

**Bouquet on the skyscraper
Bach's Ornamentation and our Era
by Sebestyén Nyíró, April 2014**

**THEMATIC PAPER FOR THE AGO NATIONAL CONVENTION
BOSTON 2014**

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PART ONE. INRODUCTION - THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

‘ [...] we can acquire knowledge about almost anything. We can, for instance, guided by our beloved scientific method, study everything there is, from theological, anthropological, sociological, psychological and even biochemical perspectives, about a human phenomenon called love. The result will be that we will know everything that can be known about love. But once we achieve that complete knowledge, we will sooner or later discover that that we will never understand love, unless we fall in love. We will realise that knowledge is not the road that leads to understanding, because the port of understanding is on another shore, and requires a different navigation. We will then be aware that we can only attempt to understand that of which we become a part. That understanding is the result of **integration**, while knowledge has been the result of **detachment**. That understanding is holistic, while knowledge is fragmented. Perhaps it would be good to realise that there is no reason whatsoever to banish intuition, spirituality and consciousness from the realm of science. Or, to put it in Goethe's words’:

Max Manfred Neef: From Knowledge to Understanding, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, www.dhf.uu.se

If [we] would seek comfort in the whole, (we) **must learn to discover the whole in the smallest part**’, because ‘nothing is more consonant with Nature than that she puts into operation in the smallest detail that which she intends as a whole’.

Naydler, Jeremy, Goethe on Science, Floris Books, UK, 2000, pp. 92-93.

Dear AGO members and colleagues, researchers, fellow musicians, friends of organ music, teachers, students and visitors

Our discussion today regarding the ornaments of Bach begins with the question:

Is this really so important? What can be added to the research of Hans Klotz, Frederick Neumann, Eugen Ott and so many others? I have to admit that, if the question is put this way, the answer is no. But I immediately say no to that no, recalling the words of CPE Bach about the aim of perfect execution of ornaments, which “is a task at which one may perfect himself almost lifelong” (“eine Aufgabe ist, woran man beynahe Zeit Lebens lernen kann”, p. 12, §18, Versuch, 1753).

Taking that seriously, I invite you now to pose the question differently. To pursue another path of inquiry. With a new logic. A deductive one. Let's try.

Let's imagine for a moment that we have a newborn baby and consciously raise it to speak Latin, eat medieval food, wear medieval clothes and pursue the ideas and values of medieval life. Would this not be absurd, paradoxical, and irrational?

That child would no doubt grow up in a special home, where we would visit it then drive home in our hybrid car, chatting in English or German instead of Latin (which we did not understand anyway) and later would eat popcorn while watching a movie on our computer, digging into our email account on the iPhone and talking to each other about the movie going on. Doing things, which that child would never do - according to his rearing.

Thinking about it, we may come to a surprising conclusion: it's what we do when we play early music and try to evoke the whole range of emotional-intellectual-spiritual circumstances – the so-called “Zeitgeist” – of that music and present it to the listener as it supposedly sounded – “supposedly” because we do not have any recordings from that time. In this case we are both the baby and the educator. I do not touch on why we do it. That may be another thematic paper at the next AGO convention. I only touch here on how we do it.

If we play that music, in that moment we are supposedly the baby reared up on medieval customs. Turning away from the organ bench, if we sit at our desk and study the music or read about it we are the educator with hypermodern tools and consciousness talking about medieval customs... In other words: we try to revive a music containing emotional-intellectual presumptions and prerequisites OTHER than those we are accustomed to in our era.

Furthermore, we would have to forget the emotional reactions, intellectual assumptions and sensual aesthetics of our time, if we could. Can we really? Surely music from the past has the right to be played as it – supposedly – was conceived. The question is rather: can we be born into and live in an era without it influencing all our actions, including how we play music? I doubt it. I hope you do, too. And... what the heck does that have to do with ornaments? Now, reversing our point of view, here is the question I propose:

Suppose that I am Bach, and I compose in my normal way and put in some ornaments here and there. Do I do it in the way most coherent with my Zeitgeist? Of course. Do these tiny little signs therefore fit organically into what I just composed and heard in my inner ear? Of course they do, otherwise I would not put them there.

Now, 300 years later there's a student who happens to be playing that piece. Not because I, Bach, wanted him to, but because he does. Apart from the unlikely case that that person is a reincarnation of Bach, he will be carrying another Zeitgeist in his soul and mind – emotional, aesthetic, intellectual. The perception of the piece is changed forever by the new setup – sounds a bit like a computer language, doesn't it?

So the student sees the little ornament-sign, which he doesn't understand yet, and looks it up in a book to see how to play it. The book, at best, gives a tolerable suggestion – based on the most accurate information we have from the past – and he plays it accordingly. So far so good. Then, sometime later, he plays the piece faster and reduces and changes the execution of the ornament because the piece sounds better like that or because his teacher told him to. What do you think: did the student completely ignore the relationship between the ornament and the composition because he is attuned to a newer aesthetic? Or because he ignored the tempo limitation which the ornament implied? Saying “this is more musical” or “sounds better”? Which is to say: “sounds better FOR US”. Old Zeitgeist versus new Zeitgeist. So the question is, WHO is talking? Who's in charge: we or the composer?

Today we always want both things: the most accurate historical performance possible, and the most interesting and vital performance possible. We want to pay homage to and respect the composer, but we want the piece to please us, and we are willing to sacrifice those little things for that.

On the one hand, we want to respect the Zeitgeist of another era, and on the other hand, we want to please the Zeitgeist of our current era. If we are lucky and have enough taste and talent, there may be a common denominator... but sometimes there seems to be a chasm in between...

It must be said here, that the idea of being “historically respectful” in music performance is only an idea of the late 20th century. The idea has its roots, of course, in earlier developments in other disciplines such as archeology etc, but it came to music performance practice about 50 years ago. This is still a controversial topic in the music world - at least in philosophical terms - and one which I must leave now unelaborated. Without further considerations, I will tell you what I have concluded.

We cannot change or re-educate our emotional-intellectual-sensual way of life, our Zeitgeist. It is impossible. Therefore, as a performer of my era, I have a problem: I have to understand, not only to know but understand that the composition is a text which embodied a completely coherent meaning in its time, even in its smallest details. And I have to understand that, however historical I try to be, I change the manner of the performance by being me here and now. I inevitably do so after 300 years of change in the Zeitgeist, regardless of what I do to avoid it. Even if we consciously try to be like a man of Bach’s era, the modern Zeitgeist affects us in ways that we are not conscious of.

At this point, there is only one logical course of action: I, the musician, must try to be as historically respectful, that is, knowledgeable, as possible, and, at the same time, I have to not only be knowledgeable about how to do it, but believe wholeheartedly that doing so is completely convincing and musically captivating for me and the audience. But, to believe in my performance, I necessarily must have understanding of the piece to reach coherency. Doing so I reach the limit of possibility because I never can have another Zeitgeist than that of my own. So I have to learn to come to an understanding of that music. To do so, I have to try to recreate a new organic life of that piece. How? By **integrating** all of its parts, the most little ones, too, and find tools which help me to find the original intent. The more I can get the proportions in sound and time

(time means here both rhythm and tempo) of what the composer originally may have intended, the more likely that my understanding and my performance will have an organic relationship to the composer's intentions and thus, communicate a true understanding.

If I do the opposite, that is, if I do not pay attention to the whole and to the detail with the same accuracy and intensity, that means I do not care about the original meaning in its wholeness. Because in it everything must fit, from the large-scale structure of a piece, down to the smallest ornament. If I do not come to believe that, I have to admit that the way I play will not reflect historical considerations. It is also a possibility. It is contradictory to try to be historical in one way and remain modern in another, to play f. e. the clavichord in the way we assume it ought to be played and at the same time to ignore the ornaments for the sake of a musical tempo which pleases us in present time but which is sometimes contradicted by limitations implied by the ornaments created in their original era.

For those who chose the first way, to be historically respectful, the question is whether the ornaments could sometimes have significant meaning for tempo and structure. I believe that there are cases where they actually do. So at least in some cases we can determine whether to redesign the ornaments for the sake of our perceptions and taste or whether we first try to redesign our perception of the piece with the help of these disturbing little signs... Before we do so we have to find out how the ornaments were intended to be performed and what their function may have been for the Baroque musician.

PART TWO — FUNCTIONS, INSTRUCTIONS, ROLES

The roles of ornaments are twofold in music, according to Marpurg: on the one hand they can be compositional elements which merge into the realm of figures, on the other hand they are elements used in the performance to highlight certain places, to intensify the effect of certain musical parts. The roots of the ornaments are the musical interlineations, insets which were done in order to make the music fluid. The where and how were the questions of taste and talent.

Marpurg writes:

'§ 22 From the lucky blending of the simple and florid art of singing emerges the pleasant and touching writing style of those, who, on one hand, seek to avoid the ornate and incomprehensible and, on the other hand, the meagre, the sleepy, and the vile, and, consequently, seek to speak in the harmonious language of nature.'

The idea of dealing with the ornaments in a compound literary work about music is not new. We know that there were lexicons by Walther, Mattheson, Brossard, and so on, discussing many of them. But the idea of dealing with the ornaments in a separate work is relatively late and at the time was unique. It came from F. W. Marpurg who is an interesting mix of Baroque and Post-Baroque spirit. We may well assume that his 'Discourse upon the ornaments' (Abhandlung von den Manieren) from 1754 was interrupted because he started his other book called Anleitung zum Clavierspielen (1755, Introduction to master clavier playing) and he incorporated some material of his previous Abhandlung into that book. Also the famous Versuch from CPE Bach came out in 1753 and soon gained popularity which superceded Marpurg's Abhandlung.

However, the idea what he wrote in the Abhandlung is quite unique: there is no other place in the literature to my knowledge that treats the ornaments as both compositional elements and beautiful embellishments in the same treatise.

'All Ornaments can be looked at

1) with intention of the turn of tune

2) with intention of the performance of the same. With intention of the turn of melody are the Ornaments up to the idea and the taste of the composer.

So the way there can be innumerable ideas, in the same way there can be innumerable variations of Ornaments in the composition. With intention of the performance of tune there are essential and incidental Ornaments. Under the essential ones I mean all those, which have their foundations in the nature of singing, and without the observing of which, one cannot please their ears to be fully satisfied. With incidental ones I mean all those which have their origin in the taste of each performer, and since this taste can be excellent, mediocre and bad: one easily can see, how many ways of accidental Ornaments there could be. Here we have to do solely with the essential Ornaments in the performance, but we will deal with some of those, as well, which has a place in the art of composition – simultaneously.'

As this work of Marpurg remained a fragment, it leaves us tantalized but unfulfilled. But before he stops he tells us something important:

'One sees the Ornaments with certain signs or letters under, over or next to the note, where they shall have room. Just since the way of marking, at the time being, is not set up yet by any musical Concilium [that means there were no standards. S.N.], everyone thinks to have the right to follow

their opinion in this matter. In such cases like this it is undeniably needed that a composer would explain his signs in advance, so be it a piece should be played according to the way he meant it.'

Thank you so much, Mr. Marpurg! We take a look at what we are left with from Bach and must say that we are in a lucky situation. Due to the works done by finest scholars, it is clear for us that Bach has 22 ornaments in the strict sense of contemporary scholarship. We also know that he used more than 30 musical emblems stemming mainly from the French tradition, to designate those 22 ornaments. That means that he uses sometimes more than one or two signs for the same meaning. Marpurg, in his 'Abhandlung,' tells us even the three main criteria of execution in a very clear manner:

'§4

- 1. that themselves [the ornaments] have to always be suited to the duration of the notes on which they are to be executed.*
- 2. that the Ornaments should never change or interrupt the tempo.*
- 3. that one, while executing a Ornaments , never should hurry up, however fast it should be done. One takes time for it and performs it in an effortless way, with skill.'*

From the two last statements only one logical conclusion can be drawn: the ornament should be played in the most effortless way, but it takes the time it needs. Certainly there is some flexibility **but there is also a minimum time and time proportion the ornament needs in order to be artistically meaningful. Thus, it tells us the limit of the fastest tempo which works (depending on the skill of the player as well), that is, in which tempo it will not disrupt the tempo.** Thus, the ornaments behave as a tool to tell us some hints about the musical tempo. It seems to be a self-explanatory thought. But the recordings made by contemporary artists seem to show a great confusion.

There is no tool which tells us exactly which structural function an ornament has. The ornaments have a certain nature which derives from the fact of their miniature melodic contour and rhythmical core-design, usually referred to as 'dessin,' which determines that the ornament is thought to function more lineally or rather punctual. Ornaments can have structural functions in certain phrases, for example in hemiola rhythms here trills are almost always expected to come. If we take a look not just at Bach but for instance at Grigny or Buxtehude, to mention two different worlds with which Bach dealt, we find that the ornaments are placed mostly at places where, for some reason, more intensity is required.

Taste and style is decisive about how it was applied. Schweitzer says: *'So as to play the Bachian trill in the way that they were conceived by him, we must - in addition to the familiarity to their diverse nature - put life into them by the art we play them. Life will be given them by executing in the right tempo, in the necessary precision and all that in a sovereign leisureliness.'* (Schweitzer, p. 76) In reading this, one recalls immediately what Marpurg wrote.

[As late as 1962, Schweitzer wrote a letter to A. & C. Black Ltd. London in which he comes up with the idea that in the newest edition of his Bach-book the publisher should provide a little booklet in which he - Schweitzer - presents the new chapter about the ornaments to replace the old one. It did not happen. In short, Schweitzer's new results needed to be proven by comparisons made with the autographs of Bach at hand. This work Schweitzer could not finish. His friend and colleague Hans Klotz (with whom he was corresponding) did this work (for example that of 15. 03.1953). Though it seems that the Klotz book is out of date today, actually it is not. What it needed was a only a slight redesign and updating of the rules derived there. This is the kind of book one must read and think about for a long time. Today we have newer books, such as that of Eugen Ott and Laukvik who give examples and information instead, in the hope that everyone can make an interpretation even if it is quite a complex issue. The reason I prefer Klotz is that his book develops from the insight that it is better to start with what we know for certain and to show the possible options for solution and discover the irregularities afterwards, instead of presenting a bunch of examples and giving little hints, while assuming complete overview, independence and experience in the field.]

Intensity as such, on one hand, can be rhythmical-accentual which has to do with the compositional need for time division. For that reason its scope of effect remains relatively sharp and short. The effect usually remains in a more local context, functioning as a marking tool to designate a certain point of time in the phrase or section in which it occurs. The Germans prefer the strong beats of a phrase; the French like the ending point of a phrase or motif (be it strong or weak), and the buildup of the melodic line also plays a great role. Going upwards in the musical line, a mordent is common, whereas in a downward line, a trill is more likely, since the idea is to repeat a tone that already occurred in the melodic line, already known to the ear. The idea of interlining requires the consideration whether the ornament, which we intend to play there, has already at least one of the previously heard tones. This is again the idea – in miniature – of having variety which does not interrupt, so it needs be a new retelling of something already known i.e. heard. Short appoggiaturas, slurs and short mordents and trills fall into this category of ornament.

On the other hand, intensity can be expressed in the sound, creating tension between pitches (harmonies) or using the dynamics. When the harmonic-dynamical expression needs a pre-phase from which the impact is built up, ornaments of harmonic-dynamic nature are employed: longer trills, longer mordents, longer appoggiaturas. Complex combinations of

ornaments are in this category. Combined ornaments imply certain 'heaviness' in the composition. This has nothing to do with the dynamics in first line, but rather with a musical-rhetorical focus-point signaled by extensiveness and lengthiness which corresponds to the local musical affect at that point so that phrase or section can fulfill its role in the entirety of musical structure. Intensity and ways of heightening it are therefore present not only in the composition, but always in the performance as well. The level of talent and taste with which the ornaments are used varies. The best one can do after having studied the theory is to study the score and listen recordings, in order to develop awareness and sensitivity.



Bouquet on the skyscraper — Bach's Ornamentation and our Era

THEMATIC PAPER FOR THE AGO NATIONAL CONVENTION BOSTON, June 2014

by Sebestyén Nyíró

This presentation reviews:

- the relation between the ornament's character and tempo as a new tool of understanding text
- Marpurg's writings on the structural role of ornaments and the execution of them
- metrics, character of Bachian ornaments, and their role in determining tempo;
- conflicts between our tempo feeling and the tempo suggested by the ornaments—the dialectic struggle of instinct and intellect in the interpretation of the signs.

The presentation includes case studies from Bach's organ works (citing the autographs), demonstrating the problems at hand.

Please, if you could, look and listen in advance to the following spots of any available recording in the works listed below:

C1	Case one — Duet BWV 802	At the end of the piece	Doppelschlag (turn) on the note
C2	Case two — BWV 653 Choral 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon'	Measure 35	Trill
C3	Case three — BWV 641 Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein...	Measure 3	accent and mordent
C4	Case four — BWV 662 Allein Gott in der Höh...	Measure 15	trill versus accent – what does Bach if the trill is not doable
C5	Case five BWV 994 — Applicatio.	Measure 2	Trill and mordent (incorrectly usage is: trill and nachschlag)
C6	Case six — BWV 676 Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr	Measure 14	Bach's own invention: doppelschlag + trill + mordent
C7	Case seven — BWV 769 Vom Himmel Hoch	Measure 29	Melodic trill with nachschlag (confluent, no <i>point d'arrêt</i>)

PART HTREE — Case Studies

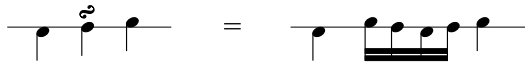
We are taking now closer look at seven spots in the organ work of Bach. In doing so, we try to apply our thinking method and listen in recordings groups of three.

Case One — Duet BWV 802 Ornament: Doppelschlag (turn) on the note

The character of the turn on the note is to create a continuation bridge between two notes and to highlight the importance of that connection. The line must be flowing but also clear, that is, articulated. The situation is harder if the note is to be played staccato and the time is shorter to play the ornament. Because the time for the ornament is reduced to the half of the note value and causes us, if not taking attention, to hurry up. This creates obfuscation and instability of time division.

MARPURG, 1749

»DOPPELSCHLAG«
»DOUBLÉ«



ClÜb III, Duett *e* (OSt)

802



73

Artist

A respectful, but ethereal sound

B not respectful

C respectful and very good, breathing tempo for the clarity

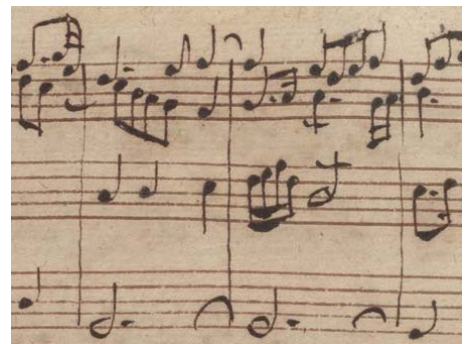
Case two — BWV 653 Choral 'An Wasserflüssen Babylon'. Ornament: Trill in measure 35

As Bach's writing determines that we cannot help out with the left hand, the shortness of the trill is required. The point d'arrêt (the point where the trill stops, PDA) is in that case inevitably counted on. This is a case which gives us a clue that the trill has to be stopped, even if there is a Nachschlag after the trill. According to what we can know, the trill does not stop only when a slur is above both the sign and the Nachschlag



Trill with stop - the clue is that there is no slur IS NOT THE SAME Trill continuing into the nachschlag.

The autograph tells us that there is no slur, so that the trill should actually be stopped for both reasons: because it means that and because Bach creates an environment in which it is very advantageous to do so. The difficulty is that the trill should sound in an effortless way. Also it should be of a drawing-singing character as if there was nothing else to play. We watch then two things: does stop the trill, and how is it coordinated with the other one, how is it played. Artist



A at 2.09

it takes the upper note of the trill before time and begins the trill on the main note. Stops the trill.

B at 2.02

does not stop the trill, plays with a longer upper note (appui) coordinates both in the same way

C at 2.11

stops, singing character, begins on the upper note on beat. coordinates differently (the other trill does not stop)

not stop)

17 Ch, „An Wasserflüssen Babylon”

A comparison between the Goldberg Variations and the spot in the choral is delighting. In both cases is a shorter trill required. So as to stop the trill before the other part moves, it must be really short.

Goldbg 16 (OSt) ↓

Case three — BWV 641 Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein...

Compound ornament: accent and mordent in measure 3

OBü, „Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein” (autogr)

OBü, „Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten” (autogr)

Artist

- A at 0.36 the mordent is ignored, only appoggiatura played
- B at 0.27 respects the meaning but the rhythm proportion not enough clear
- C at 0.29 good but the appoggiatura not is not enough long, too fast

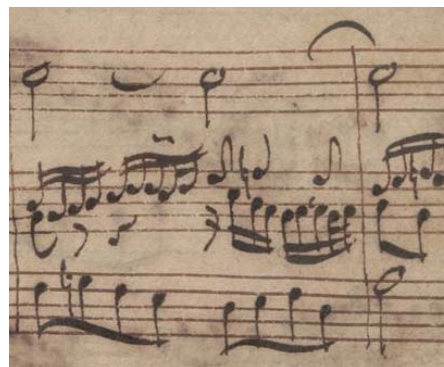


The compound ornament of turn and trill is a very good hint for the tempo — it has minimum 8 notes (4 beats) and the beats ought to stop too before the nachschlag:

Case four — BWV 662 Allein Gott in der Höh...

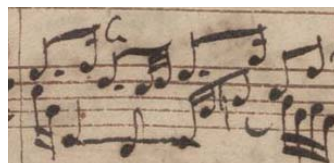
Ornament: trill versus accent if it is not doable (bar 15)

„Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr'” (autogr)



Because of the nature of the accent (not too short and weighty), the rhythmical realization of the time proportion between appoggiatura and main note is more difficult than that with the 2-beat trill. Thus, it is a better tempo indicator.

An even stronger tempo hint in bar 9 is also a compound ornament as in case four:



Artist

- A at 1.57 not very clear, but articulated, waery, fast no PDA
- B at 2.01 no PDA at all, so it speeds up the tempo or the playing clarity is diminished
- C at 2.03 excellent clarity but no PDA, so the breathing is missing (clarity in rhetoric not reached)

Case five BWV 994 — Applicatio

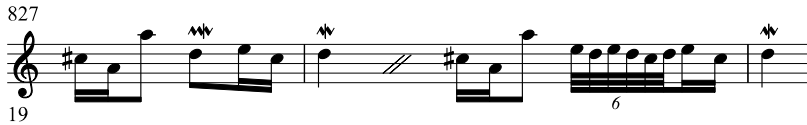
Compound Ornament: Trill and mordent in measure 2 (incorrectly usage is: trill and nachschlag)

The trill + mordent combination has at least 3 beats (6 notes) and thus becomes a tempo-indicator. In need, one can go without PDA as well, but one must think about whether a need is really there:

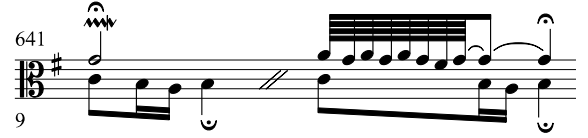
Part a, Sar (OSt, autogr)



Part a, Scherzo (OSt)



OBü, „Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein” (autogr)



ClBü (1720), Applicatio (autogr)



17 Ch, „Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr' ” (autogr)



OBü, „O Mensch, beweine dein Sünde groß” (autogr)



Artist

A at 0.05 and 0.19 The beginning of the ornament is too fast so that the speeding up cannot happen between the beats

B at 0.09 and 0.25 singing character is better, and the tempo is slower for that reason (no seeding, though)

C at 0.03 and 0.013 tempo is fast, no speeding up, but clear beats, interesting that speeding is done at 0.22 and 0.27 (and at 0.34, 0.39 respectively) is recognizable when another ornament is played

Case six — BWV 676 Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr

Compound ornament, one of the few of Bach's own inventions: doppelschlag + trill + mordent

Excellent tempo indicator: it has minimum 10 notes. BACH, 1720

»DOPPELT CADENCE UND MORDANT«

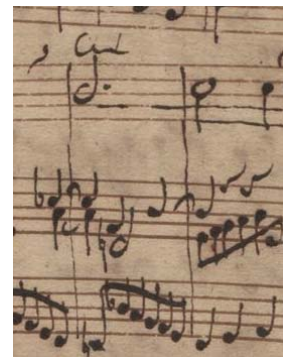


Marpurg, 1755 'Anleitung'

p. 57, Anm. 5. and Tab. V, Fig 9



17 Ch, „Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele” (autogr)



ClÜb III, „Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr' ”



Artist

A at 0.32, 1.46, 2.23 no PDA (for the sake of the tempo), no speeding up ("leading in"), only minimum number of beats
B at 0.34 and 1.54 the correct ornament, at 1.16 trill+mordent instead of turn+trill+mordent. 12 notes, leading in: OK
C at 0.38 PDA is recognizable, "leading in" is there: but no mordent at the end (he could have that with that tempo).

Case seven — BWV 769 Vom Himmel Hoch da komm ich her

Ornament: melodic trill with nachschlag in bar 29 - this is a trill which is not allowed to stop (no PDA)

„Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her”, VergKan (autogr)

769



Bach writes these

17 Ch, „Allein Gott in der Höh' sei Ehr' ”

662

32

662



17 Ch, „Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele (autogr)

654

89

654



The difficulty is simply the character, as the trill cannot be played too fast because of its melodic nature and though, it has to have the minimum tone numbers (8), that is:

Clüb III, „Vater unser im Himmelreich” (OSt)

682

[1.] [2.]

Vom Himmel hoch

Artist — A at 2.33, not bad, plays as the autograph renders the augmentation

canon: The edition instructs trill with PDA, the autograph with melodic trill with nachschlag (the melodic trill is confluent and does not stop) Leading in is good.
B at 3. 17 excellent, has a leading in, slows to the nachschlag in the melodic line
C at 6.38 mechanic: no leading in, no melodic character, no slowing down with the nachschlag.

