'.⁸ In

⁵ Harold C. Schonberg, 'Plumbing the Shallows of Minimalism', *New York Times*, 21 February 1985.

⁶ 'John Adams Conversation with Jonathan Sheffer', in *Perceptible Process: Minimalism and the Baroque*, 81.

⁷ Quote taken from K. Robert Schwarz, 'Process vs. Intuition in the Recent Works of Steve Reich and John Adams', *American Music*, vol. 8, no. 3, 247.

⁸ Pierre Ruhe, 'An American classic: John Adams brings a common touch to the highbrow symphonic world'. 6/8/2009. <http://www.earbox.com/inter-ruhe2.html>

an interview, the violin virtuoso Midori called the composition 'a true showpiece for the violin's range and character'.⁹ Other receptions of the music include that of Alex Ross, who asserted that 'the slow movement can stand comparison with the instrumental lamentations of Britten and Shostakovich'.¹⁰

The Violin Concerto is one of the important compositions that demonstrates the direction of Adams's creative efforts. The work can be seen as 'modernistic' Baroque and as new Baroque music; it not only provides a sense of hearing yesterday in today, but also establishes an overall relationship between past and present. In the composition, Adams has shown some interest in applying electronic sound color to his music; he employs two keyboard synthesizers and an orchestra. In fact, this is not the only composition that Adams shows interest in employing electronic sound. His other works that are preoccupied with electronic sound color include *Studebaker Love Music* (1976) for two-channel tape, *Fearful Symmetries* (1988), which uses a synthesizer, sampler and orchestra, *Hoodoo Zephyr* (1992–93) for Midi keyboard, and his *Dharma at Big Sur* (2003) for electronic violin and orchestra. In addition, Adams highlights pop-based musical idioms in his music.

Along with modern musical culture, in this Concerto the composer assimilates the musical style of Baroque. In his program note Adams wrote that the piece is 'a throwback to traditional means of discourse and syntax'.¹¹ Despite the differences in musical material, his music hits upon the effect of various principles and idioms in common which, without being traditional in the strictest sense, form the basis of both Baroque and minimalist musical phenomena.

Adams's Violin Concerto consists of three movements in a fast-slow-fast disposition: Movement I, Movement II: Chaconne: Body through which the dream flows, and Movement III: Toccata. Throughout the composition, the lyrical melody in the solo violin can be considered as traditionally-based expressive language. In the outer movements, however, the music is hyperactive – inexorable energy, tension and momentum. Adams employs extremely fast speeds of running notes in the Toccata. It is as if he intends to explore the limits of extreme power and vitality found in a world-class violinist. Thus, the intensive, dramatic natures of the first and last movements contrast sharply with the tranquil manner of the second movement.

Although the Concerto is cast seemingly in the conventions of the three-movement plan, each movement shows distinct musical characters. 'I am sometimes puzzled by how the first movement seems to exist in an entirely different expressive world from the succeeding two', wrote Adams.¹² In fact, there is no motivic development in any of the three movements, which engenders a sense of incompleteness to the work. Nor is there any audible thematic relationship among the movements. Moreover, musical ideas used in the three movements do not bear any discernible relationship to each other: each movement presents new material and is complete in itself. This musical manner makes one wonder how exactly Adams connects the three movements.

Also, unlike a traditional concerto form where the solo alternates with tutti, forming a dialogue between a soloist and orchestra and giving a narrative structure, with Adams the focus is very much on the violin: the solo violin starts the piece and plays throughout. The orches-

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Alex Ross, 'The Harmonist' in *The John Adams Reader: Essential Writings On An American Composer*, ed. Thomas May (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2006), 41.

¹¹ John Adams, Rebecca Jemian, Anne Marie de Zeeuw 'An Interview with John Adams', 89.

¹² John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 175.

tra is clearly subservient to the solo violin, giving a sense of meditation with less musical rhetoric. Adams once described the character of the piece as follows:

The violin intones long, lyrical melodies, floating above the orchestral body as it slowly turns and shifts direction. The orchestral music is by and large modal, moving among various scalar patterns.¹³

The first movement opens with the orchestra in a rising contour. The solo violin joins in with a two-note figure of a descending third that soon develops into a melodic line. Nevertheless, the melodic line never appears in exactly the same shape throughout the rest of the music, although it reappears in various varied forms. Throughout the movement the music is also enhanced by recurring musical gestures from the opening material and ideas. There is no obvious division of sections, such as exposition, development and recapitulation, that one can relate to a classical sonata form. Nor does the music show any strong surface contrast. It is no surprise that one would relate such musical manners to minimalism. However, there is no exact trace of minimalist repetition in the movement; repeated phrases and melodic ideas are presented in a sequencing manner, a characteristic that is most often found in Baroque music.

In the movement, Adams not only generates tension through melodic forces, but also, using scalar-like contour in ascending and descending motion in the orchestra, reinforces the impression of increasing velocity which gives a forward-moving momentum. On most occasions, Adams features a stylistic trait of Arcangelo Corelli and many other Baroque and classical composers: that is, a walking bass with a steadily moving pattern of eighth notes. These compositional features allow Adams to create a musical tension that is only resolved at the end of the movement. In other words, the tension of the music constantly occurs throughout the movement, which is itself one of Adams's idiosyncratic compositional methods. The result is certainly one of the most exciting examples of Adams's orchestral writing.

In Baroque music the heart of a concerto principle is provided by an improvisatory cadenza. Here, in the Concerto, the cadenza passage is relatively conventional in several aspects. A short written-out cadenza is placed before a coda at measure 297 in the first movement. The soloist not only adopts a more lyrical approach, but also indulges in highly complicated and idiomatic violin playing, such as an extremely high pitch register, double-stops in triplet patterns, triple-stops, large leaps and different kinds of harmonics. Hence, although there is no suggestion of cyclic form or motivic development throughout the entire composition, the music is connected through the mood, its expressiveness and, to some extent, the musical style of Baroque.

Different rhythmic alterations also play a major role in Baroque music. The use of the famous Lombard Snap, a short-long rhythmic pattern, (for example: a sixteenth-note followed by a dotted eighth), is evident in the first movement beginning at measure 40. It must be stressed that Adams's approach to the Lombard Snap is not a traditional one; here an eighth-note is tied to the sixteenth-note. In other words, he captures the Baroque musical idiom in late 20th-century terms. Thus, Adams does not create a short-long rhythmic effect as expected, but instead a new listening experience of the past.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 174.

Traditionally, dozens of examples of written short-longs can be seen in Vivaldi's published instrumental works such as the Violin Concerto in D Major, RV 228 and Concerto for 4 Violins in E Minor, RV 550. In much of Baroque music, the short-long rhythmic patterns are presented in descending motion. Such a rhythmic pattern can also be seen at the opening of Chopin Etude no. 5; nevertheless the musical interest in the Etude is focused on a single technical problem and finger exercises. One other Baroque rhythmic technique is the use of 'unequal-note' alteration (*notes inégales*), which can be seen in the third movement of the Violin Concerto. I shall develop this point in the following discussion.

To some extent, E \flat has become the focus pitch of the movement. It not only begins and concludes in E \flat in the solo violin, but also occurs in important musical statements, sections and ideas. For example, at the introduction to the cadenza section at measure 302, the solo violin begins with a high E \flat ₇ (pitch references are based on the Acoustical Society of America standard: middle C = C₄). Also, Adams concludes the entire movement with bass instruments playing *tremoli* in octave E \flat s in long-note values to set the mood for the next movement. Without a pause, the bass moves a semitone down to D that begins the second movement.

The slow movement has the title *Chaconne: 'Body through which the dream flows'*, a phrase taken from a poem by Robert Hass. Adams portrays 'the orchestra as the "body" and the solo violin as the floating, disembodied "dream"'.¹⁴ The music is slow, calm and deeply expressive in manner. Generally, in the concerto, Adams supports the main lyrical solo line with a plain, static, simple repeated bass line and scale-like musical background – a support that does not reinforce the musical ideas and material of the solo violin. In addition, rhythmic contrast between solo violin and orchestra is evident in the music. For example, syncopated rhythms in the solo violin are placed above the static orchestra. Such musical handling certainly suits the title of the movement. Indeed, the music seems to project two layers of sound in the composition, which also brings to mind the sound effect of Charles Ives's *Unanswered Question*.

A chaconne is a Baroque procedure in which a repeated chord progression or bass-line supports a constantly changing melody throughout the entire composition, with little or no variation. Traditionally, it is usually written in triple meter in two, four, eight or sixteen measures with harmonic progressions: I–V–vi–V, I–vi–IV–V, I–V–V–V. Here, the music begins in 3/4 meter in D major. It is six measures in length, with a harmonic progression I–V–vi–iii–IV–V–I at its first appearance. Like most traditional chaconne compositions, here the bass line does not have a distinctive rhythmic pattern; it is introduced in long-note values. Nevertheless, by using the techniques of augmentation and diminution, Adams not only expands the chaconne into nine measures and compresses it into four as the music progresses, but also allows some changes in rhythmic patterns.

As in some Baroque instrumental music, sections are used in the music to indicate a change of texture, idea and mood. Here, in the second movement, Adams also divides the movement into three sections: 1–61, 62–91 and 92–174, based on the chaconne bass line. The first and third sections are focused on the opening D major bass line. Adams keeps the idea of the use of variation technique in most instrumental music of the Baroque period. Beginning at the middle section (measures 62–91), Adams transposes the original bass line down a major third and a perfect

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

fourth, forming the interval patterns and pitches: 3 (B \flat)-4 (E)-4 (F \sharp)-3 (D)-4 (D)-4 (E)-3 (B \flat). As the music progresses Adams fragments the pitches from both bass lines in groups of two to three notes. The listening experience is placed between the past and present.

This movement also shows the presence of pitch centrality: for example, the emphasis on D in the orchestra and A in the solo violin. The music begins on D in the orchestral chaconne bass line, and the solo violin comes in with the dominant pitch, A. The music certainly reflects what Adams called the 'floating' character. D not only appears at the opening melodic bass line but also at the end of the movement in the orchestra parts, and A constantly reoccurs at the opening and ending of a musical statement played by the solo violin. Interestingly, the last statement of the solo violin begins on D and ends with a cadential whole-step trill falling on its final pitch C7, which then resolves to the D played by chimes in the orchestra (Example 2).

Example 2

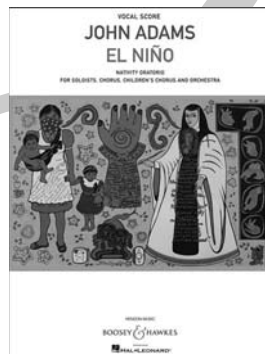
John Adams

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By employing a trill in the solo part Adams not only draws attention to the conclusion of the music, but also intensifies the resolution of the pitch C7 to D. The musical handling of resolving pitches brings to mind Schumann's structural treatments in his *Lieder*. Suffice to mention Schumann's *Dichterliebe*. For example, in the conclusions of both *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai* and *Aus meinen Tränen sprießen*, the lyrical vocal melodic lines resolve to their piano accompanying parts. Adams once commented on Schumann's music, including his *Lieder*:

The harmonies, restless and forever migrating to a new tonal center, moved between tension and resolution in an uncanny way that constantly propelled the listener forward ... They were lovely beyond description.¹⁵

Recycling pitch material is apparent in this movement. The idea may derive from minimalism. An example is at the opening musical statement, where the musical phrase is restricted to limited pitches (Example 3). The simplicity of the melodic pitch manner and its expressiveness, especially at the opening of the movement, also reflects the musical characters of a vocal work.

Example 3

The image shows a musical score for Example 3. It consists of two systems of music. The first system starts with a tempo marking of quarter note = 52. The vocal line (top staff) begins with a trill on a note, followed by a melodic line. The piano accompaniment (middle and bottom staves) features a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals. Dynamics include *ppp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). Performance instructions include *legatissimo con* and *(Synth.)*. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts, with dynamics like *p* and *mf*.

One of the most popular Baroque stylistic traits lies at the very heart of ornamentation. In Baroque style, expression is largely conveyed through the ornamental notes. Also, ornaments in Baroque music are generally used to clarify and segment a section such as the use of a cadential trill to indicate the end of a passage; to emphasize an important note; and to embellish the melodic line. J. Nucius, a Baroque scholar wrote: 'a musical composition through uninterrupted similitude and lack of florid embellishments not only remains artless, but also bores the listeners'.¹⁶ In his book, Manfred F. Bukofzer also claimed that 'the emphasis on ornamentation must be understood as a symptom of the structural importance assigned to the melodic ornament'.¹⁷

In the Concerto, Adams employs whole-step and half-step trills in the second movement. To some extent, a series of trills in the music is used to establish the teleological nature in the melodic line, giving a sense

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁶ Quote taken from J. Nucius, *Musices poeticae* (Niesse, 1613), chapter 7, F4.

¹⁷ Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era: from Monteverdi to Bach* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1947), 372.

of goal and direction. On some occasions, the composer adopts the traditional approach to a trill: that is, an appoggiatura leads to a trill. An example of such handling can be seen at measure 60 in the second movement. Both C. P. E. Bach, in his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (1753), and Leopold Mozart, in his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756), wrote that a trill should be preceded by an appoggiatura. Also in his book, *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (1756), Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg wrote that: 'a trill, wherever it may stand, must start with its auxiliary note'.¹⁸ In his book, *Remarques curieuses sur l'art de bien chanter* (1668), Bénigne de Bacilly wrote that the trill is 'one of the most important ornaments, without which the melody is very imperfect'.¹⁹ Indeed, the use of trills can also be seen in much of Baroque music.

A pause is made between movements before Adams begins the Toccata. Traditionally, the toccata genre is often free in form and can be divided into several sections, and is generally written for a solo keyboard instrument. It is also idiomatic in style in that it incorporates virtuosic elements designed to show off the player's 'touch'. Here, the musical character of this movement is made immediately explicit by the title; the music demonstrates a hectic energetic running manner. Not surprisingly, the momentum of the music starts from the beginning of the movement, which gains its intensity through repetition and complex rhythmic patterns. A familiar minimalist technique of rapidly repeated musical pattern appears here. Nevertheless, the overpowering emotions in this movement are created not only through the extremely fast forward-moving momentum in repeated rhythmic patterns, but also through the intensive use of percussion instruments such as bongos and timpani, and bass instruments such as cello and contrabass.

As in the second movement, the third movement also shows a sound-layering effect; the soloist begins with A in a rising contour, and the rest of the instrumental parts emphasize C, while the music ends with a *sforzando* A in the bass and a double-stop on C and D in the solo violin. Throughout the movement, not only are more percussion instruments employed in the music, but also more harmonics and other techniques such as *pizzicato*, *sul ponticello* and *glissandi* are used to produce sound colors that show the Romantic spirit.

What is particularly interesting about this movement is that one hears different musical styles presented simultaneously. Adams commented about the movement that instead of the more usual title Toccata 'I used the Italian infinitive form of the word – [it] is based in scales that flip back and forth between modes. Its virtuoso writing hints at the high-energy early Minimalist piece of the 1970s like *Shaker Loops*'.²⁰ Indeed, it is in this movement that one perceives an obvious freedom of stylistic fusion in the music. Adams uses different musical means to explore effects such as pop musical culture and a 'cowboy-like' musical manner that recalls Aaron Copland's *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid*. To some extent, like many of the minimalist compositions, the rhythm in the Violin Concerto constantly shifts from strong beats to weak ones and back again. Although diverse styles and techniques are incorporated in the movement, there is no obvious perceptible clash or conflict that occurs in the music.

It is true that the style of interpretation and the expectations of the listener have changed over time. Composers have incorporated various musical styles such as pop and jazz in their compositions for

¹⁸ Quote taken from Robert Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance* (London: Faber Music, 1982), 130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁰ John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 175.

diverse audiences. Here, Adams also finds joy in playing with jazz rhythmic components in the Toccata movement. An example can be seen beginning at measure 32 in the solo violin. On some occasions, he incorporates dramatic and off-beat pulsations in the bass. It not only creates a sense of pop musical character but also generates forward moving motion. 'I was very drawn to certain aspects of American music – pulsation, beat, the sense of movement that characterizes a lot of ethnic music and jazz', Adams has said.²¹ The use of jazz idioms also reveals Adams's admiration for jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington. He once claimed that Ellington was one of his 'greatest heroes'. Adams described Ellington's piano style as 'effective and unobtrusive', and as having deeply influenced him:

The signature jabs and 'bullets' of the Ellington brass made an indelible impression on me, and I now hear them throughout my own orchestral works, from *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* to *Nixon in China* and even later pieces like *Naïve and Sentimental Music* and *Doctor Atomic*.²²

These pop musical passages in the movement are capable of stimulating physical excitement in the listener. This compositional style has become the norm for much of Adams's music. Indeed, many of his works demonstrate the influence of pop music culture. His upbringing certainly plays an important role in his creative compositional writing. 'I grew up in a household where Benny Goodman and Mozart were not separated'.²³ In addition, he is also concerned that his music should be audience-friendly, and be able to communicate with a wide range of audiences. Not surprisingly, this concept has become one of the essential aims for Adams in writing his music. As he has written:

In my own work, I try to find a way to create something that is, on the one hand, fresh and new and has the feel and sensation of being written in my time, and on the other hand, can have a larger cultural impact, be comprehensible to a level of educated people who are not musical specialists.²⁴

On the other hand, one witnesses another of Adams's creative characteristics at measures 32 and 33 – an eight-note followed by a sixteenth-note and a sixteenth-note's rest in the solo violin, with even eighth-notes accompaniment. Adams tends to imitate a French Baroque musical expression in his own way. Here, he introduces the written 'unequal-notes' (*notes inégales*) playing over the even eighth-notes (Example 4). The sound effect is playful and lively.

Example 4

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, spanning measures 31 and 32. The score is written for a solo violin and piano accompaniment. Measure 31 is marked 'loco' and 'ff'. Measure 32 features 'arco sempre' and 'pizz.' markings. The piano accompaniment has dynamics 'f', 'ff', and 'mf'.

²¹ 'John Adams', *The Muse that Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process*, ed. Ann McCutchan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

²² John Adams, *Hallelujah Junction*, 52–53.

²³ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 170.

²⁴ 'John Adams', *The Muse that Sings: Composers Speak about the Creative Process*, 72.

Traditionally, the 'unequal-note' style of the rhythmic alteration was never written out in an actual French baroque music score. Indeed, similar to the style of musical ornamentation, it was often directed by the composer, and was seldom considered so essential as to be written out. 'The Italians ... write their music in the true time values in which they have intended them to play [while we French] dot several consecutive eighths in diatonic succession, and yet write them as equal', Couperin wrote.²⁵ French Baroque musicians believed that the principal notes should be brought out, rather than the passing ones.

Conclusion

What has been demonstrated here is John Adams's interpretation of Baroque genres and his creative methods that draw on a relationship between past and present. In his Violin Concerto, Adams not only creates Baroque musical language through new performance practices, but also draws together diverse musical idioms, creating a way to communicate with our society. In view of Adams's creative writing and his ability to communicate with listeners through his music without losing the intellectual challenge, it is not surprising that the work has received much attention from listeners and world-class performers.

Structurally, although there is no trace of motivic connexion throughout the composition, the music does not lack stylistic unity. Despite the fact that one witnesses Adams's new approach to Baroque musical idioms, the music evidently demonstrates some of the Baroque musical tradition. The 'harmonic' language is generally consonant, which reflects Adams's regard for conventional musical sound. Indeed, the composition certainly captures the spirit of the past. The musical characters in the Chaconne and Toccata appear like a distant memory of the traditional genres. But at the same time, in this work, Adams also takes Baroque idioms but alters them by embracing elements and the musical language of late 20th-century style, giving a new musical context. The composition is certainly a summation of the old and new musical languages, but in a different way from the quotation and collage methods one encounters in postmodernism.

The Concerto demonstrates the composer's creative imagination in the process of formulating a musical language that is capable of integrating various stylistic traits. Indeed, the music not only shows remarkable underlying construction in a wide range of musical styles, but is also equally notable for its expressive intensity. It is also in this respect that Adams shows striking individuality in his music. Not surprisingly, the result is a radical new listening experience.

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²⁵ Quote taken from Sol Babitz 'A Problem of Rhythm in Baroque Music', *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Oct. 1952), 549.