

On Commissioning New Music for Baroque Cello Commander de nouvelles oeuvres pour violoncelle baroque

Elinor Frey

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Article abstract

In 2014, cellist Elinor Frey began commissioning new music for the five-string Baroque cello as a way to contribute to and expand the repertoire for the instrument. Her project grew to three new works for five-string cello, two works for the four-string cello, and one for cello and harpsichord. This article documents Frey's close collaborations with six composers—Scott Godin, Isaiah Ceccarelli, Linda Catlin Smith, Maxime McKinley, Ken Ueno, and Lisa Streich—and reflects upon the ways in which her approaches to style and performance practice played a role in interpreting the new works. Frey also explores how she drew inspiration from Baroque stylistic qualities such as concealment and illusion.

On Commissioning New Music for Baroque Cello

Elinor Frey

There is a moment in the documentary film *Rivers and Tides* when the film's subject, Andy Goldsworthy, attempts to build a stone sculpture, a pile of tenuously balanced beach rock. We watch him labour in silence for a long while, and he speaks only after the gently balanced sculpture has collapsed multiple times:

[At] the moment when something collapses, it is intensely disappointing, and this is the fourth time it's fallen, and each time I got to know the stone a little bit more and [it] got higher each time, so it grew in proportion to my understanding of the stone. And that is really one of the things that my art is trying to do, trying to understand the stone. I obviously don't understand it well enough yet.¹

1. Andy Goldsworthy speaking in Riedelsheimer *et al.*, 2006.

When reflecting on my five-year project of commissioning new works for Baroque cello, Goldsworthy's remarks stuck in my mind. *Understanding the materials*. Indeed, learning new music for Baroque cello feels like a series of small collapses and rebuildings, a practice spread out over the time it takes to learn new works, like Goldsworthy's daily trips to the water's edge. I translate his stone into my wood, gut, and bow hair, and into all the infinite discoveries that are possible with cello playing. Over the past five years of commissioning, understanding my materials also meant reflecting on the many subtle implications of the notated scores, springing from the mind of each composer and from our collaboration.

Before I began commissioning new works for Baroque cello, I worked on a research project exploring how tools of interpretation, primarily formed through the study and performance of Baroque solo cello music, could enrich the performance of new music on the modern cello.² At that time, I nearly always performed Baroque music on the Baroque cello (with gut strings

2. Frey, 2012.

strung over a shorter fingerboard, a thicker neck at a straighter angle to the bridge that produces lower tension, a longer bass bar, a differently shaped bridge, no endpin, and a bow that is more convex and without camber) and contemporary music on a “modern” cello (synthetic/steel strings, increased neck angle, shorter bass bar, use of an endpin, etc.), even though neither Baroque nor modern composers typically specify such things as string material, bow shape, or use of the endpin.

The Baroque cello’s living composers and living makers

The music that I commissioned spans the years 2014 to 2018. While each commission was a separate project, I kept in mind connections between the six different pieces (like an 18th century opus of six works), enough music for a concert-length or CD-length program.³ In this sense, the project aims for both unity and variety, and it showcases various cello sizes and non-standard tuning of the strings. The project began with a new instrument, a five-string cello commissioned in 2012 from Québécois luthier Francis Beaulieu.⁴ Now primarily known as the instrument intended for Bach’s sixth solo cello suite, in the 17th and 18th centuries, five-string cellos were simply some of the many instruments found in the family of bass violins; smaller versions fitted with a higher string (e’ in Bach’s suite) were particularly suitable for virtuosic sonatas and solos in higher registers. Since the small five-string cello did not have a large body of repertoire, I wanted to encourage new works as well as enlarge its presence in my own life onstage. The first commission also came out of the impulse to capitalize on the unique and beautiful tone colour of the five-string cello, a mix of the standard cello and the viola da gamba. By good fortune, composer Scott Godin and I were both interested in doing a project inspired by Hildegard von Bingen, which led to commissioning his *Guided By Voices* (2014-2015) for solo five-string cello. Another work for five-string cello came from Isaiah Ceccarelli, who wrote *With concord of sweet sounds* (2015), a work consisting almost entirely of dyads with at least one open string. A third work, Ken Ueno’s *Chimera* (2017), demands a special tuning where the top two strings are tuned to the 7th and 11th partials of the C-string, creating unusual sixth-tone intervals that, when combined with the unique timbre of the five-string cello’s gut strings, make for surprising harmonic mixtures.

Three more commissions were for four-string Baroque cello, with the standard tuning C-G-d-a. The first was a solo work titled *Ricercar* (2015) by Linda Catlin Smith. The title points Domenico Gabrielli’s *Ricercari* from 1689, the first unaccompanied works written for the cello. The second commissioned work for four-string cello is a duo with harpsichord by Maxime McKinley. His

3. The six composers are (in chronological order of the pieces) Scott Edward Godin: <http://www.scottedwardgodin.com/>; Isaiah Ceccarelli: <https://isaiahceccarelli.com/>; Linda Catlin Smith: <http://www.catlinsmith.com/>; Maxime McKinley: <http://www.maximemckinley.com/>; Ken Ueno: <http://kenueno.com/>; Lisa Streich: <http://www.lisastreich.se/> (all accessed February 27, 2018).

4. Francis Beaulieu: <http://www.fbeaulieuluthier.com/> (accessed May 1, 2018).

Cortile di Pilato (2017) was inspired by the extraordinarily beautiful mosaic patterns on the wall of an ancient Bolognese church, and makes use of various textural combinations of the cello and harpsichord through games of repetition, pizzicatos, and small figural gestures. The third, *Minerva* (2018) by Lisa Streich, mixes subtle humming of the voice with sonorous double stops and quickly vanishing harmonics realized in the transition between extremes of bow speeds and pressures. I now perform these pieces on a newly commissioned Baroque cello from American luthier Karl Dennis and bows from living makers Jérôme Gastaldi, Pieter Affourtit, and Antonino Airenti, and, furthermore, the harpsichord used in the premiere of Maxime McKinley’s duo was made in 2009 by Yves Beaupré. While this commissioning project’s main objective is to celebrate new music for period instruments, it also showcases the instruments themselves, made by living artists.⁵

Commissioned works

Each commission was for a work 8–10 minutes long, likely to be performed alongside Baroque music although some were delivered to me with a longer duration.

5. Karl Dennis: <http://www.karldennisviolins.com/>; Jérôme Gastaldi: <https://www.jeromegastaldo.com/>; Pieter Affourtit: <http://www.affourtit-bowmaker.com/>; Antonino Airenti: <http://www.baroquebows.net/>; Yves Beaupré: <http://www.clavecinsbeaupre.com/> (all accessed May 1, 2018).

FIGURE 1 Commissioned works for Baroque cello, 2014-2018.

Composer	Title	Duration	Instrument and tuning	Location of first performance	Date	Financial support
Scott Godin (b. 1970)	<i>Guided By Voices</i>	12 min	5-string D/G/d/g/d'	Montreal, Église du Gesù	April 11, 2015	Elinor Frey
Isaiah Ceccarelli (b. 1978)	<i>With concord of sweet sounds</i>	11:30 min	5-string C/G/d/a/e'	Montreal, Église du Gesù	April 11, 2015	Elinor Frey
Linda Catlin Smith (b. 1956)	<i>Ricercar</i>	11 min	4-string C/G/d/a	Montreal, Salle Bourgie	October 15, 2015	Daniel Cooper
Maxime McKinley (b. 1979)	<i>Cortile di Pilato</i>	9:30 min	4-string C/G/d/a + harpsichord	Quebec City, Musée de l'Amérique francophone	November 4, 2017	Elinor Frey and Daniel Cooper
Ken Ueno (b. 1970)	<i>Chimera</i>	20-25 min	5-string C/G/d/bb' (-31¢)/ gb' (-49¢)	Austin, TX, UT Austin Recital Hall	November 18, 2017	New Music USA Project Grant
Lisa Streich (b. 1985)	<i>Minerva</i>	8 min (projected)	4-string C/G/d/a	Toronto, Toronto Music Garden	July 8, 2018	Toronto Harbourfront Centre

In search of understanding the materials

Godin's *Guided By Voices* already challenged me to better understand my materials. During our initial phone conversations about the commission, I told Scott as much as I could about the instrument, including possible tunings. When he delivered the score, it asked that the five-string cello be tuned only with D's and G's: D-G-d-g-d', a pure and resonant tuning inspired by medieval music that contributes to the colour and sound qualities of the piece. I felt I'd best understand the piece if I read from the score at pitch. This meant calculating non-standard fingerings on three out of the five strings in my head, one string up a whole tone (the C transformed to D) and two strings down a whole tone (a to g, and e' to d'). Figure 2 shows the opening bars of the piece which rise from the lowest to highest string. At first, this created a cacophonous chorus in my head—"Up! Down! Normal!"—until greater familiarity with the tuning helped automate my responses. I also needed to manage the *scordatura* tuning during practice and in planning for concerts. I risked being quite out of tune if I programmed another piece on the five-string cello just after or just before *Guided By Voices*. I also had to consider the interaction of the effects of humidity with this different tuning, as well as the wear and tear on the gut strings with frequent changes in string tension.

FIGURE 2 Scott Godin, *Guided By Voices*, mm. 1–3.

♩ = 136; frantic and delirious

Violoncello (5-string)

f, like a recitative *pp*, whispering *f*, ecstatically joyful

Other passages in *Guided By Voices* taught me how to better manage my instrument. Figure 3 shows a passage of quick arpeggios in which the string did not respond as I expected to the pressure of the bow and the articulation lacked clarity. As I started solving this problem, some of the questions I asked of the cello were typical to making interpretations of any piece of cello music: Shall I adjust the speed or the weight of the bow? Do I need to create more resonance, give more time, use less bow, play nearer to the bridge? Should I discuss with Scott a slower tempo?

With the five-string Baroque cello, I also had questions different from modern cello (the instrument I had used previously when learning new music): Is the tension of the string a problem? Should I use a thicker or thinner string gage? Which model of bow makes this passage speak? Since the

FIGURE 3 Scott Godin, *Guided By Voices*, mm. 165–172.



strings are closer together with five of them, I cannot simply push into the string to sharpen the clarity because I have a greater risk of hitting the other strings, especially since the string tension is lower than on the modern cello. Therefore, I tried to apply bow pressure closer to the bridge for the passage and I asked Scott if I could slur the notes because I found this combination best produced the legato and the clarity I was searching for. I also learned through this first new piece for five-string cello to accept and even enjoy a certain graininess and colour of the string sound that I don't usually have with modern cello.

FIGURE 4 Ken Ueno, *Chimera*, beats 193–217.



Similarly, a fast passage in Ken Ueno's *Chimera* (Figure 4) sounded muffled in a pre-concert practice. At one point in my learning process, I decided to tune the cello to A=392 Hz instead of A=415 Hz because I worried that the high tension of the scordatura top string, tuned almost to F#, would lead to broken strings, especially in humid weather. Playing on the second string was clear, but when the passage dropped to the fourth string, I didn't like the cello's projection: it was rather "flubby." Furthermore, sliding to *sul ponticello* was quite different and difficult. The grainy resistance of gut strings doesn't give way to quick transitions as well. I hadn't realized beforehand that tuning a semitone lower would affect the clarity of the gut strings so greatly. The piece demands constant adjustment to a mixture of elements (bow speed, contact point, weight, tuning, string tension, and thickness) with each passage, and I didn't quite know how to resolve the issue in string tension on the fourth string. In the end, as I play the piece in concert, I now keep the cello

6. Humid weather means the string must stretch even farther to achieve a higher pitch. The lower diapason (A=392 Hz) made me less anxious about tuning the top string. For the G-string passage, I could experiment with either thicker or thinner strings in diameter, but changing strings is expensive and the response may change after a few days of use. So many different factors made it difficult to determine a solution here.

7. McKinley, email to the author, February 12, 2018. “Sur le plan de la notation, j’ai opté pour une écriture en rythme des ornements, à l’exception de quelques trilles. Sachant aussi l’importance que tu attaches à la résonance du violoncelle baroque, j’ai cherché des accords de quatre sons dont la moitié sont des cordes à vide.” In January 2018, I emailed each composer asking a few questions about the composer-performer exchange and the process of working with me specifically. I also asked them to tell me their responses to working with a “Baroque” cello and a cellist that often plays Baroque music.

tuned to A=415 Hz, unless the weather is exceptionally humid.⁶ *Chimera* gave me more experience in navigating some delicate balances in cello playing and taught me that extreme *scordatura* can affect each and every passage of a work, even indirectly.

How “Baroque” is it?

Although there is very little risk that freshly composed music for Baroque cello will be confused with cello repertoire from the 17th and 18th centuries, it was important for me to reflect on which qualities of Baroque performance practice could be retained in the performance of a new work. The violoncello has seen—in the course of about 350 years of use under that name—various modifications and changes to its set-up. As instrument changes came about to better serve ever-changing music, so too did music respond to changes in the design, materials, and use of the cello. When working with today’s composers, I introduced questions that could stimulate their thinking about the early form of the cello: What does the cello do naturally? What actions produce a sense of strain? What produces resonance? When the cello was constructed and first used, how did composers typically employ it? How did performers use it for expressive means? Were there different technical approaches? Moreover, as composers take into account the history and practice of the cello, they may also respond to the individual performer’s particular performing history and their embodied practice, thereby taking into account how these aspects participate in the stylistic interpretation of a new work. This means that my specific formation and arsenal of tools and techniques could become further stimuli for the composition.

FIGURE 5 Maxime McKinley, *Cortile di Pilato*, mm. 45–47.



Maxime McKinley’s *Cortile di Pilato* provided many examples of this dialogue between interpreting a work from our time and confronting the habits and tools inherited from another repertoire. Figure 5 exemplifies the composer’s awareness of both the instrument’s and the performer’s materials. McKinley wrote to me that, “In the notation, I opted to write out the rhythm of the ornaments, with the exception of some trills. Knowing also the importance that you attach to the resonance of the Baroque cello, I searched for chords of four sounds of which half are open strings.”⁷

FIGURE 6 Maxime McKinley, *Cortile di Pilato*, mm. 85–88.

If the passage in Figure 6 were 18th century music, I would be tempted to shorten or release the lower voice and also release the second and third eighth notes of each beat. Here we decided not to release too much, instead applying an overall fairly sustained sound on the double stops. Also, McKinley marked a dynamic range (not only one dynamic), *mezzo-forte* to *forte*, which lets the cellist improvise dynamic shapes and direction without relying on over-articulation or a faster/lighter approach to bow speed in order to realize the expression of the passage. In other words, by considering expressive techniques already employed in Baroque music, and by experimenting, we found cogent solutions for the passage.

During the phone conversations and meetings with each composer, we spoke about how the cello and bow can be treated differently when playing on gut strings for early music as opposed to the “modern” cello, and in particular my approach to European cello music from about 1670–1770, for example, a sonata by Antonio Vivaldi, a caprice by Giuseppe Dall’Abaco, or a concerto by Leonardo Leo. I often focus on the following elements (among many other conscious habits formed through the study of performance practice):

- Releasing slurs and shaping phrases to imitate the cadences of language.
- Limiting my vibrato generally to ornaments while maintaining subtly loose fingers.
- Approaching notes with a greater attention to resonance as part of the length of the note. The Baroque bow is curved with a naturally weak tip and uneven playing surface, whereas the modern bow (with camber) helps sustain the sound throughout the length of the bow, providing greater evenness and power to the sound production.
- Staying aware that posture of the cello (more upright) influences interpretation in that it changes the location and angle of the arms.

- Employing a mode of sound production that is related to the natural release of the arm. Heavy pushing into the string creates a crunch in the sound more quickly. My concept of tone instead comes from releasing and resonance.
- Using the inherent qualities of gut strings, particularly their “buzz” and their colour that is very “live” on its own, without vibrato.

FIGURE 7 Linda Catlin Smith, *Ricercar*, excerpt, p. 1.



Linda Smith’s recent email illustrates the collaborative process and how our conversations influenced her work for solo cello:

Our conversations really helped me when I was setting out to compose *Ricercar*. Early in the process, we had a long phone conversation, and I took notes (I still have them) that really helped me understand aspects of the difference between the Baroque cello and modern cello, in terms of bowing, and in terms of the sound. You were very clear about the difference in the posture with the instrument; that there is no end pin, and how this affects the sound; that the sound production is not so much about pushing but about release and resonance; you were very articulate about bowing, and the kind of reaction that gut strings have, and all of that gave me some details that fed my process. We also talked about harmonics, and about slurs, and how the playing is more on the string—these aspects all filtered into my thoughts as I worked on the piece.⁸

8. Smith, email to the author, January 11, 2018.

Knowing that a new solo work for five-string cello might be heard on the same program as Bach’s sixth cello suite (BWV 1012), Ken Ueno used Bach’s Allemande in the third movement of *Chimera* (Figure 8). He writes:

Rather than imposing a style or will, a “contemporariness,” on the instrument, I wanted to hear a counterfactual history. Over the years, I learned a lot about Baroque music from you. The symbolic value of notation [for example]. What was influential in this piece was how you interpret binary forms. The nuanced local articulations, the phrasing. I wanted to create a space for you to inflect those mechanisms, your interpretive virtuosity, in [mouvements] II and III.⁹

9. Ueno, email to the author, January 13, 2018.

FIGURE 8 Ken Ueno, *Chimera*, III. “we are resurrected,” beats 38–44.



Having left much of the dynamics and articulations of *Ricercar* to the performer, Linda Smith notes that in Baroque music,

the scores are not filled with dynamics and tempo markings, so the performer is used to this aspect of interpretation, to coming up with certain things on her own. Much music of the 20th and 21st centuries is highly prescriptive and leaves little room for interpretation. But Baroque players are always taking an interpretive stance, and that is a wonderful conversation we get to have together.¹⁰

Indeed, it would be impossible to uncouple or even fully measure how my interpretation of a new work interacts with playing techniques and expressive devices I have developed over years of reading, performing, and studying repertoire of many eras.

Person-specific and instrument-specific

Collaborating closely with the composers meant I had the simultaneous experience of journeying into uncharted territory on my instrument while remaining close to my own personal experience.¹¹ Ueno elaborates:

My music celebrates artistic possibilities which are liberated through a Whitmanesque consideration of the embodied practice of unique musical personalities. Much of my music is “person-specific” wherein the intricacies of performance practice are brought into focus in the technical achievements of a specific individual fused, inextricably, with that performer’s aura.¹²

In this same vein, McKinley used my relationship with Italy and Italian music as a starting point, which, blended with his own interest in art and architectural spaces, led to a piece inspired by a Bolognese courtyard.

Italy (and Bologna in particular) is very important in the history of the cello as well as in your own professional and personal path. The architecture of Cortile di Pilato is marked by a Byzantine influence (which, to me, did evoke certain quasi-“oriental” passages in the music of Tartini), especially through the many mosaics, inviting an inward-looking sense of expression, but also a certain playfulness.¹³

Details of my personal biography also nourished the commission from Scott Godin. Godin already had in mind Hildegard von Bingen as the primary “muse” for the piece, but he used a specific recording of Hildegard’s “O, vis eternitatis” sung by my aunt, Barbara Thornton (founder of Ensemble Sequentia), as another compositional inspiration. Another relative showed up in *Chimera*: Ueno notes that one way he engaged with my biography was by titling the movements from quotes from my sister’s poetry.¹⁴

Godin already had in mind the qualities of obsessiveness and extreme registration before our phone conversations about the cello. However, once we

10. Smith, email to the author, January 11, 2018.

11. While some of the inner workings of these commissions stem from me and my personal involvement with the project, it is certainly possible that other cellists can play them. Two of the pieces for four-string cello have already been performed or are scheduled for performance by other cellists. Owning a high-quality five-string cello is relatively rare, but the creation of additional repertoire for these cellos will only make it more likely that players will invest in these instruments.

12. Ueno, email to the author, January 13, 2018.

13. McKinley, email to the author, February 12, 2018. “*L’Italie (et Bologne en particulier) est très importante dans l’histoire du violoncelle ainsi que dans ton propre parcours professionnel et personnel. L’architecture du Cortile di Pilato est empreinte d’une influence byzantine (qui n’est pas sans m’évoquer certains passages quasi ‘orientaux’ de la musique de Tartini), notamment par de nombreuses mosaïques, invitant à l’intériorité mais exprimant aussi un certain ludisme.*” See also McKinley, *Les pavements de San Marco* for violin and piano (2012).

14. Movement titles can all be found in poems by Emily Frey, 2014: I. “Night opening its black flower”; II. “in the shadow of my sorrow”; III. “we are resurrected”; IV. “the sky will be lavender”; V. “an ocean bell sounding.”

started discussing writing for the five-string, Godin found particular features of the instrument shaped the genesis of his work:

Once I saw the possibilities of this instrument for this piece, it began to come to life. The unique timbre of the gut strings, the unique sound of the outer strings (the “earthiness” of the lowest string, the “ecstatic” nature of the top string, and the inner strings that take on the sound of otherworldly whispering), the chordal possibilities, and of course the amazing resonance of the instrument in D-G tuning started to turn a concept into an instrument-specific work.¹⁵

15. Godin, email to the author, January 13, 2018.

Inganno and Trompe-l’œil

The relationship between a performance in real time on the Baroque cello and the cumulative practices of both the composer and the performer is complicated. In the case of these six commissioned works for Baroque cello, the complications of this relationship arise when examining whether each piece attempts to reveal, celebrate, or allude to the instrument’s history and early repertoire, and also whether my performance serves the revelation or the concealment of these underlying structures of influence. Here emerges a kind of Bakhtinian “heteroglossia,” or double-voiced discourse (this concept was first applied to novels, for example, when the speech of a character coexists with the speech of the narrator or the author).¹⁶ This simultaneous discourse happens for me through my realization of the composer’s musical voice while at the same time I continue to enact my own dialogue with performance practice: my embodied stylistic practice of cello playing. On the one hand, I am constantly directing myself to reproduce the conditions that can best accomplish the score’s indications. On the other hand, I operate in a continual state of questioning, listening, ornamenting, and adjusting in a way that often stems from my experience playing Baroque music (on gut strings and with a Baroque bow) on the same instrument.

This discourse comes to life in another way when I draw on the typically Baroque stylistic qualities of concealment and illusion.¹⁷ I am particularly inspired by the concepts of *inganno* and *trompe-l’œil*. Meaning deceit, *inganno* can refer to the Renaissance compositional technique of mixing small note patterns and is a way of simultaneously generating melody and disguising the process of its invention,¹⁸ while *trompe-l’œil* refers to an optical illusion where a painted mural depicts three-dimensional objects and spaces (see Figure 9 for a masterful example of this technique). In a sense, these concepts capture the perfume of the Baroque, stylistic approaches that are hinted at, or perhaps felt, but are somewhat submerged, that create a polyphony of illusions, as well as allusions to forms of expression that are embedded within the cello and within me.

16. Cook, 2001.

17. Vanscheeuwijck, 2009, p. 2.

18. Schubert, 2003, p. 91.

FIGURE 9 A ceiling in the Château de Tanlay, France, an example of *trompe-l'oeil*.¹⁹



19. Photo by Ji-Elle [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], from Wikimedia Commons (accessed May 1, 2018).

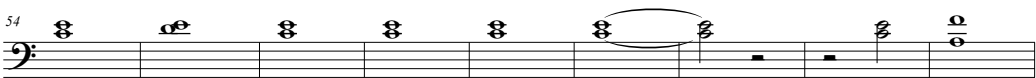
An example of my interpretation of *inganno* or *trompe-l'œil* came in performing Isaiah Ceccarelli's *With concord of sweet sounds*, a piece that challenges the five-string cello to find fullness in its resonance, creating an almost buzzing sound as the harmonies transfer seamlessly between consonant and dissonant dyads. In order to create this rather loud fullness of sound, the bow has to remain quite close to the bridge and ride the edge of cracking the sound. His long double-stops, always exploiting one open string, all resonate differently throughout the instrument and under the bow, sometimes quite affected by the transfer from up-bow to down-bow. Here I must restrain impulses to play in a perfunctory or habitually "Baroque" way (of course based on my interpretation of performance practice).

I think that my desire to not shape the phrases—to let the grain of the bow take over and to "push through" rather than dynamically shape the beginnings and endings of phrases, to perform more like something resembling a drone box than a cello—were the elements furthest from typical Baroque or contemporary musical performance practice.²⁰

Even if Ceccarelli sees this as far from performance practice, for me it was quite close to the illusions, the suggestions, and internal games that one may engage with when performing, notably in early music. On the surface, *With concord of sweet sounds* may sound straightforward and rather slow in pacing,

20. Ceccarelli, email to the author, January 16, 2018.

FIGURE 10 Ceccarelli, *With concord of sweet sounds*, mm. 54–62.



but the irregularly spaced bow changes on two notes buzzing with very actively ringing overtones bring out intense internal activity in the gut strings (Figure 10 above shows Ceccarelli’s use of the open e’ string). This results in very detailed, on-the-spot listening to the fluctuating tonal purities produced by my cello, and overall, a very improvisatory and liberated experience for the performer.

Conclusion

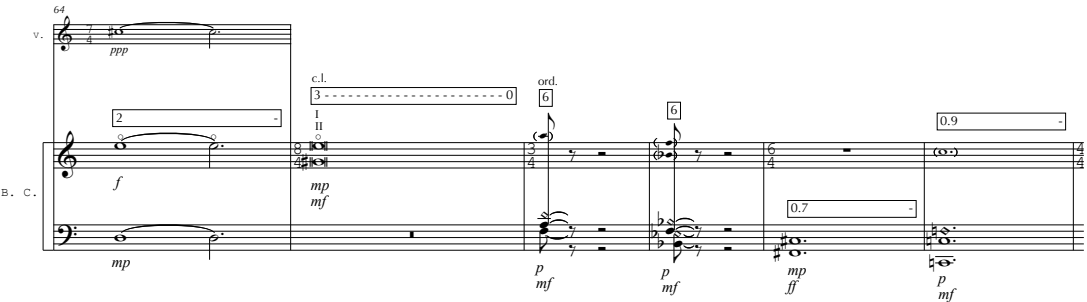
Following the metaphor of Goldsworthy’s stone structures, I am now in the process of building and re-building via Lisa Streich’s *Minerva*.²¹ To be premiered in July 2018, *Minerva* asks that I construct a new vocabulary of Baroque cello sounds via false harmonics, quarter-tones, long notes executed *col legno*, exceptionally slow or fast bow speeds, vocal humming, and other techniques that participate in creating a new and fascinating language of gut strings which, for Streich, “have something whiney but also something totally shiny and many colours can be produced on these strings with simple differences in bow speed, pressure and point of contact.”²² A recording of this piece, along with the other five, will be released in March 2019 on the Analekta label.

Goldsworthy’s quest to understand the stones brings him to the beach, where he concentrates for long hours until the tide comes in or the sun fades. For me, attending to the basic questions of a commissioned work’s collaboration and realization, working towards a performance on the cello, means

21. Delivered to the author at the time of writing this article.

22. Streich, email to the author, March 1, 2018.

FIGURE 11 Lisa Streich, *Minerva*, mm. 64–69.



repeating small gestures over and over and re-examining the interpretive process until the sound emerges in the best possible form. The urge to know better how my cello responds to the composer's new work—always with an eye on how subtle changes of weather affect the very “live” condition of the gut string—is extremely motivating. As problems arise, I begin to know, more and more, the complex nature of the Baroque cello, especially as it intersects with my own performing history and aesthetics. While the beauty and intricacy of the music by Godin, Ceccarelli, Smith, Ueno, McKinley, and Streich inspires my work, it is also the process of commissioning and premiering these pieces that has brought me to a deeper, richer, and more nuanced understanding of my instrument.

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