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## **An improvisatory approach to nineteenth-century music**

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# Part 2

## Improvising with scores



## Chapter 3. A rhetorical view on ornamentation

### 3.1. Introduction

In 1938 Ernst Ferand (→ chapter 1.1) published *Die Improvisation in der Musik*,<sup>119</sup> followed in 1956 by the annotated anthology *Die Improvisation*.<sup>120</sup> Ferand offers an impressive overview of improvisational practices in Western music, the scope of which reaches from the earliest music to the music around 1800. The anthology shows many scores with features that could be seen as the residue of improvisational practices, for example notated embellishments to a melody. Ferand termed this type of improvisation, which is based upon a ‘bereits vorhandene mehr oder minder festgelegte Komposition’ [an already existing and more or less codified composition], ‘relative’ improvisation (as opposed to ‘absolute’ improvisation which also invents the formal structure itself at the time of performance).<sup>121</sup> Part 2 of the present study looks at such relative improvisation, extending the term beyond Ferand: it deals with any improvisatory approach to a score. The focus will be on two major areas: ornamentation and related topics (chapters 3 through 5) and tempo (chapters 6 and 7). In chapter 2.2, I proposed a musical application of the rhetorical concept ‘locus communis’ to indicate principles that guide musical creation. I argued that the idea of recognising loci communes is of fundamental importance to the dialogue between performer and score (→ chapter 2.3). Throughout part 2, attention will be given to other aspects of rhetoric as well. It will be argued that a renewed attention to musical rhetoric, not in the sense of a petrified Baroque *Figurenlehre*, but as an essential aspect of nineteenth-century performance, provides us with important insight in an improvisatory approach to scores. I will show that such an approach guides the attention to something more fundamental: variety. The real antipode of the *Urtext*-paradigm is not improvisation, but a continuous search for variety in performance. The exploration of rhetoric supports variety as a both historically motivated and musically inspiring alternative to the *Urtext*-paradigm.

The present chapter discusses preliminary aspects of what might be termed ‘ornamental improvisation’: the practice of adding extempore embellishments, flourishes and other forms of ornamentation to an existing melody or to pre-determined chord progressions. Improvisatory ornamentation occurs within many different musical styles that lie outside the boundaries of Ferand’s survey; much improvisation in jazz, for example, can be classified as such. In the nineteenth century it existed especially in bel canto and in related instrumental styles such as the so-called brilliant style. By way of introduction, this chapter examines the soil in which extempore ornamentation during the nineteenth century was rooted, and as such focuses on ornamental

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<sup>119</sup> Ferand, E.: *Die Improvisation in der Musik*. Zürich, 1938.

<sup>120</sup> Ferand, E.: *Die Improvisation in Beispielen aus neun Jahrhunderten abendländischer Musik*. Köln, 1956.

<sup>121</sup> Ferand, E.: op. cit., 6.

improvisation as it existed before the nineteenth century, specifically at the end of the eighteenth century. Several structural aspects of nineteenth-century ornamentation are best introduced by looking at the eighteenth-century situation.

### 3.2 Structural aspects of ornamentation before 1800

#### *Anchor tones*

As Ferand shows, the idea of embellishing a melody in Western music can be traced back to Gregorian chant. Because it is neither possible nor even necessary to summarise the history of ornamentation within the context of this study, only a few developments that are relevant to the period covered by this study will be mentioned here. In Renaissance and early Baroque music, techniques of diminution (division, *passaggio*, *glosas*, *double*) were well described in treatises, which typically included many examples on basic melodic progressions. An instance can be found in Sylvestro Ganassi's well-known *Fontegara* (1535).<sup>122</sup> The example shows a specific basic melodic motion (three tones that ascend stepwise) at various positions in the scale, followed by different ways to ornament this fragment melodically by way of diminutions. Only the simplest diminutions are shown here; *La Fontegara* astonishes the reader with a wealth of ornamental virtuosity.

Moto de terza assendente  
[Aufsteigende Terz / Rising third]

The image displays four variations of a melodic fragment in G major, starting on G4 and ascending stepwise to B4. Variation I shows the original melody with green ovals around the G, A, and B notes. Variation II shows the melody with blue ovals around the G and B notes, and red ovals around the A and B notes. Variation III shows the melody with a different ornamentation. Variation IV shows the melody with a different ornamentation. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of one flat, and a 2/4 time signature.

Example 3.2.1 Diminutions according to S. Ganassi

Such diminutions or divisions basically consisted of a rhythmical division of larger note values into smaller ones (hence the term). Melodically speaking, the important tones in the original melody served as ‘anchors’ for ornamental flourishes that were added to the basic structure: they more or less stayed on their proper places in the meter (see the blue and red ovals in example II above). I call these structural pitches ‘anchor tones’. Sometimes the anchor tone is moved to a different octave, as in example I/4 (green ovals).<sup>123</sup> Diminutions are a clear example of hierarchy in tonal music: the tones

<sup>122</sup> Ganassi, S.: *La Fontegara* (Venice, 1535). German translation: H. Peter. Berlin, 1956; 24.

<sup>123</sup> Already during the sixteenth century, opinions differed in this respect: some treatises demand the diminution to start and finish with the main note, while some are less strict in that regard (cf. Boquet, P. & Rebours, G.: *50 Renaissance & Baroque Standards*. Courlay, 2007; 13).

of the original melody belong to a different, more ‘fundamental’ or ‘structural’ level than the diminution itself. Much later, Heinrich Schenker was to expand this idea to an encompassing view on the structure of musical compositions.

### *Harmonic basis*

Whereas in early diminutions such as Ganassi’s the motivation seems to have been purely linear or melodic, later Baroque embellishments were clearly based upon harmony as well. The *willkürliche Manieren* [arbitrary embellishments] of the eighteenth century, for instance exemplified in Georg Philipp Telemann’s *Methodische Sonaten*,<sup>124</sup> show many fragments of chord arpeggiations. This development from purely melodically driven figuration towards an ornamentation that is based upon both melody and supporting harmony is seen most clearly by comparing Ganassi’s ornamentation with a table by Johann Joachim Quantz from 1752:<sup>125</sup>



Example 3.2.2 Ornamentation according to J.J. Quantz

The melodic basis here is similar to the example from Ganassi, but Quantz incorporates an implied harmonic background; this background is notated as a figured bass (shown separately at the top, green oval), spelled out as chords surrounding the melodic tones (blue oval) and, most importantly, shows in the embellishments consisting entirely of arpeggiations, as seen in example *n* (red oval). Not surprisingly, nineteenth-century ornamentation was also firmly rooted in harmony, as will be shown in chapter 4.

<sup>124</sup> Telemann, G.Ph.: *Sonate metodiche*. Hamburg, n.d. [1728]

<sup>125</sup> Quantz, J.J.: *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752). Reprint: Kassel, 1983; Tab. VIII

*Dissemination of ornamentation at the end of the eighteenth century*

Embellishments remained fashionable throughout the eighteenth century; in 1760, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach published his *Sonaten mit veränderten Reprisen*, and even in several keyboard sonatas of W.A. Mozart we find printed embellishments in the melodies of slow movements, for instance in the sonata in F major, KV 332. The ornamented recapitulation of the Adagio in this sonata is seen as a revision by Mozart himself; it only appears in the first edition, whereas the autograph still has an unornamented recapitulation, notated as a *da capo*.<sup>126</sup> Such examples strongly suggest that ornaments were seen as an addition to the basic structure of the score, or, conversely, that the score as composed was generally accepted as a ‘blueprint’, a point of departure for music-making, rather than a set of prescriptions which the performer had to obey. As late as 1802, Charles Burney wrote:

An adagio in a song or solo is, generally, little more than an outline left to the performers abilities to colour: and the performer who is not enabled to interest an audience by the tone of his voice or instrument, and by taste and expression, should never be trusted with slow notes, in the performance of which the smallest defects are so easily discovered; and if not highly embellished, they soon excite languor and disgust in the hearers. The talent of executing an adagio well, in which performers of great powers of execution often fail, is a merit of the highest class which a musician can possess.<sup>127</sup>

In opera arias, extensive embellishments (especially in the *Da Capo*-sections) were expected from the singer by the audience, a practice that among connoisseurs occasionally gave rise to disapproving remarks about the vanity of singers (notably the *castrati*) who supposedly had no sense of moderation.<sup>128</sup>

The longstanding art of preluding by instrumentalists (playing introductory music based upon a simple harmonic progression, usually a cadence) and the related instrumental or vocal *cadenza* as it arose in the course of the eighteenth century, can be seen as amplifications of this ornamental practice. Because nineteenth-century preludes and cadenzas tend to exceed the limits of ornamental improvisation as it is discussed here, they will be treated in part 3. A last important specimen of relative improvisation before 1800 to be mentioned here is the practice of *basso continuo* playing, which in some instances could have highly ornamental features. Figured basses remained an important tool for nineteenth-century harmony training, but faded away from musical practice already towards the end of the eighteenth century, last in church music.

By the end of the nineteenth century, all of these ornamental practices had practically disappeared from Western Art Music. Heinrich Schenker had a rather strong opinion on this:

<sup>126</sup> Neue Mozart Ausgabe, Serie IX, Werkgruppe 25, Band 2. Kassel, 1986; XI.

<sup>127</sup> Burney, C.: ‘Adagio’, entry in: *The new Cyclopaedia, or, Universal Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences* (Abraham Rees, ed.). London, 1802.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. e.g. Gossett, Ph.: *Divas and Scholars*. Chicago, 2006; 300, or Marcello, B.: ‘Il teatro alla moda – part I’ (translated by Reinhard G. Pauly). In: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 1948); 390.

Unser Geschlecht hat die Kunst der Diminution, der Auskomponierung von Klängen vertan und erklärt deshalb gleich dem Fuchs in der Fabel die Traube für sauer, die es nicht erreichen kann. Nicht einmal die in Lehre und Ausführung von den Meistern uns vermachte Kunst der Diminution vermag es mehr zu verstehen, es wendet Ohr und Sinn von einem Grundgesetz ab, dem es weder schaffend noch nachschaffend gewachsen ist.<sup>129</sup>

[Our generation has wasted the art of diminution, of the elaboration of tones, and therefore it is like the fox in the fable who declares sour the grapes he cannot reach. It is not even capable of understanding the art of diminution as it has been handed down to us by the masters in their teachings and in practice, it turns away both ear and mind from a fundamental law which it isn't equal to, neither in creation nor in recreation.]

By 1925, when Schenker wrote these words, the idea of embellishing indeed seems to have been foreign to the contemporary musical aesthetics.<sup>130</sup> The topic of ornamentation had already occupied Schenker in his first theoretical publication, *Ein Beitrag zu Ornamentik*,<sup>131</sup> and later was to form the basis of the idea of *Auskomponierung* (prolongation), a central concept in his analytical thinking. Whether or not one would like to follow Schenker in his extrapolation of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's techniques of ornamentation into an all-embracing understanding of the structure of tonal music, the disappearance of 'the art of diminution' in the course of the nineteenth century raises two questions that are preliminary to the topic of this chapter. First, one wonders what exactly the effect is of adding embellishments during a performance of a composition, and second: to what extent may we assume that ornamentation in music from before 1800 was actually extempore? The first question will be dealt with in sections 3.3 through 3.6 and the second one will be discussed in section 3.7.

### 3.3 The purpose of embellishments

An interesting question about the practice of adding embellishments to composed music, as referred to above, is not only *how* it was done, but especially *why*. What does it tell us when we know that it was usual, and therefore implied in the score, that the performer was equally 'responsible' for the musical content, that the score rather served as a starting point for a 'free' performance than as a text that demanded strict obedience? For the present chapter, the years between 1750 and 1800 are especially relevant since many nineteenth-century developments can be traced back to this period. These five decades, which were marked by one of the most ground-shaking transitions in Western music (still called the Classical period) saw the publication of a number of important treatises on

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<sup>129</sup> Schenker, H.: 'Die Kunst der Improvisation'. In: *Das Meisterwerk in der Musik* (München 1925). Reprint: Hildesheim, 1974; II.

<sup>130</sup> I argue that this included composed music, generally speaking; a discussion however would exceed the limits of this study.

<sup>131</sup> Schenker, H.: *Ein Beitrag zu Ornamentik*. Wien, 1904.



musical practice. Quantz's treatise was already mentioned above; one year later, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (similarly employed at the court in Berlin) wrote his famous *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (1753).<sup>132</sup> Leopold Mozart published his successful *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* in 1756.<sup>133</sup> The *Klavierschule* of Daniel Gottlob Türk dates from the revolutionary year 1789. All four treatises were generally seen as important books in their time, and are today valued as staples of eighteenth-century source texts on performance practice.

All books dedicate extensive chapters to the practice of embellishing. Traditionally, a distinction is made between smaller ornaments that can be indicated by a symbol, such as a trill, and more arbitrary or free embellishments that are left to the discretion of the performer (*wesentliche* and *willkürliche Manieren* respectively). The general picture for the second half of the eighteenth century is that arbitrary embellishments were common in elegant, *cantabile* music, especially when a passage was repeated. Their purpose seems to have been to make the music more interesting, to increase its beauty and to enhance the *Affekt* of the composed music, mainly by means of an increase of variety. Today, we might have lost somewhat our sensitivity to this need for variation. Arguing within the *Urtext*-paradigm, according to which the performer's task is to translate a score into sound as precisely and faithfully as possible (→ chapter 1.4), we tend to see it as the composer's responsibility to write music that avoids sounding boring. The flip side of the picture is that the modern respect for the score is such that most musicians seem to be very reluctant to change anything in a composition; what counts as 'good taste' today might impede adding ornamentation. In her 2001 study on improvised ornamentation in Mozart arias, Kathleen Carlton compared added embellishments in arias from *Le Nozze di Figaro* in then recent recordings, conducted by Charles Mackerras, John Eliot Gardiner, Arnold Östman and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Despite notable differences, she concluded: 'It seems very likely that the respect accorded Mozart in the present day lends a very conservative approach to the embellishment of his work, and most present day conductors and performers are likely to err on the side of discretion.'<sup>134</sup> As I will show in chapter 5.2, in the case of Mozart – who became a 'classic' soon after his death – this is a trend that already started at the early nineteenth century, and even nowadays a similar comparison would probably not yield an altogether different conclusion.

Conversely, all historical sources mentioned above stress (although to different degrees) the duty of the performer to 'improve' the composition, that is, to make a performance more effective.

<sup>132</sup> A third treatise that was published in Berlin in the same decade is Johann Friedrich Agricola's *Anleitung zur Singkunst* (1757), which was however an extended translation of Pier Francesco Tosi's earlier *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* (1723).

<sup>133</sup> The Dutch translation of the book was published in 1766; Leopold Mozart was so satisfied with this publication that he preferred it to the original (letter to Johann Lorenz Hagenauer, 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 1766).

<sup>134</sup> Carlton, K.M.: *Improvised Ornamentation in the Opera Arias of Mozart: A Singer's Guide* (diss.). Norman (OK), 2001 (unpublished); 125.

Obviously the performer was supposed to recognise the sense of the composition, the *Affekt* it intended to arouse in the listener, and to know how to achieve the same (or a similar) result with slightly different means, namely by varying what is in the score and adding musical material. Drawing upon the eighteenth-century line of thought that music and language have the same origin, and therefore are basically the same thing (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder), one could say that to eighteenth-century authors the primary goal of a performance was to be ‘persuasive’, and musical persuasion was not in the first place sought in a particularly affirmative way of executing the written material (as it might be understood today) but in an ever new, enriching musical ‘formulation’. In this way, a musical phrase could be varied by adding embellishments, but also by changing the order of notes, rephrasing, or even, occasionally, by simplification.

It might be not too far-fetched to postulate the existence of an ‘aesthetics of variety’ in pre-1800 music-making which seems to be at odds with modern outlook and taste; this study aims to demonstrate that this mindset continued in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the more dominant view in classical music today is a contrasting ‘aesthetics of unity’ that we all grew up with and that determines the way how we listen to a performance. The modern understanding of perfection in this respect stems from the idea of unity rather than variety. It determines almost any aspect of a performance: in chamber music one expects similar bowing and articulation in similar passages, rhythmic togetherness and precision in tempo,<sup>135</sup> in orchestral playing and choir performances blending tone colours constitute the modern sound ideal,<sup>136</sup> and regularity and evenness are the keywords to instrumental technique. The ideal interpretation of a piece is the one in which ‘every note is in its place’ – a view that corresponds to the *Urtext*-paradigm. It is very likely that the rise of recordings has been a major influence behind the shift from variety to unity: the mere possibility to listen more than once to a performance must have had an enormous impact on the attitude of listening and on the expectations of a listener. This topic however will be left aside here: it warrants a new research project.

### 3.4 Variety: a rhetorical approach

#### *Classical rhetoric and music*

In the following sections the relation between music and Classical rhetoric will be explored relatively elaborately. My goal is to make a reasonable case for the idea that during the nineteenth century, great importance was still attached to eloquence in writing and speaking, and that a centuries-old

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<sup>135</sup> In his study on early recordings of music for string instruments, Emlyn Stam uses the words ‘neatness and tidiness’. Stam, E.: *In Search of a Lost Language: Performing in Early-Recorded Style in Viola and String Quartet Repertoires* (diss., unpublished). Leiden, 2019; 213. <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2912418/view>

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Philip, R.: *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*. New Haven, 2004.

orientation on Classical rhetoric formed its feeding ground. Similar stylistic ideals were applied to music, generally understood as language-like (→ chapter 1.3) at that time. In the opinion of many, the term ‘rhetoric’ may have less favourable connotations today, but I will argue that its importance for nineteenth-century musical culture is obvious, and that there is good reason to understand ornamentation as a primarily rhetorical phenomenon.

There are several notions in section 3.3 which refer to the field of rhetoric. *Manieren* (ornaments), for instance, seems to be a translation of the Greek *tropos*. In rhetoric, the word ‘tropos’ indicates a change of the normal meaning of a word in figurative language;<sup>137</sup> *Manieren* likewise change a musical figure. A rhetorical *Affektenlehre* [theory of affects] at least dates back to Aristotle. Being persuasive was the business of an orator, and rhetoric was his instrument; as Plato puts it in his *Gorgias*, citing the Greek orator after whom this dialogue was named: ‘Rhetoric is a producer of persuasion.’<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the idea of variety (to be explored further below) has its roots in classical rhetoric, and the Roman rhetorician Quintilian even expounds at length on improvisation (*ex tempore dicere*<sup>139</sup>).

Particularly in German Baroque music, a musical application of rhetoric found its expression in a highly systematised *Affektenlehre* and *Figurenlehre* [theory of affects and of figures, respectively]. According to this theory, based upon writings of René Descartes and especially the German Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, concrete musical patterns or qualities were supposed to influence the ‘humors’ (body fluids) of the listener, and consequently arouse affects.<sup>140</sup> For the period under investigation this theory is less relevant: with the rise of the galant style, the rather mechanical idea of particular musical qualities having concrete involuntary effects in listeners was replaced by a focus on direct emotional expression in the sounding music. Interestingly however, several Baroque authors already emphasised the close connection between music and language instead; in other words: often the purpose of theorists of Baroque musical rhetoric was not to erect a rigid prescriptive system, but to explain why music is as it is. In 1601, for example, Joachim Burmeister explicitly used pre-existing rhetorical terms to name and explain musical phenomena that were as such already familiar.<sup>141</sup> Thus many late-eighteenth-century texts on music still used terms and notions that probably stemmed directly from rhetoric as it was practised during classical antiquity.

<sup>137</sup> Krones, H.: ‘Musik und Rhetorik’. In: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band A6. Kassel, 1997; col. 826.

<sup>138</sup> Plato, *Gorgias* 453a. Translation W.R.M. Lamb; Cambridge (MA), 1967.

<sup>139</sup> Quintilian: *Institutio oratoria* X.7.1.

<sup>140</sup> Bartel, D.: *Musica Poetica*. Lincoln, 1997; 37.

<sup>141</sup> Bartel, D.: *Handbuch der musikalischen Figurenlehre*. Laaber, 2004; 24.

*Eloquence in verbal and musical languages*

Of all rhetorical notions, it is notably the ideal of eloquence that has deeply influenced Western intellectual life for centuries. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, Latin remained the lingua franca of at least the clergy, albeit gradually deteriorating with respect to the grammar. Renaissance humanists such as Petrarca, Erasmus and Vossius accomplished a re-orientation on the ‘golden’ Latin of Cicero, and with impressive results. One of their achievements was a reevaluation of the art of rhetoric, which had been of central importance in the Roman curricula. The discovery in 1416 of the complete text of Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* (95 A.D.) in the monastery of Sankt Gallen caused great excitement. Quintilian’s book can be seen as the result and the summit of five centuries of teaching rhetoric.<sup>142</sup> It was to become the most important text about rhetoric in the early modern age, and *eloquentia* the centre of the education at grammar schools.<sup>143</sup> As we know, Latin was the lingua franca among scientists for centuries; less attention is paid today to the wealth of poetic literature in Latin that was also produced in Western Europe at that time. In general, more books were being published in Latin than in the vernacular – a balance that in Germany changed as late as 1681.<sup>144</sup> Johann Joseph Fux still published his influential treatise on counterpoint, *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725), in Latin; the second part is written in the form of a dialogue, after the fashion of Cicero.

Though university lectures used to be in Latin in several countries until into the nineteenth century (at Leiden University even until 1876<sup>145</sup>), the importance of the language outside academia declined markedly during the eighteenth century. Fux’s book was translated to German already in 1742. One might expect that, since the practical use of Latin disappeared from public life, the old ideas about rhetoric must have been at most a relic from bygone times to the generation of 1800. There are good reasons however to nuance this picture. Especially in nineteenth-century Germany, the concept of *Bildung* became highly influential. The ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt (his *Bildungsreform*) led towards an educational system in which Latin and ancient Greek played a central part, a system that was to remain intact during the nineteenth century. He was the founder of the *Gymnasium* as a school type. The number of hours that were spent on lessons in Greek and Latin is hard to believe today, but becomes slightly understandable when we consider the fact that Latin in particular was learnt actively (cf. chapter 1.3). For their final exam, students had to produce not only an essay in Latin, but also poetry in several metrical forms. Quite a few Latin scholars of today would probably have trouble with this exam... In 1835, a seventeen-year old boy presented

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<sup>142</sup> Gerbrandy, P.: ‘Inleiding’. In: Quintilian: *De opleiding tot redenaar* (trans. P. Gerbrandy). Groningen, 2011; 15.

<sup>143</sup> Stroh, W.: *Latein ist tot, es lebe Latein!* Berlin, 2008; 212.

<sup>144</sup> Stroh, W.: op. cit., 232.

<sup>145</sup> Vervoorn, A.J.: ‘Kleine frontberichten uit een verdwenen taalstrijd.’ In: *Ons Erfdeel*, vol. 24, no. 1 (1981); 457.

such an essay, well written in beautiful Latin: only the quality of his handwriting gave rise to a critical remark by his examiners. The name of this boy was Karl Marx.<sup>146</sup>

This period in German cultural history is termed *Neuhumanismus* [neo-humanism]. It may be true that the practical use of Latin (and Greek) had become less evident by that time; however, that doesn't alter the fact that generations of the nineteenth-century elite were imbued with the principles of classical rhetoric, which they were supposed to apply actively. Classical rhetorical thinking was part of the cultural baggage of educated Europeans also during the nineteenth century. Judging by the presence of Antiquity in seventeenth-century paintings and texts, the ancient Greek and especially Roman cultures must have felt almost contemporary to the Western Europeans of early modern times. This feeling of contemporaneity might have weakened from the later eighteenth century on due to the awakening of a historical sense.<sup>147</sup> But especially in the field of rhetoric the connection might have stayed close because it directly affects language. Already the Italian humanists, inspired by their studies of the classics, turned their attention towards their mother tongue, and attempts North of the Alps to raise the German language to the level of the elevated poetic Latin date already from the early seventeenth century.<sup>148</sup> In addition, rhetoric remained of importance to the Romantic generation. This fact may seem to be at odds with our popular image of the Romantics, but this rather shows a feature of the later view on Romanticism than of the Romantic authors themselves.<sup>149</sup>

The notion that the theory of rhetoric applied to music as well as to language continued into the post-Baroque period. In 1768 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose writings on music retained their influence for a long time, compared a (creative) musician with an orator, when he wrote: 'Avec les seules règles de l'Harmonie on n'est pas plus près de savoir la Composition, qu'on ne l'est d'être un Orateur avec celles de la Grammaire.'<sup>150</sup> [With the rules of harmony only, we are no more advanced in the knowledge of composition, than an orator with those of the Grammar.<sup>151</sup>] Also during the nineteenth century, 'music as a language' (*Tonsprache*) remained a familiar idea. Philosophers and authors such as Friedrich von Schlegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel and Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann, music critics such as Eduard Hanslick and Gustav Schilling, and composers such as Beethoven and Liszt (who called music the 'twin sister of language') are just a few examples that give

<sup>146</sup> Stroh, W.: op. cit., 250-251.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Mathijsen, M.: *Historiezucht*. Nijmegen, 2013.

<sup>148</sup> Ueding, G. & Steinbrink, B.: *Grundriss der Rhetorik*. Stuttgart, 1986; 98.

<sup>149</sup> Ueding, G. & Steinbrink, B.: op. cit., 135. For a discussion of rhetoric in nineteenth-century German, see ibidem, 134-156.

<sup>150</sup> Rousseau, J.-J.: *Dictionnaire de musique*. Paris, 1768; 109.

<sup>151</sup> Rousseau, J.-J.: *A Complete Dictionary of Music* (trans. W. Waring). London, 1779; 75.

an impression of the ubiquity of this topic.<sup>152</sup> In 1829, Carl Czerny worked out the parallel between an improviser and a *Redner* in his *Anleitung zum Fantasieren*:

Sobald der Spieler sich vor einer grösseren Gesellschaft, und überhaupt vor Zuhörern zum Improvisieren hinsetzt, kann er sich mit einem Redner vergleichen, der einen Gegenstand deutlich und möglichst erschöpfend aus dem Stegreif zu entwickeln strebt. In der That passen so viele Regeln der Beredsamkeit auf das musikalische Fantasieren, dass es nicht zweckwidrig ist, den Vergleich fortzusetzen.<sup>153</sup>

[As soon as the performer sits down before a larger gathering and generally to improvise in front of an audience, he can be compared with an orator who strives to develop a subject as clearly and exhaustively as possible on the spur of the moment. In point of fact, so many principles of oratory correspond with those of improvisation that it is not inappropriate to venture the comparison.<sup>154</sup>]

In England, Charles Burney seems to have been very familiar with ancient rhetorical literature, since he refers to the Greek-writing Roman rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BC) in an encyclopaedia entry on *improvisatore* (→ chapter 8).<sup>155</sup> In nineteenth-century French, *dire un morceau de musique* [to speak a piece of music] was a common expression until World War I.<sup>156</sup>

So far, the focus has been on verbal rhetoric as a means of describing music. Interestingly, some writers from Antiquity also do the opposite: they use music as an example for spoken language. Dionysius of Halicarnassus for instance went so far as to write:

The science of public oratory is, after all, a sort of musical science, differing from vocal and instrumental music in degree, not in kind. In oratory, too, the words involve melody, rhythm, variety, and appropriateness; so that, in this case also, the ear delights in the melodies, is fascinated by the rhythms, welcomes the variations, and craves always what is in keeping with the occasion. The distinction between oratory and music is simply one of degree.<sup>157</sup>

With respect to the improvisatory in music, two fields that are related to classical rhetoric are especially relevant. One is the area of *inventio*, in which the locus communis as a source of invention has a central role. This concept was already introduced in chapter 2.2, and will be elaborated in part 3 of this study. The other one has to do with the stage of the delivery of a speech. Different authors tend to link rhetoric terms with music in various ways, which is understandable because of the different functions of ‘meaning’ in music and in spoken language (→ chapter 2): often it is rather the

<sup>152</sup> Krones, H.: ‘Musik und Rhetorik’. In: *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band A6. Kassel, 1997; col. 841-846.

<sup>153</sup> Czerny, C.: *Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte* op. 200 [Wien, 1829]; facsimile reprint: Wiesbaden, 1993; 36.

<sup>154</sup> Czerny, C.: *A Systematic Introduction to Improvisation on the Pianoforte* op. 200 (A.L. Mitchell, trans.). New York, 1983; 42.

<sup>155</sup> Burney, Ch.: ‘Improvisatore’. In: Rees, A.: *The Cyclopædia*, vol. 18. London, 1819.

<sup>156</sup> Eigeldinger, J.J.: *Chopin vu par ses élèves*. Paris, 2006; 24.

<sup>157</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus: *On literary composition* (W. Rhys Roberts, trans.). London, 1910; 125-126.

underlying principle than the exact concept itself that can be applied to music. ‘Tropos’ for instance, mentioned above, cannot literally be translated to the language of music for precisely that reason. With respect to the categories that deal with the musical foreground, several terms were in use alongside one another. Arbitrary ornamentation (*decoratio*), discussed in chapters 3 and 4, can, according to Mattheson, be counted as a part of *elaboratio* or *elocutio*.<sup>158</sup> He distinguishes between *Figuren* (*figurae*), which to him seem to be musical figures that make part of a composition, and *Manieren*, arbitrary ornamentation which is added by the performer – very much in line with Quintilian.<sup>159</sup> With respect to *Manieren*, Mattheson is, incidentally, remarkably critical, since they ‘verderben manche schöne Melodie’ [spoil many a beautiful melody] by making the figures unrecognisable.<sup>160</sup> The aspect of *pronuntiatio*, which to Quintilian is a very important part of rhetoric,<sup>161</sup> is represented musically in the present study by the aspect of improvisatory performance (→ chapters 5 and 7). I will now turn to a rhetorical concept that is central to an improvisatory approach to scores: variety.

### *Varietas*

The history of the idea of variety is a long and interesting one. According to Cicero, the word *varietas* originally referred to the shifting colour of ripening grapes in autumn<sup>162</sup> and became used mainly in a transferred sense, which could be pejorative (changeable, uncertain), as well as positive.<sup>163</sup> Here one notices already the ambiguity that also surrounds the related later concepts of ornament and decoration. The positive valuation of *varietas* is reflected in proverbial expressions like *varietas delectat* [variety pleases] and *natura gaudet varietate* [nature rejoices in variety]. Connected to this is the idea of *natura ludens* [nature that plays]. *Varietas* was seen as a virtue that fosters persuasion by raising both *amplificatio* [the increase of expression] and *ornatus* [adornment].<sup>164</sup> In the early Christian world, variety was identified as the essential quality of God’s creation.<sup>165</sup> In the Middle Ages, it became one of the leading principles of literary style.<sup>166</sup> A glimpse of the celebration of variety in nature in later times can be seen for example in the commonplace books that became popular from the fifteenth century on, and in the collections of curiosities of wealthy citizens in the seventeenth

<sup>158</sup> Mattheson, J.: op.cit., 235.

<sup>159</sup> Quintilian: op. cit., IX.1.4.

<sup>160</sup> Mattheson, J. : op. cit., 242.

<sup>161</sup> Quintilian: op. cit., III.3.3.

<sup>162</sup> Fitzgerald, W.: *Variety: The Life of a Roman Concept*. Chicago, 2016; 18.

<sup>163</sup> Fitzgerald, W.: op. cit., 19.

<sup>164</sup> Fekadu, S.: ‘Variation’. In: Ueding, G. (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Band 9. Darmstadt, 2009; col. 1006-1007.

<sup>165</sup> Fitzgerald, W.: op. cit., 54.

<sup>166</sup> Fekadu, S.: op. cit., col. 1008.

and eighteenth centuries. As late as 1845, the painter J.D. Harding wrote in his *Principles and Practice of Art*:

Variety is essential to beauty, and is so inseparable from it that there can be no beauty where there is no variety. (...) As variety is indispensable to beauty so perfect beauty requires that variety be infinite. It is this infinite variety which constitutes the perfection of Nature, and the want of it which occasions every work of Art to be imperfect.<sup>167</sup>

In Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, *varietas* produces *copia* (abundance) in speech – a word that comes from the same semantic field. As the classical philologist William Fitzgerald puts it:

It is essential for an orator to be able to put it in another way (and another, and another...) so that he can be sure that in any given situation he will not dry up. But *varietas* in this sense is not just a decorative matter; it is rather the means of unfolding the dimensions of a thought and proving its worthiness (*dignitas*), for this depends on its capacity to expand. Without variety, this unfolding proves nothing about the potency of the thought or the speaker. It is mere loquacity.<sup>168</sup>

Several aspects from the history of *varietas* are still relevant in modern times. The advice that *varietas* be 'the means of unfolding the dimensions of a thought' for instance still seems to be an appropriate answer to complaints about the emptiness of virtuosity (both in verbal and musical languages) in much later times. Also, the idea of God as a creator of variety underwent a very interesting transformation when the task of an artist was no longer seen in imitating nature, but in becoming an almost god-like creator himself. It is often assumed that after Kant, Romanticism equipped the artist (*in casu* the musician) with characteristics that were based upon the theological dogma of the *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>169</sup> On basis of what was written above, however, this picture may be nuanced: if indeed an 'aesthetics of variety' was prevalent even after Kant, if indeed the notions of *natura ludens* and variety were essential ideas in nineteenth-century culture, this would create room for a different view on the role of the nineteenth-century musician: neither a god-like genius-composer, nor a slave-performer, but a partner in dialogue with the score.

Concepts such as *varietas* and *copia* were transmitted by Renaissance humanism. Erasmus' highly influential treatise on rhetoric *De utraque verborum ac rerum copia* (1512) gives stunning examples of variety in formulation by providing several hundreds of alternatives to the same sentence.<sup>170</sup> Here a comparison with Ganassi's diminutions (→ section 3.2) is unavoidable. In this way *varietas* became an important notion in early modern eloquence, a notion that remained vivid until the present day.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted in Fitzgerald, W.: op. cit., 38.

<sup>168</sup> Fitzgerald, W.: op. cit., 48.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Benson, B.E.: 'In the Beginning, There Was Improvisation.' In: *Improvisation: musicological, musical and philosophical aspects* (Orgelpark Research Report 3/1). Amsterdam, 2013.

<sup>170</sup> Erasmus: *De Utraque verborum ac rerum copia*. ('On copia of words and ideas'); trans. D.B. King and H.D. Rix). Milwaukee, 1963; 38-42.



It shows for instance in a love for rich formulation, avoiding the repetition of words, exploiting synonyms and elegantly constructed sentences. In this connection the twentieth century witnessed a contrasting development that consciously deviated from the rich nineteenth-century eloquence, for instance in the work of Franz Kafka and other authors of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] or in the more journalistic style of Ernest Hemingway. That variety as a still existing rhetoric ideal may sometimes clash with a more modernistic aesthetics, is illustrated beautifully in Milan Kundera's essay *Les testaments trahis* (1993).<sup>171</sup> Kundera describes how the deliberately sparse language of Kafka gets distorted in several French translations that replace repeated words in the original text with diverse synonyms: the translator wanted to render Kafka's very personal language into 'beautiful' (= varied) French.

Already Joannes Tinctoris transferred *varietas* to music in his *Liber de Arte contrapuncti* (1477).<sup>172</sup> That the idea certainly played a role in renaissance performance is clearly seen in Riccardo Rogniono's introduction to the second part of his *Passaggi* (1592):

Eccovi dunque nella Prima Parte una Raccolta delle Ricercate sopra gl'Instrumenti; laquale si può dir ragioneuolmente, che sia il condimento del Suono, e l'ornamento della Musica, come che senza questa varietà di Passaggi siano rinresceuoli le repliche frequenti anco di questo come d'ogn'altra cosa all'orecchio. E perciò, se talhora nel Diminuere u'occorreranno spesso l'istesse Cadenze, douranno con questa diuersità (ch'habbiamo à questo sine posta) di Diminutioni, ò altri Passaggi farsi praticchi, & anco con le loro Ricercate s'accompagnino differentemente.<sup>173</sup>

[You see, then, in the first part [of this book (BM)] a collection of *ricercate* for instrumental use, which one can reasonably say is the seasoning of the sound and the ornament of music, such that *without this variety of passaggi the frequent repetitions even of this, as of every other thing, are displeasing to the ear*. Since, if sometimes in diminutions there will sometimes happen often the same cadences, you will need to become practiced in this diversity of diminutions and *passaggi*, which I have printed for this purpose, and also you may accompany yourselves differently with your *ricercate*.] (transl. Sion M. Honea, my italics.)

Even though the exact musical meaning of the term *varietas* may remain slightly unclear,<sup>174</sup> it seems not unreasonable to see ornamental improvisation as an important manifestation in music. Türk also mentions the term in connection with ornamentation in his *Klavierschule*. In a footnote he writes about variety:

<sup>171</sup> Kundera, M.: *Les testaments trahis*. Translation in: *Over de romankunst*. Amsterdam, 2012; 195-208.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Luko, A.: 'Tinctoris on Varietas'. *Early Music History*, vol. 27 (2008); 99-136.

<sup>173</sup> Rogniono, R.: *Passaggi per potersi essercitare nel diminuire terminatamente*. Part 2: *Il vero modo di diminuire*. Venice, 1594; [1].

<sup>174</sup> Markovska, N.: *Varietas: a Stylistic Virtue* (2013). <https://sotonmusic18c.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/varietas-as-a-stylistic-virtue-in-rhetoric/>.

Einheit und Mannigfaltigkeit können in einem Werke der Kunst gar wohl neben einander bestehen, und sind beide gleich nothwendig. Die Einheit erlaubt nicht, muntere und traurige Gedanken nebeneinander zu stellen; die Mannigfaltigkeit hingegen verlangt Abwechslung solcher Gedanken, die einerley Charakter haben. Einheit im Mannigfaltigen, oder das Mannigfaltige der Einheit untergeordnet, ist daher ein sehr wesentlicher Theil der Schönheit.<sup>175</sup>

[Unity and variety are able to exist quite well next to each other in a work of art and both are equally necessary. Unity does not allow the juxtaposition of lively and sorrowful ideas; variety, on the other hand, requires the alternation of thoughts that have a similar character. Unity in variety, or variety subordinated to unity, is therefore an essential quality of beauty.<sup>176</sup>]

Türk's expression 'Einheit im Mannigfaltigen' echoes Horace's *concordia discors*,<sup>177</sup> and seems to foreshadow a classicist sense of balance – all the same with *varietas* as one of the poles! In part 2 of this study, this very notion of variety is a common thread. In order to investigate manifestations of ornamental improvisation and of relative improvisation in general, the continuation of the *varietas* concept in musical performance after 1800 will be examined; the situation during the pre-classical and Viennese classical periods serves as a springboard.

### 3.5 Ornamental *copia* in late-eighteenth-century music

Eighteenth-century treatises frequently warn the reader that the amount of *willkührliche Manieren* should not be exaggerated, though pedagogic publications of embellished music such as Johann Adam Hiller's *6 italienische Arien*<sup>178</sup> do show abundant ornamentation (in this particular case explicitly disapproved of by Türk). Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach stresses the requirement that the embellishment should be in accordance with the *Inhalt* (the content) of the piece;<sup>179</sup> other authors often use the more familiar term *Affekt*.

This advice sounds obvious enough for a modern reader: most musicians concerned with stylistic accuracy would be reluctant to spoil the *Affekt* of a tender *Adagio* with a wild cadenza. Indeed, to a modern musician, an eighteenth-century author warning his readers of any excess of embellishments might be like a confirmation of what most of us already thought. However, on a more subtle level things are less simple. What does it mean, for instance, when in an aria of Pasquale Anfossi, where the poet speaks about the soul resting in the Elysian fields, Hiller adds ornaments as in the example

<sup>175</sup> Türk, D.G.: op. cit., 311.

<sup>176</sup> Türk, D.G.: *School of Clavier Playing* (trans. R.H. Haggh). Lincoln, 1982; 498.

<sup>177</sup> Horace: *Epistulae*, I.12.19.

<sup>178</sup> Hiller, J.A.: *Sechs italiänische Arien verschiedener Componisten mit der Art sie zu singen und zu verändern*. Leipzig, 1778.

<sup>179</sup> Bach, C.Ph.E.: *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1753). Facsimile reprint: Wiesbaden, 1986; 117.

below? Many modern singers would probably think that the peaceful atmosphere is spoiled by the rather virtuosic ornamentation.

Example 3.5.1 J.A. Hiller, 6 Ariens, no. 3; the middle and lower staves show Anfossi's score, the top staff gives Hiller's suggestions for ornamentation.

This, however, can be a pitfall. One should not rule out the idea that the degree of ornamentation in eighteenth-century music making could have been considerably higher than is often assumed today, even by many 'historically informed' performers. This includes not only the *willkürliche* [arbitrary or optional], but also the *wesentliche* [essential] embellishments. Some contemporary copies of Johann Sebastian Bach's three-part *Sinfonien* for keyboard for instance include added symbols for ornamentation to a degree that would seem very unlikely today.<sup>180</sup> A very interesting source is also the organ clock from the Esterhazy palace that contains a cylinder with original interpretations of short pieces of Joseph Haydn, prepared during Haydn's stay with the Esterhazy's. Here, too, the amount of little ornaments (including arpeggios on organ!) definitely exceeds the expectations of a modern listener (→ chapter 7.14). The most stunning examples of copious ornamentation however can be found in contemporary (notated) variants of opera arias that contain many *willkührliche Manieren*. Karin and Eugen Ott compiled a wealth of material in their monumental *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst*. A very interesting example is the ornamented version of *Dove sono*, the aria of the sad *contessa* in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which was found in the performance material of the 1791 premiere of the opera in Donaueschingen. The embellishments may have been written out for amateur singers (*dilettanti*) who took part in the performance but were not skilled enough to

<sup>180</sup> Reproduced in the Wiener Urtext edition of the *Inventionen und Sinfonien* (U. Leisinger, ed.); Wien, 2007.

improvise the ornaments<sup>181</sup> (the same explanation is sometimes put forward for the many cadenzas Mozart composed for his piano concertos, see chapter 10.4). The top line provides the ornamented version:

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Dove sono', measures 13-20. The score is written in three systems. The first system (measures 13-15) features a vocal line with a highly ornamented melody and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'di - quel - lab - bro - men - zo - gner di quel'. The second system (measures 16-18) continues the vocal line with further ornamentation and the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'lab - bro men - zo - gner?'. The piano part consists of simple chords and rhythmic patterns.

Example 3.5.2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Dove sono*, m. 13-20. After Ott, K. and E.: *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst*, Vol. 3. München, 1998; 241.

Surely this piece is often regarded as an example of Mozart's melodic pureness and simplicity, an instance of the unearthly beauty of the Apollonian Mozart, dearly loved by masses of people. There seems to be a tension between this now familiar idea and the suggested sounding reality of the performance in Donaueschingen – and this amount of ornamentation is absolutely no exception for the end of the eighteenth century! The contrast brings to mind Kathleen Carlton's conclusion regarding modern performers of Mozart – specifically, that 'most present day conductors and performers are likely to err on the side of discretion'.

Especially the slow movements in piano concertos of Mozart can strongly resemble an opera aria in disguise. In this case there is evidence that in Mozart's day a degree of ornamentation that is virtually unimaginable today (despite the efforts of Robert Levin to convince the music world that improvised ornamentation and cadenzas belong to Mozart's style) must have been in fact the norm.

<sup>181</sup> Ott, K. and E.: *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst in der Musik*, Vol. 3. München, 1998; 220, 221.

The *Ott Handbuch* gives a stunning example of two contemporary notated variants of the famous *Adagio* from the piano concerto in A major, KV 488. The top line gives the version of the composer / pianist Philipp Karl Hoffmann (1769-1842).

Example 3.5.3 W.A. Mozart, *Adagio* from Piano Concerto KV 488, m. 26-30. After Ott, K. and E.: *Handbuch der Verzierungskunst*, Vol. 6. München, 2000; 315.

Alfred Brendel wrote about this variant:

The embellishments by (...) Philipp Karl Hoffmann do not even try to follow Mozart's example; they are foreign to his style and frequently overcrowded with notes to such a degree that, to get all of them in, the relatively flowing tempi of Mozart's middle movements must be pulled back to *largo*. The

additions by (...) Hoffmann do make us aware that the ‘gusto’ of performance style could change quite quickly and drastically.<sup>182</sup>

This is a strong opinion that most likely will be shared by many modern lovers of this extraordinary piece. However, the second line in example 3.5.3 stems from another ornamented version that can be directly linked to Mozart! Most likely, the manuscript was owned by Mozart and written ‘in an improvisatory way’ by a student, possibly Barbara Ployer, for whom he wrote several piano concertos.<sup>183</sup> It seems unlikely that a change of ‘gusto’ can explain these richly ornamented versions, how little they may conform to modern taste. Perhaps it is rather our loss of ‘gusto’ for variety as a virtue in music making that can explain our difficulties with a historical performance tradition that itself can hardly be denied.

### 3.6 The rhetorical function of ornamentation

Trying to align rich ornamentation as it has been handed down from the later eighteenth century, with the *Affekt* of the passage where it occurs, might turn out to be a dead end. After all, it is questionable to what extent the Baroque *Affektenlehre* is still applicable to the galant and early classical styles. It is more fruitful to explore the relationship between extempore ornamentation and musical loci communes. On the level of a melody, the type of locus that comes to the fore is that of musical phrases, of melodic gestures. Eighteenth-century composition treatises such as Heinrich Christoph Koch’s *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition* (1782) typically identify ‘phrases’ as melodic units, comparable to the fragments of a spoken sentence. Incisions in a melody (comparable to e.g. a colon in a sentence) are usually marked by different types of cadences – something that was still described in the nineteenth century by Anton Reicha in his *Traité de haute composition musicale* (1824).<sup>184</sup> It should be noted that this eighteenth-century use of the term ‘phrase’ differs from the later analytical meaning; in fact, it is more similar to the ‘beat’ or ‘bit’ in Stanislavski’s theory of drama, as it will be elaborated in chapter 5.

Indeed, rich ornamentation as seen in Hiller’s edition of Agossi’s aria never blurs the phrase structure of the music: analysis shows that all incisions are acknowledged, and never is one obscured by ornamentation. Even when, as sometimes happens, ornamentation connects two phrases by means of a bridge, the cadence itself is not affected as the goal of the first phrase. In the example below, for instance, Hiller adds a short cadenza in the last bar; this cadenza is principally an elegant flourish of the kind that Mozart referred to as an *Eingang* (→ chapter 10). This cadenza leaves the

<sup>182</sup> Brendel, A.: ‘A Mozart player gives himself advice.’ In: *Music, Sense and Nonsense: Collected Essays and Lectures*. German edition: *Über Musik*. München, 2005; 20.

<sup>183</sup> Beck, H.: *Neue Mozart Ausgabe, Kritischer Bericht, Serie V, Band 7*. Kassel, 1964; g/8-g/17.

<sup>184</sup> Reicha, A.: *Traité de haute composition musicale* (German translation by Carl Czerny), vol. 2. Vienna, 1832; 362-370.

previous phrase (i.e. the last time ‘*mancando v*à’) undisturbed; its ‘function’ is to connect the last tone of that phrase to the first one of the next (starting on ‘*Negli*’; ex. 3.6.1). In doing so, I argue that Hiller’s *Eingang* does not blur the incision between the two phrases; rather it does the opposite: by stopping the movement of the piece, the cadenza is *senza tempo* and in this way draws the attention of the listener to this prominent moment in the piece, namely the return to the main key and the recapitulation of the beginning.



Example 3.6.1 J.A. Hiller, *6 Ariens*, no. 3.

What happens in between the melodic incisions (i.e. within a phrase) is that the ‘direction’ of the melodic gestures is intensified by the ornamentation: the embellishment ‘amplifies’ (→ section 3.4) the effect of movement, either by making the distance (the range) bigger, or by increasing the sense of moving somewhere by speeding up the rhythm. In short, this could be an answer to the question of the purpose of ornamentation: late-eighteenth-century embellishments tend to intensify the melodic gestures by intensifying their sense of direction, and the search for variety in the ornamentation can be interpreted as a kind of musical eloquence in performance; ornaments support both *amplificatio* and *ornatus*.

### 3.7 Were embellishments improvised?

The first of the two questions that were asked at the end of section 3.2 (about the effect of ornamentation) gave rise to elaborations on the importance of rhetoric for musical performance. An answer to the second one will be formulated in this section. Did pre-1800 ornamentation indeed come into being in the moment of performing, in other words: was it ‘improvised’? Today, many ‘classical’ musicians, especially those active in the field of early music, seem to consider ornamentation a primary instance of improvisation as such – an idea that is confirmed by the set-up of Ferand’s anthology, as it was shown at the beginning of this chapter. However, historically the term ‘improvising’ (and related terms like *préluder* and *Fantasieren*, see chapter 8) was not used for extempore ornamentation; rather, the latter was seen as an aspect of ‘performance’. To avoid jumping to conclusions however, two considerations have to be made.

a. An important aspect is the number of times that a piece was performed. It is the history of jazz music that provides an interesting experience here. Because the development of jazz largely coincided with the rise of recorded music, we have the possibility of comparing different versions of improvisations on the same tune by the same player. Analysis of performances by Louis Armstrong, for instance, shows that there are similarities between solos that he ‘improvised’ at different occasions across a long period in his career.<sup>185</sup> This process of settling (even though the solos were not notated) is just a natural thing that happens by virtue of musical and embodied memory. In fact, it would have given Armstrong a lot of trouble to *avoid* any similarities. This phenomenon matches experiences of *basso continuo*-players. A figured bass usually offers many possibilities of realisation, some of which are more to the taste of the player and according to stylistic considerations than others. When a piece is performed many times by one performer, for instance Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* that in some countries is programmed extensively every year before Easter, the harpsichordist or organist tends to fall into similar ‘solutions’ for specific passages. Also here, it can be difficult and even tiresome to obsessively try to be different every time.

b. Whereas the previous consideration was focusing on the number of performances, there is also the preparation for a performance and its character to take into account. Starting with the latter: during the second half of the eighteenth century, public concerts with instrumental music as we know them were rare. Chamber music and keyboard compositions, as they seem to be the focus of most treatises mentioned before, were primarily performed in more intimate settings, and enjoyed by listeners and players alike. It is mainly the solo concertos and the symphonies that were played for a larger audience. As for the preparation, it seems to be likely that compositions were much more often sight-read than nowadays. It should not be forgotten that at the time of the pre-classical period, performing composed music still equalled performing contemporary music. The stylistic competence and the virtuosity in the particular type of music a player was familiar with, must have been of a level a modern classical musician can only dream of. Nikolaus Harnoncourt describes in *Musik als Klangrede* the competence of musicians in the orchestra of Johann Strauss, who knew perfectly well how to play a waltz or a polka – and therefore had little difficulty interpreting Strauss’ score.<sup>186</sup> This also draws attention to the importance of musical genres, a topic that will be elaborated further in chapter 12.

Summing up: given these circumstances, the question whether embellishments were improvised is typically a modern one, asked within an environment where compositions are meticulously

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<sup>185</sup> Personal communication with jazz historian Wouter Turkenburg; see for instance Armstrong’s different recordings of ‘West End Blues’. Other examples are recordings of ‘Body and Soul’ by Coleman Hawkins (tenor saxophone) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sul\\_9BcgOOI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sul_9BcgOOI) vs. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sfj5UtPoMcg>, or of John Coltrane (tenor sax) playing ‘My Favorite Things’.

<sup>186</sup> Harnoncourt, N.: *Musik als Klangrede*. München, 1985; 35.



practised until the performance is as fully controlled as possible. When an eighteenth-century performance was sight-read, the embellishments naturally would be (as we call it) improvised (which certainly did not exclude the use of standardised formulas); when a piece was practiced beforehand, the ornamentation might have tended to develop in a more specific direction. As mentioned above, adding embellishments was not seen as a form of *Fantasieren*; it was seen as *Vortrag* (performance) – in rhetorical terms: embellishments don't belong to *inventio*, but to *elocutio* or *pronuntiatio*.

Therefore, the (modern) question whether embellishments in the late eighteenth century were improvised cannot be answered in general because it depended on the circumstances. The degree of the 'unforeseen', the un-premeditated, must have differed with the situation, which makes the eighteenth-century classification of ornamenting as *Vortrag* a much more sensible one. What makes our preoccupation with whether or not something can be called improvisation so difficult is that it distracts from a much more important and fundamental phenomenon: the disappearance of *varietas* as a stylistic virtue in music making. This preoccupation betrays a focus on unity in our thinking about performance because improvisation is seen as the not-planned, something that is different from 'normal' performance. As Nikolaus Harnoncourt observed, the desire of most listeners today is to hear often the pieces of music they like, 'by which we have reached a ridiculously primitive stage of reception. (...) We are like children, who want to hear the same fairy-tale again and again, because we remember specific beautiful moments that we enjoyed at the first time listening' (my translation).<sup>187</sup> A similar focus on sameness characterises music making itself. When we keep thinking in terms of unity only, we leave variety to the composer – and in this way unwillingly maintain the late-twentieth-century *Urtext*-paradigm. Making musical performance more improvisatory in the first place means opening up towards an aesthetics of variety. After all, isn't it ironic that many would object, with Brendel, to 'fiddling' with the beautiful *Adagio* from KV 488 exactly in a time when this music is more widely available than ever before? Isn't this indeed a 'primitive stage of reception'? In my view, the old idea that a performance should sound as if the musician is conceiving the music on the spot, even when he actually isn't, might sometimes be even more important than the question to what extent a performance is (or should be) actually improvised.

After these preliminary thoughts on ornamentation, the journey through nineteenth-century musical landscapes will really commence in the next chapter. The three central questions are: What happened? How were nineteenth-century musicians trained? How can we acquire these skills today? In chapter 4, I first turn towards early-nineteenth-century Italian opera.

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<sup>187</sup> Harnoncourt, N.: op. cit., 30.