

Book review: *Ornamentation: A question and answer manual* by Valery Lloyd-Watts and Carole L. Bigler

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1996

Fermata

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Original citation:

Smyth, L. (1996). [Review of book *Ornamentation: A question and answer manual* by Valery Lloyd-Watts and Carole L. Bigler]. *Fermata*, 2, 43-46

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BOOK REVIEW

Valery Lloyd-Watts and Carole L. Bigler. *Ornamentation: A Question and Answer Manual*. Van Nuys, California: Alfred Publishing Company, Inc., 1995. 64 pp. ISBN 0-88284-549-7.

This recent survey of ornamentation throughout the history of music is geared for a wide audience—hence the easy-to-read question and answer format. According to the authors, this book was written "to help all musicians, regardless of instrument, understand ornamentation and be able to realize ornaments ...[so that they are] accurate, historically correct and musically appropriate."¹ Despite its short length, its eight chapters cover much basic and useful information.

The first two chapters give an introduction to the actual discussion of ornaments. Chapter One includes essential background material such as a definition of "ornament," the purpose and time frame of ornamentation, and a list of common ornaments and their effects, while the second chapter relates music to art and architecture through the various time periods, thus supplying an overview of music in its cultural environment. Well-chosen photographs are included to illustrate the connection between the arts. This critical perspective, i.e. viewing music in its historical context, is one of the book's best attributes.

Chapters Three through Six deal with ornamentation facts and practice in the different style periods. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the most important contemporary writers on the subject to give the authority for the ensuing statements.

The most extensive chapter is on Baroque ornamentation, since it is the basis for the practice of later periods; it includes a facsimile of J.S. Bach's ornamentation table from the *Wilhelm Friedemann Bach Notebook*. The ornaments are dealt with as "pictographs" for the realization of the ornament in order to give a reason for the symbol, and a visual image of the expected result. Tables of every logical realization of each ornament are inserted into the text. An overview of the changes in ornamentation from Baroque to Classical practice, the two schools of use in the Romantic era, and present-day practice constitute the remainder of this section.

The seventh chapter gives a "self-help" method for realizing, practicing, and integrating ornaments and fioritura² into a piece of music, while the last chapter shows—by example—how to add ornamentation to Baroque music. Bach's *March in D* BWV Anhang 122 from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook* is printed in its original form, then with optional varied repeats supplied by Willard Palmer. Rather than go deeply into the subject, the authors have reproduced two





¹*Ornamentation: A Question and Answer Manual*, 7.

²A fioritura is "a series of additional notes [in small print] played against a series of accompaniment notes specified by the composer." See *Ornamentation: A Question and Answer Manual*, 9.

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tables by J.J.Quantz of "added variations"—the first for rising notes, and the second for descending. The actual application of the embellishments is left—as it should be—to the good taste and creativity of the performer.

The bibliography includes the main contemporary sources, but in the present favors the editions of Willard Palmer. Other than Robert Donington's revised edition of *The Interpretation of Early Music* from 1989,³ the only other major source from this century pertaining directly to ornamentation is Arnold Dolmetsch's *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVII and XVIII Centuries*, from 1915.⁴ Given the lack of reliable material on the subject this is not surprising, but Putnam Aldrich's 1942 dissertation should have been included.⁵

Despite the wealth of information this book provides, it has, in my opinion, some serious flaws. The "pictograph" concept is excellent, except that the authors have modified the symbols from Bach's table to suit their ideas more closely, e.g.  becomes , and  becomes ; in doing so, they have confused the issue. The modified versions are much harder to read, and do not match the table they claim as their authority.

I strongly agree with the important and all-too-seldom stressed point that "the appoggiatura with a cross stroke was never written by J.S.Bach and editions containing them are not accurate."⁶ I do not, however, find the discussion of the acciaccatura, trill, or mordent adequate. The acciaccatura does break up the chord in the manner indicated, but the chord can also be played simultaneously with the ornament resolving after the chord.⁷ Under the discussion of the trill, it is not mentioned until the end of Chapter Seven (and then only briefly) that it is possible to prolong the first note of a trill to heighten the dissonance. This leaning effect, or *cadence appuyée* was one of the most common practices in Baroque ornamentation, and was always used on the penultimate strong beat of a cadence. Why, then, is this important type of trill left out?

³Robert Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1989).

⁴Arnold Dolmetsch, *The Interpretation of Music from the XVII and XVIII Centuries, Revealed by Contemporary Evidence* (London: Novello, 1915).

⁵Putnam Aldrich, *The Principle Agréments of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1942).

⁶*Ornamentation: A Question and Answer Manual*, 28.

⁷See Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music*, 222-225 for a complete discussion of the functions of the acciaccatura. The difference in interpretation to which I am referring concerns the use or lack of arpeggiation in the texture.

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The mordent, too, is short-changed. While it is often played rapidly to produce a "biting" sound, it can also be played in a relaxed way.⁸ A fast mordent will ruin the mood of a slow, serious piece, while lingering on it will actually bring about a more effective, and more deliberate "bite."

Note that the classification of composers in their usage of ornamentation is inaccurate. Leopold Mozart is included in the Classical era, when his own compositions show him to be pre-Classical, and Clementi and (early) Beethoven are included in the Romantic era, when they should have been dealt with under Classicism. Stating that Hummel did not influence Chopin, Field, Schubert, or Weber is also incorrect. Surely these composers were aware of his theories, but deliberately chose not to adopt his usage of the trill. There is a great difference between the two wordings, since the composers' conscious choice in the latter statement shows their conservative leanings versus the experimental outlook of composers such as Liszt and Mendelssohn.

The problems discussed so far have mostly been ones of omission which can be remedied by a little extra reading. The biggest complaint I have about this book is one of commission. I do not agree with the method presented for learning and performing ornaments; that is, I do not believe that in order to perform an ornament, "the notes of the ornament and their time values must be precisely specified".⁹ According to the authors, the performer must write in the counting in every measure of the piece, and strictly measure out the ornament into the space available for it. This method denies the Baroque concept of ornaments having an improvisatory character, and frequently being up to the good taste of the performer to add, even on the spur of the moment. It denies the fact that when a good musician performs an ornament it is seldom strictly measured, and thus is quite often impossible to notate. Clearly, this also leaves no room for interpreting the ornament according to the mood of the music.

In addition, tables of every common realization of each ornament are included in the book—this encourages the performer to select the one that fits his time signature and simply insert it in the score, rather than promote experimentation to find the type of interpretation suitable for each instance. One such table would have been enough to illustrate how ornaments fit into any space, but a table for each ornament is redundant. After all, the actual number of repercussions in a trill depends primarily on the performer's taste and ability, not what looks good on paper. Granted, this method can and does work for beginners, but can stifle musical

⁸Donington states that "a certain ferocity is normally associated with the shorter mordents, of which the function is essentially rhythmic, while the longer mordents, which have some melodic influence, tend to be a little smoother." See Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music*, 260. Also, Couperin states that it is "the value of the notes that determines the value of the *pincés*". See François Couperin, *Pièces de Clavecin* (New York: Broude Brothers Limited, 1973) Premier Livre, 74.

⁹*Ornamentation: A Question and Answer Manual*, 8.

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growth. I prefer to introduce the ornament to students away from the score, then ask them to fit it in while they are playing, so that they are comfortable with its improvisatory nature as soon as possible, and do not even have the suggestion of ornaments as "strict" in their minds.

The method of integrating a *fioritura* into a passage of music comes with the same set of problems. The authors' own examples prove that dividing the *fioritura* by the number of accompaniment notes does not work. Instead, the passage should be analysed in terms of harmonic goals and types of figuration such as arpeggios, scales, and sequences, and matched with the accompaniment by this means. The result will be a natural rubato, which avoids all sense of mathematical formality—something that would be ignored in the final version by any musical performer.

Thus, while this is, within its limits, a good resource for teachers, students, and performers, especially in the first six and last chapters, it does not go far enough, and if the seventh chapter is followed, I believe it could produce inexpressive if not robotic performances. Nevertheless, the convenience of having at one's disposal a single book that covers the usage of ornaments in all the musical eras in a well-organized manner, easily outweighs its weaknesses.

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