

Ornamentation in Recent Recordings of J.S. Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas for Violin

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The performance of baroque music changed enormously over the course of the twentieth century. Its history is well documented on sound recordings, and parallels the development of the so-called early music movement that has more recently been referred to as historically informed performance or HIP. Whether or not this style of performing has actual historical verisimilitude is not a concern here. What matters for the current investigation is the fact that, throughout this time, musicians dedicated to playing baroque music according to their understanding of historical sources have established many stylistic conventions that are now associated with HIP. These may resemble eighteenth-century performance practices because they are based on descriptions found in contemporary music treatises and instrumental tutors, and take advantage of the technical and physical characteristics of period instruments. In any case, the resulting sonic characteristics are recognizably distinctive. Many modern publications tally these stylistic conventions and provide information on the constituents of what is currently believed to potentially emulate historical techniques and means of expression.¹ An interesting facet of this literature is how the emphasis of discussion has changed over time. In the earlier twentieth century, publications dedicated most space to ornamentation, collating various historical ornamentation tables and score examples, and debating the nature and execution of grace notes, such as trills and appoggiaturas.² The performance of dotted rhythms also received considerable attention, especially in the 1960s and '70s.³ However, since the 1980s or so, publications placed more emphasis on the importance of rhetoric and creating a “speaking” quality, on rhythmic projection and flexibility, articulation, metric stresses and accentual patterns. More recently, the topic of ornamentation has been taken up again in relation to improvisation and melodic embellishment, including that of continuo parts.⁴

While all this was happening in certain musical circles of increasing influence, many musicians and conservatoires remained steadfast in practicing a “living tradition.” They saw no need for a re-creation of past performing conventions because they maintained that past composers and master performers have handed down the way pieces should be played through

¹ Colin Lawson & Robin Stowell, *Historical Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Frederick Neumann, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York, Schirmer, 1993); George Houle, *Meter and Music, 1600-1800* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); John Butt, *Bach Interpretation: Articulation Marks in Primary Sources* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and many others.

² The best known are Arnold Dolmetsch, *The Interpretation of the Music of the 17th & 18th Centuries* (London: Novello, 1949/1915 [R1969]); Robert Donington, *The Interpretation of Early Music* (London: Faber, 1963 [2nd edn.: 1965; rev.1974, reprinted with corrections 1975, 1977, rev. 1989, R1990]); Putnam Aldrich, *Ornamentation in Bach's Organ Works* (New York: Coleman-Ross, 1950); Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

³ See, for instance, Frederick Neumann, *Essays in Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982), which is a collection of his papers on the topic first published in the mid-1960s. One of the last overviews of the topic is by Stephen Hefling, *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1993).

⁴ For instance, the work of lute player Paula Chateaufauf and the Division Lobby or Christopher Suckling's PhD (in preparation), which explores ornamentation in continuo cello parts (Guildhall and City University London).

their pupils and disciples from one generation to the next. As the HIP project gained strength and credential, and especially since sound recordings have shown how radically performing styles have changed over time, the claim of the “mainstream” to be representing a “living tradition” became seriously challenged. This can clearly be seen by merely looking at the discography of Bach's six pieces for solo violin. The very first recording on a period instrument occurred only in 1976 (Luca), and there is only one other such version before the mid-1990s (Kuijken in 1982), while mainstream (MS) violinists continued to record the pieces throughout the 1980s. Then, during the second half of the 1990s, it seems that HIP violinists took over with hardly any MS violinist recording the pieces until the middle of the first decade of the new millennium (cf. Discography for detail). Since about 2005, it seems that non-specialist violinists have begun to reclaim these seminal works and make them part of their repertoire, as can be seen from the growing number of recent releases by performers not associated with HIP. For instance, Julia Fischer, Gidon Kremer, Christian Tetzlaff, Richard Tognetti, Rachel Barton Pine, Lara St John, Victoria Mullova, Isabelle Faust and Sergej Khachatryan.

Commentators on the history of twentieth-century performing traditions have noted a mutual influence or interaction of MS and HIP.⁵ At times, this alleged convergence of styles is evaluated as a sign of increasing homogeneity of practice. However, there are hardly any systematic examinations of recent recorded performances. Compared to the growing literature on early recordings and artists, there is very little hard evidence regarding the characteristics of contemporary performance practice, especially in orchestral and ensemble music but also in relation to Bach's compositions.⁶ In this paper, I intend to put the contemporary performer in the limelight and examine the current situation, at least as far as performances of Bach's works for solo violin go. I am not searching for the ultimate HIP style, whether prescriptive or descriptive, nor do I wish to compare modern violinists to old ones in an attempt to deliberate whether violinists recording early in the twentieth century had a more unique sound or playing than those making records now. My purpose is to study contemporary practice with a view to evaluating the level of individuality as opposed to homogeneity in approaches to and interpretations of these classic pieces.

Although the interaction of MS and HIP styles may manifest in a variety of performance measures, I focus here exclusively on ornamentation and embellishment. Since this is linked closely to individual creativity and spontaneity, this aspect of an interpretation will surely tap into the level of impersonal homogeneity or subjective diversity that may be characteristic of contemporary trends. I studied more than thirty recordings prepared and issued between 1976 and 2010; approximately twenty by non-specialists and ten by period violinists.⁷ The age of the violinists varied considerably, the oldest (Oscar Schumsky) was

⁵ Lawson & Stowell (above, n. 1) also noted the application of “period principles ... to mainstream situations” in their book *Historical Performance*, 160, whereas Eitan Ornoy demonstrated “clear similarities” between the styles of playing in his paper, “Between Theory and Practice: Comparative Study of Early Music Performances,” *Early Music*, 34/2 (2006): 233-47 (citation p. 243). This trend began when Harnoncourt and other HIP specialists began conducting large symphonic orchestras in the early 1980s, demonstrating that the HIP style was transferable to modern instruments (see Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice, 1945-1975: A Comprehensive Review of Sound Recordings and Literature* [Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003]).

⁶ For instance, Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Styles: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Robert Philip, *Performing in the Age of Recording* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2003); Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2000); Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London: CHARM, 2009).

⁷ The number is approximate because not all of the studied recordings are complete sets of all six Solos (see Discography), and only a selection of them will be commented on in detail.

born in 1917 and the youngest (Alina Ibragimova) in 1985. It is important to take this into consideration when seeking performing trends. Researchers have pointed out that performers tend to form their interpretative styles early in their career, and only rarely change their approach to pieces in a radical way.⁸ If true, the longer lives and recording careers of twentieth-century musicians would contribute to the concurrent availability of diverse generational trends, making the assumption of uniformity somewhat counter-intuitive. On the other hand, possible diversity may be nothing more than generational differences. The issue therefore is the trend. Are older musicians more subjective in their style of playing than younger ones? Has the youngest generation turned the tide and, on the wings of postmodern plurality, embraced greater flexibility and subjectivity than was typical for the previous generation who reached maturity during the 1950s to '80s? I hope this paper will provide some answers to these questions.

In my earlier work, I argued that ornamentation, together with the use of period instruments, was less important in establishing the style of a performance than rhythmic projection and articulation.⁹ I came to this conclusion in relation to performances from the 1950s to '70s and, to that extent, I still stand by my opinion. However, in the examination of recordings made since, ornamentation turned out to be one of the most interesting aspects of study; it has emerged as a crucial indicator of how far the HIP movement had developed by the beginning of the new millennium. The choice of apparatus or specializing in baroque repertoire may not be adequate criteria for categorizing violinists in stylistic camps. This was certainly true for recordings of the Bach repertoire up to the 1980s. The analysis now indicates that several other aspects of a performance may get mixed or often even converge (e.g. the use of accents and metrical stresses; dynamics and bowing; tempo and rhythmic rubato), making the distinguishing of MS and HIP styles of articulation and phrasing a complex task. In this situation, ornamentation becomes crucial in contributing to a dividing line. To be precise, it is the level and kind of ornamentation and, significantly, the way it is delivered that make the difference. Ornamentation therefore seems the most obvious signifier of *advanced* HIP style. It is in fact a little inaccurate to label it simply ornamentation, as this word refers primarily to trills, appoggiaturas and various other types of short figures contemporary sources indicated (or not) by signs. Although pleasing and certainly in line with historical practice to add such decorations at cadence points, on accented notes and at other suitable moments, their occasional use does not make a huge difference to the overall effect of a performance. In contrast, when smaller note values are played with quasi improvisatory freedom, when such smaller notes are added as melodic embellishments to smooth out melodic lines, to fill or emphasize larger leaps and dissonances, to add energy or weight to structurally important notes, or to vary oft-repeated melodic turns, then the music gains additional stylistic affiliation and character because it sounds freer, more gestural, affect-centered, impulsive, possibly improvised—all desirable characteristics as theorized in eighteenth-century treatises. The richer such detail is and the more spontaneous sounding its delivery, the more it appears to match eighteenth-century performance aesthetics as we understand them today.

As a way of gaining an overview of practice, I assigned ratings (1 [a little] to 10 [a lot]) to each recording studied, along three scales: frequency of added graces; extent of added embellishments; and level of improvisational delivery. It is clear from the scores in Table 1

⁸ See, for instance, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, "Recordings and Histories of Performance Style." In *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson & John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 246-62.

⁹ Fabian (above, n. 5), *Bach Performance Practice*. The repertoire discussed in the book does not include the solo violin works but is limited to recordings of the two Passions, the six Brandenburg Concertos and the Goldberg Variations.

that apart from Luca only two other HIP violinists, Huggett and Podger, go reasonably far in this regard in the twentieth century. Since the mid-2000s, non-specialist violinists have been leading the way, with Isabelle Faust and Viktoria Mullova's very recent recordings taking the lead. But let us not rush ahead and, instead, proceed in a systematic manner.

Table 1 Summary of subjectively-rated level of ornamentation (1 = a little; 10 = a lot), based on repeated comparative listening. Names of violinists known to be specialist period players are marked by italics. The recordings are listed in order of age of performer

Performer; Recording date	Added Graces	Added Embellishments	Improvisational delivery
Shumsky 1983	1		1
Ricci 1981†			1
<i>Schroeder</i> 1985	5		3
Poulet 1996	1		2
<i>Luca</i> 1977	7	5	7
<i>Kuijken</i> 1982	3		2
<i>Kuijken</i> 2001	3	1	2
Perlman 1986			
<i>Van Dael</i> 1996	4	2	9
Kremer 1980			1
Kremer 2005			1
<i>Wallfisch</i> 1997	2	1	6
<i>Holloway</i> 2004	2		8
<i>Huggett</i> 1995	4	7	9
Mintz 1984			
Lev 2001†			1
Mullova 1987*			
Mullova 2008	8	8	9
Zehetmair 1983			8
<i>Brooks</i> 2001	1		7
Tognetti 2005	8	7	6
Tetzlaff 1994	4		5
Tetzlaff 2005	4	1	6
Schmid 2000	1	1	8
<i>Podger</i> 1998	7	8	8
Faust 2010†	9	8	9
Barton Pine 1999	3		2
Barton Pine 2004†	2		3
Barton Pine 2007	1		5
Ehnes 1999			
Hahn 1997†			
Gringolts 2001†	8	9	8
Fischer 2005			1
Khachatryan 2010			1
Ibragimova 2008			8

* In 1987, Mullova only recorded the B minor partita.

† Only three or fewer works recorded by these violinists. For detail, refer to Discography

Problems and Theories

The most difficult problem of ornamentation and improvisation in baroque music concerns the decision not so much *how* but *when* to do it.¹⁰ There are countless charts providing solutions to symbols of graces and many examples of figurative embellishments¹¹—but in the end, all sources, modern and historical alike, reiterate that it is a matter of good taste to know when and how much is appropriate. What's more, it is obvious that the sensibility of this infamous *bon goût* changes with the passing of generations. Take Tosi (1653-1732), for instance. Writing as he does at the time of Farinelli (1705-82) and other popular singers admired for their ability to lavish *passagi* and *roulades* on simply sketched melodies, he decries them as “modernists” who are lacking in true taste, scorning them for “their offences against the true art of singing.”¹² At the same time, Quantz (1697-1773), a contemporary of Farinelli, is enthusiastic in his praising from the 1720s-'30s when, in his view, the art of singing reached its greatest height.¹³ But reading Tosi and Quantz further, one encounters statements from the former: “whoever cannot vary and thereby improve what he has sung before is no great luminary”¹⁴; and from the latter: “all-too-rich diminutions will deprive the melody of its capacity to ‘move the heart.’”¹⁵ So how do we know what is “all-too-rich” and what may be an “improvement” on what already has been sung?

Neumann provides an open-ended basic framework when he distinguishes between first- and second-degree ornamentation:

As a rule of thumb ... an adagio is skeletal if it contains no, or only very few, notes smaller than eighths; it has first-degree diminutions if it contains many sixteenth notes; it has second-degree diminutions if it contains a wealth of thirty-second notes or smaller values. The skeletal types were always in need of embellishment; the first-degree types may fulfill stylistic requirements in the lower range ... further ornamental additions are optional and often desirable on repeats; the second-degree designs were in no need of further enrichment but on repeat could be somewhat varied.¹⁶

¹⁰ Basic and detailed information on ornamentation practices, including the differences between national styles are readily and abundantly available in modern publications (see note 2). Therefore, I restrict discussion to issues that are relevant to my project at hand.

¹¹ In my discussion, I aim to distinguish between the French practice of *agrément*s and the Italian melodic embellishment. The former comprises short grace notes either notated in small font or indicated by symbols, such as trills, mordents, appoggiaturas, slides and turns. Melodic embellishments are basically diminutions or divisions where written notes are broken up into smaller denominations, providing figuration on the melody and harmony. To confuse matters further, Bach often uses a combination of signs and normal font in his notation practices, although he often omits the sign itself while still notating out a part of it. A common example is a long note followed by two short notes in a suffix melodic shape. Even without the trill sign on the long note, the two short notes may in effect be the written-out ending to a trill. Similarly, appoggiaturas often are written out, masking the context and erroneously inviting added appoggiaturas. Examples will be shown later on. Literature on ornamentation in Bach's music is vast. For a comprehensive review of such specialized literature see Fabian, *Bach Performance Practice* (above, n. 5), chapter 5.

¹² Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de cantori antichi sopra il canto figurato* (1723), cited in Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 521.

¹³ Johann-Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute [Versuch]*, trans. E.R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer, 1975/1752), chapter 18, par. 58.

¹⁴ Cited in Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 521

¹⁵ Neumann, *ibid.*, 538, citing Quantz, *Versuch*, chapter 13, par. 9.

¹⁶ Neumann, *ibid.*, 529.

Ornamentation in Bach's music is even more complicated as he was in the habit of notating out diminutions, even graces that others indicated with symbols (see note 12). Butt considers this "writing everything out" practice of Bach a potentially key reason for the lasting appeal and value of his music.¹⁷ Bach was chastised for it in his own time by Scheibe and defended by Birnbaum in a public debate that seems to rehearse the familiar problem of taste, the composer's "honor" and the performer's "prerogative" that are voiced also in other historical sources.¹⁸ Scheibe (1737) reproached Bach for writing out all the melodic embellishments (figures or divisions) and for not leaving space for the performer's improvisation: "Every ornament, every little grace, and everything that one thinks of as belonging to the method of playing, he expresses completely in notes."¹⁹ In defense, Birnbaum observed that it was a fortunate situation when a score where embellishments are added by the composer was available, for he knows best "where it might serve as a true ornament and particular emphasis of the main melody." Birnbaum considered it "a necessary measure of prudence on the part of the composer" to write out "every ornament ... that belongs to the method of playing." He asserted that improvised embellishment "can please the ear only if it is applied in the right places" but "offend[s] the ear and spoil[s] the principal melody if the performer employs it at the wrong spot." To avoid attributing errors of melody and harmony to the composer, Birnbaum posited the right of "every composer ... to ... [prescribe] a correct method according to his intentions, and thus to watch over the preservation of his own honor."²⁰

The mid-twentieth-century Bach scholar and conductor Arthur Mendel pointed out the crucial lesson in this debate, which turns the attention away from petty point scoring and the matter of taste toward the fundamental issue in twentieth-century Bach performance and playing baroque music in general. He suggested that Scheibe's objection was perhaps due to the difficult rhythmic patterns that arise from written-out turns and other ornaments:

Because of the essentially improvisatory character of trills, appoggiaturas, and other ornaments, the attempt to write out just what metric value each tone is to have can never be successful. I think this may be partly what Scheibe meant in criticizing Bach for writing out so much.... The attempt to pin down the rhythm of living music at all in the crudely simple arithmetical ratios of notated meter is [hardly] ... possible.²¹

In their concern for the text, the notated score of a composition, and its technically correct rendering, modern musicians are easily misled by the visual representation of music. Notes of equal significance in print will likely be played with equal importance. Recognizing the ornamental nature of Bach's notation practices is a first step toward rendering rhythmic

¹⁷ Butt (above, n. 1), *Bach Interpretation*, 207-208.

¹⁸ For instance, compare Birnbaum's text (published in *The New Bach Reader*; see notes 20-21) with Bononcini's complaint in the Preface to the publication of his *Sonate da chiesa a due violini* (Venice, 1672): "because today there are some [performers] so little informed of that art of tasteful embellishment that in singing or in playing they want with their disorderly and indiscreet extravagances of bow or of voice to change, indeed to deform, the compositions (even though these were written with every care and conscientiousness) in such a manner that the authors have no choice but to beg those singers and players to content themselves with rendering the works plainly and purely as they are written" (cited in Neumann [above, n. 3], *Performance Practices*, 570). Couperin (Preface to *Pièces de clavecine*, Book 3) is also on record demanding performers to be faithful to his notation whereas Saint Lambert, like Scheibe, defended the rights of the performers "to add new ornaments [and] leave out those that are prescribed [or] to substitute others in their stead" (*Principe de clavecina* [1702], 57, cited in Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 514).

¹⁹ Christoph Wolff (ed.), *The New Bach Reader – A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents* (New York-London: Norton, 1998), 338.

²⁰ Wolff (ed.), *Ibid.*, 346-47

²¹ Arthur Mendel (ed.), *Bach: St John Passion – Vocal Score* (New York: Schirmer, 1951), xxii.

patterns and melodic groups with some freedom. For instance, the opening bars of the G minor Adagio would likely have been notated as in Figure 1 by most other baroque composers, especially those of the Italian tradition.²² Instead, Bach notated a possible embellished performance version. Playing the notes rhythmically accurately is therefore a mistake, as spontaneous ornamentation is never rhythmically stable or exact. As Lester points out, “Thinking of the *Adagio* as a prelude built upon standard thoroughbass patterns can [help] the melody [be] heard not so much as a series of fixed gestures, but rather as a continuously unfolding rhapsodic improvisation over a supporting bass.”²³ Tracing the relative flexibility (or lack thereof) in performing the opening bars of the G minor Adagio in the course of the recorded history of the Solos thus provides an excellent window into the trajectory of Bach performance practice since the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴ Among the recordings under examination here, Huggett, Wallfisch, Barton Pine, Ibragimova, Mullova and others provide variedly flexible interpretations that create the impression of free ornamentation, while Fischer, Khachatryan, Ehnes, Mintz, Perlman and others provide much more literal and measured readings.



Figure 1 Bars 1-2 of Bach’s G minor Adagio for solo violin (BWV 1001). The top system is a hypothetical version that emulates the much sparser notation habits of Italian composers such as Corelli, who tended to prescribe only basic melodic pitches that the musicians were supposed to embellish during performance. The lower stave is Bach’s notation, reflecting one possible way of ornamenting the passage. His original slurs indicate ornamental groups to be performed as one musical gesture.

While he wrote out many ornamental figures, including appoggiaturas and terminations of trills, Bach indicated graces such as trills, slides, and mordents relatively sparingly. In addition, surviving successive versions of pieces, for instance the Inventions and Sinfonias, show different degrees of ornamentation. This situation does not provide easy answers, leaving the performer “a fairly broad range of legitimately possible levels of ornamentation, extending from a desirable minimum to a saturation point.”²⁵ And to leave things even more open to subjectivity, Neumann regards Telemann’s published embellishments to his *Sonate metodiche for violin or flute* (Hamburg, 1728) “helpful ... to late Baroque diminution practice because they strike a *happy balance* between austerity and luxuriance.”²⁶ As always, performances are judged ultimately for their emotional affect and, in this regard, Quantz’s reasons for his admiration of “Italian singing style [and] lavishly elaborated Italian arias” are perhaps the most useful guide. His praise is earned because they are profound and artful; they

²² Noted also by Jaap Schroeder in “Jaap Schroeder Discusses Bach’s works for Unaccompanied Violin,” *Journal of the Violin Society of America* iii/3 (Summer 1977): 7-32; and David Ledbetter, *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the Solo Works* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 95ff.

²³ Joel Lester, *Bach’s Works for Solo Violin: Style, Structure, Performance* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38.

²⁴ For trends in earlier recordings, see my “Towards a Performance History of Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin: Preliminary Investigations.” In *Essays in Honor of László Somfai*, ed. László Vikárius and Vera Lampert, 87-108. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005).

²⁵ Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 528.

²⁶ Neumann, *ibid.*, 536, italics added

move and astonish, engage the musical intelligence, are rich in taste and rendition, and transport the listener pleasantly from one emotion to another.²⁷

In summary, both the performer and the analyst are confronted with a multitude of musical puzzles and possibilities with no hard and fast rules, but only “sufficiently developed taste,” conditioned expectations, and subjective boundaries regarding what feels appropriate as aids and foundations for aesthetic judgment. Importantly, I hope to have demonstrated that none of this ought to be a moral issue, not even in the music of the “great” Johann Sebastian Bach. Performance is not about absolutes but about conviction and affect, nowhere more so than in relation to ornamentation and embellishment.

The Recordings

Given the trajectory of twentieth-century baroque performance practice, it is perhaps not that surprising that we have reached a stage where quite a few violinists dare ornament several movements quite lavishly, especially in recordings from most recent times. It is true that this happens less in the slow movements that already have been embellished by Bach but more in the lighter dance movements, and more in terms of adding short graces and altering articulation, rhythm or dynamics. There are also those who obviously use vibrato as a device to ornament emotionally charged or otherwise special notes (most notably Huggett and Zehetmair, but Wallfisch, van Dael, and Podger as well). However, there are also significant instances of sumptuous embellishments, even complete rewriting of bars and passages, and even in movements apparently already embellished by Bach. Let us look at the broad picture first, and then engage in the analysis of some of the details.

Table 2 The most embellished movements, listed in order of amount of ornamentation. The named violinists add graces and embellishments extensively, decreasingly so as moving downward in each column. Others not listed in the table may also add a few graces here and there.

EM Gavotte	EM Minuet	EM Loure	Bm Sarabande	Am Andante	Dm Sarabanda
Huggett	Faust	Gringolts	Gringolts	Gringolts	Faust
Podger	Mullova	Faust	Mullova	Luca	(Luca)
Gringolts	Gringolts	Mullova	Luca	Tognetti	
Mullova	Podger	Luca	(Tognetti)		
Faust	Wallfisch	Van Dael			
(Barton Pine)	(Tognetti)	Wallfisch			
(Van Dael)		Tognetti			

Table 2 lists the most ornamented movements and the violinists involved in order of the amount of ornamentation and/or embellishment observed. It is immediately apparent that the *E Major Partita* features prominently and that none of the opening adagios of the sonatas is represented. On the other hand, a number of violinists embellish further the two Sarabande movements and the A minor Andante. It is also noteworthy that the list of names includes fewer baroque violinists than non-specialists—only Luca, Huggett, van Dael, Wallfisch and Podger represent period instrumentalists, and only Luca’s name can be seen in the columns of the slow movements. As I will show shortly, the dance movements tend to be embroidered largely with various graces. Finding period violinists in these columns is not surprising at all. But even in this regard, their names pop up inconsistently in one or the other movement only,

²⁷ Quantz (above, n. 13), *Versuch*, chap. 18, par. 76, as paraphrased from Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 536.

whereas the names of the same non-specialists keep appearing in most columns (Gringolts, Mullova, Faust and also Tognetti). They add ornaments more habitually across all movements, reaching bountiful proportions in the ones listed in Table 2. What we cannot see from the table is the fact that the solutions often differ completely one from one other in terms of type, place and frequency of added ornaments. I would like to turn now to this fascinating detail. In the interest of space, I will discuss only the three movements from the *E Major Partita* and the two Sarabandes.

The Gavotte en Rondeau provides the most daring departures from the score involving the rondo theme. Given its recurrence some five times, this should not be too surprising—except that it never happened until Huggett's recording in 1995. She was the first to substitute several bars of the last statement of the tune with virtuoso flourishes. Podger devised her own variants a few years later and, since then, several violinists seem willing to enter into similar playful improvisations involving the theme. Figure 2 provides transcriptions of major divergences, usually but not exclusively during the last statement of the theme. A typical feature of most versions is the use of triplets and scales. Faust innovated by playing the final rondo statement *twice*: first softly with many light decorative notes as transcribed, and then repeating it loud and straight as in Bach's score. When I deem the repeating of the theme innovative, I bear in mind the fact that Holloway also performed the final rondo statement twice in his earlier recording and, indeed, with a similar approach to dynamics. However, he did not add anything. Importantly, I heard Faust's recording before I obtained Holloway's, so for me it was a real novelty in her performance. Whether in reaction to Huggett's and Podger's already available recordings or entirely on his own initiative, Gringolts altered the penultimate rondo statement (bb. 65-71), using triplet motions similar to how Podger and later Mullova and Faust decorated the final statement.

The figure displays a musical score for the E Major Gavotte en Rondeau, comparing the original theme with six major variants. The score is organized into two systems of staves. The first system includes the Original, Huggett (b. 93-100), Podger (b. 93-100), Gringolts (b. 64-72), Mullova (b. 93-100), and Faust (b. 93-100). The second system includes the Original, Huggett, Podger, Gringolts, Mullova, and Faust. The original theme is marked with a trill (tr) and a dynamic of *sempre p*. The variants show various interpretations: Huggett uses a dynamic of *mp* and features a triplet of eighth notes; Podger uses a dynamic of *ff* and features a triplet of eighth notes; Gringolts is marked *Presto* and *ff*, featuring a triplet of eighth notes; Mullova features a trill (tr) and a dynamic of *rit.*; Faust features a trill (tr) and a dynamic of *rit.*. The second system includes additional markings such as *rall*, *accel*, *p*, *mf*, and *rall r - i - t*.

Figure 2 E Major Gavotte en Rondeau: Theme and its major variants

Apart from these transcribed alternatives (including the slight changes to rhythm and articulation by Faust during the penultimate statement shown in the *ossia* system in Figure 2), there are also minor variants in earlier appearances of the theme in several recordings. Mullova varied one bar in the statement after the first episode (b. 23.) where, instead of a double stop on the downbeat, she played the two notes as consecutive A-C# eighth-notes. A typical addition (a short trill or a quick turn) observed in several other recordings may occur in b. 5 (or equivalent moments of the theme, e.g. bb. 21, 45, etc.). Examples can be heard in

van Dael's and Barton Pine's recordings. Barton Pine (1999) also added a scale to fill the gap between the downbeat B eighth-note and F# sixteenth in b. 43.

Ornamentation in the E Major Minuets involved adding trills and small diminutions (Figure 3), as well as changing the rhythm, articulation and dynamics. In the Minuets, variations occurred in a number of bars, commonly in bb. 2, 8, and 22, but many more in individual versions. A typical figuration, used by Podger, Mullova and Faust, was an added passing note that created anapest (or less often dactyl) patterns. Mullova added turn-like diminutions as well. Only Faust altered texture by playing double stops melodically. Minuet 1 was more commonly varied than its "trio," although Tognetti added many *prefixes* and Wallfisch quite a lot of short trills in Menuet II. Podger and Wallfisch played the eighth-notes strongly lilted, almost dotted, while adding a few trills and appoggiaturas.²⁸

According to Neumann, a short appoggiatura works the best in b. 12 of Menuet I, while unaccented ones are more appropriate in bb.2 and 10 of Menuet II.²⁹ Most violinists concur with Neumann regarding b. 12 of Menuet I, although some play it long (e.g. Faust during repeat and first play of *da capo*). However, the fact that the appoggiaturas in Menuet II are of the same pitch as the immediately preceding note tends to foster an accent on them. Those who play in a softer, smooth style—which is the majority—downplay the appoggiatura and melt it into the melodic line whether they play it short or longer (e.g. Barton Pine, Zehetmair, Mintz, Podger). Those playing with more pulse and less legato tend to accent them with shorter duration (e.g. Kremer, Kuijken 1983, van Dael, Wallfisch, Mullova).

²⁸ Others also play Menuet I in a lilted manner, but adding very few if any trills or other grace notes (e.g. van Dael, Holloway).

²⁹ Frederick Neumann, "Some Performance Problems in Bach's Unaccompanied Violin and Cello Works." In *Eighteenth-Century Music in Theory and Practice: Essays in Honor of Alfred Mann*, ed. Mary Parker, 19-48, citation: 28. Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1994.

Tognetti, b. 8 (first time and in repeat) Podger, b. 8 (first time and in repeat)

Mullova, during repeat

Faust, same bars during repeat and *da capo*

Figure 3 E Major Minuet I. Summary examples of alterations

It is interesting to note different approaches to the return of Menuet I. Repeating during the *da capo* of Menuet I is rare, although Stowell considers it a must.³⁰ Tognetti, Podger and Faust are the only violinists delivering all repeats. Kuijken in 1983 and Gähler repeat the first half, Huggett the second half. Mintz, Perlman, Edinger, Ehnes, van Dael and Kuijken in 2001 omit the *da capo* all together. In Tognetti’s performance, each repeat in Menuet I provides slightly different articulation and expressive flexibilities (accents, stresses), but the *da capo* is less decorated than the first version. Mullova plays the *da capo* without ornamentation or repeat. Podger decorates sparingly during Menuet I, but, in the *da capo*, she adds not just trills and mordents but passing notes and linking figures as well. For instance, during the *da capo* she adds the passing note originally used only in bars 2 and 28 (resulting in an F#-E-D anapest figure on beat 2) in bb. 10, 20, 22, and 25 as well, its rhythmic shape dependent on melodic contour and harmonic implications (anapest in bb. 10, 22, 28; dactyl in bb. 20, 25). Faust, like Tognetti, varies her reading of each section with each repeat and even creates alternative ornamentation to what she did during the first Menuet I. Some of her figurations recall patterns of other bars, creating a playful effect that teases the listeners’ aural memory. In short, the variety and inventiveness of ornamentation is impressive; even the location (bars) of ornaments varies to great extent. There seems to be no particular model that performers might

³⁰ Robin Stowell, *The Early Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 122.

imitate. Rather, their delivery implies an internalized vocabulary upon which they draw freely and spontaneously.

Figure 4 Transcription of seven different ornamentations of the Loure (bars 1-3 during repeat). The colors indicate similar solutions

The Loure was also ornamented mostly by trills, appoggiaturas and mordents, but Mullova, Faust, and especially Gringolts added fast and light melodic flourishes as well. Others, like Luca, ornamented the movement less abundantly but with a mixture of melodic embellishments and smaller graces. Figure 4 provides transcriptions of bars 1-3 during repeat in seven different recordings. Mullova’s up-beat flourish at the beginning of the first repeat adds well-placed energy and impetus; van Dael and Wallfisch shape theirs differently, but both also end up emphasizing the top B with van Dael masking the lower eighth-note the most, whereas Wallfisch plays the running scale very fast, almost as if sliding. Luca doesn’t play such a flourish at the start of the repeat but he adds a similar gesture in b. 18 (last beat, D-B). Another bar that is often embellished is the cadence at the end of the first half (Gringolts, Wallfisch). A unique feature of Gringolts’s and Faust’s versions is the highlighting of the imitation between voices in bb. 2-3, 12, and 22-23 by ornamenting the lower voice as well as the top one, and with similar patterns. This polyphonic detail is rarely made audible in other versions (whether ornamented or not). Most violinists tend to focus on the top melody.

Looking at the shape of some of the graces, three observations are worth noting: (1) trills with termination, (2) double appoggiaturas, and (3) choice between short trill and mordent. As the transcriptions in Figure 4 show, violinists who tend to ornament a lot play many of the trills in the Loure with termination. This is contrary to the recommendation of Schroeder, who categorically states that “the little decorative trills are short and without termination.”³¹ Neumann, on the other hand, claims that the trills in bar 1-2 “call for a suffix” while the one in b. 12 “can easily forego one.”³² Ledbetter believes that “a turn at the end” of

³¹ Jaap Schroeder, *Bach’s Solo Violin Works: A Performer’s Guide* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), 172.

³² Neumann (above, n. 29), “Some Performance Problems,” 34.

the trill is “against [the lifted] character.”³³ All thirty-odd studied violinists play a short trill in b. 12. The majority of them play trills without suffix in bb. 1-2 as well, unlike those transcribed in Figure 4. Other exceptions are Gähler and Shumsky. Furthermore, Edinger, Kuijken in 1983, and Tognetti play a termination in b. 1 but not in b. 2, whereas Barton Pine plays one in b. 2 but not in b. 1. Mullova, Perlman, Tetzlaff in 2005, and Wallfisch play the suffix in the repeat of b. 1 only. At first impression, it seems that the slower, more legato versions (e.g. Shumsky, Gähler) are more likely to have trills with termination, but eventually the picture becomes mixed up—even HIP violinists of Schroeder's circle like van Dael and Kuijken play trills with suffix—making it difficult to identify any particular reason for the variation. Interestingly, Wallfisch does away with the trill in b. 2 altogether during repeat, and Huggett plays a long appoggiatura in b. 12, creating a descending melodic line of four eighth-notes (A-G#-F#-E). One could argue that those who play the trill(s) with suffix may have taken their cue from Bach's notation in bb. 20 and 22 (last beat), although the musical context is different.

Double appoggiaturas arise in Gringolts's version, in particular as he adds an upper appoggiatura to the trilled C dotted eighth in b. 22, and repeats the formula in the second voice in the next bar (Figure 5). This is an arguable choice, as the B sixteenth note preceding the C could be interpreted as a written-out *lower* appoggiatura to the trill, forming a smooth shape together with its written-out suffix. However, such a combination of appoggiaturas is of course possible in principle. Donington cites Quantz, Marpurg and C.P.E. Bach who provide examples for various “double appoggiaturas,” including the type introduced by Gringolts here. Donington recounts the advice of these eighteenth-century authors regarding execution but then concludes, “It is not, in any case, an ornament of much baroque importance.”³⁴ Although Faust also seems to favor an upper appoggiatura, her solution is slightly different because she changes the lower appoggiatura into an upward slide, filling in the steps to the upper neighbor of the trilled C, and basically creating a compound ornament consisting of a turn and a trill (cf. Figure 5).

Figure 5 Double appoggiaturas in Gringolts's and Faust's recordings of the Loure (bb. 22-23)

³³ Ledbetter (above, n. 22), *Unaccompanied Bach*, 171.

³⁴ Donington (above, n. 2), *Interpretation of Early Music*, 216.

Few violinists realize the appropriateness of adding mordents in the Loure.³⁵ Yet the rising melody line in b. 7 seems to be a clear context for the French *port de voix et pincé* (known as *Accent und Mordant* by the Germans), where an unaccented mordent is appended to a rising appoggiatura.³⁶ Opting for this type of grace provides contrast with the upper appoggiaturas followed by trills in the previous bar. Faust makes the distinction systematically; van Dael ornaments only the second half of b. 7, while Gringolts seem to overburden the bar with graces, mixing trills and mordents at will (Figure 6). My verdict here may appear neat and reasonable, but experts of baroque ornamentation “rules” could object on two counts: first, that Bach prescribed mordents only for the keyboard; and second, that the mordent usually involved a half-note oscillation, which is not the case in the second half of b. 7. To the first objection, I might respond by referring to the many written-out mordents throughout Bach’s output (including the opening gesture of the E Major Preludio). Furthermore, the Bärenreiter critical edition of the lute version of the *E Major Partita* (BWV1006a) includes one mordent sign. It is placed on downbeat of b.5 of the Loure. This transcription by Bach is recommended by several authors as useful for violinists wishing to learn about ornamentation possibilities. Faust and van Dael adopt this mordent in their recording of the movement. Regarding the second objection, I concede that the whole tone relationship may have been the reason for Gringolts’s choice of a trill rather than a mordent at that point. However, his almost constant fast-flowing graces of flexible duration and shape make it slightly improbable that he has pre-planned everything in every minute detail and on the basis of scholarly opinion. In fact, his performance was difficult to transcribe because he plays the notes in a transient, non-defined way with rapidly shifting dynamics and bowing. Often, I could hear the exact pitches and shapes of his ornaments only at half the speed, making the debating of his choice of a short trill over a possible mordent a rather moot point. Therefore, this discussion was more to underscore the subjective nature of music performance, especially ornamentation.

Figure 6 The original and 3 transcription of bars 6-8 of the Loure from Bach’s E Major partita showing contrasting relationships between rising and falling appoggiaturas to trills and mordents

Finally it should also be noted that apart from differences in ornamentation, the recordings vary due to the diverse approach violinists take to articulation and rhythmic projection, some playing it in a more dotted, leaping manner, others more gently and legato. Wallfisch, for

³⁵ Neumann claims that “Germans continued ... the complementary pairing of main-note trill and its inversion, the multiple mordent. They were considered the same ornament, the *tremulus*: the trill *ascendens*, the mordent *descendens*. Both start and end with the main note. See Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 464-65.

³⁶ He used the French symbol for it. In his Ornamentation table drawn up for his eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, he included the sign for the *port de voix et pincé* as well.

instance, sharpens most dotted quarter-eighth note dyads, stopping the bow early during the long note and playing the short note late and very close to the next note, creating a bit of silence between the dotted note and its short pair. Keeping with this overall approach, her ornaments are delivered also more sharply, angularly, to enhance this rhythmic character and overall effect. These interpretative nuances, however, are harder to account for with words and thus remain largely unexplored here.

Turning now to an examination of the slow movements, what is most important to register is the sharp contrast between Gringolts's almost constant ornamentation and the more selective addition of melodic passing notes and occasional flourishes or compound graces in Luca's, Tognetti's, Mullova's and Faust's versions (Audio examples). Furthermore, there remains a greater sense of rhythm and basic pulse in their versions and they also manage to keep the basic melody recognizably intact.

Gringolts's embellishing of the B minor Sarabande also contains a few such metrically well defined moments (for instance b. 7), but elsewhere it tends to sound over elaborated (e.g. b. 11) due to the many smooth, sliding filler notes that grace not just leaps but stepwise motions as well ([Audio](#) of Gringolts repeating the second half of B minor Sarabande, bb. 32-32 repeat). Looking at the transcription Mullova's decorations may seem just as lavish (Figure 7). Some of her solutions do indeed resemble those of Gringolts in terms of placement and content, but not so much in terms of delivery ([Audio](#) of Mullova repeating the second half of B minor Sarabande, bb. 32-32 repeat). For instance, she also graces the E in b. 17 with an upper neighbor motion, but the two sixteenth-notes are played ornamentally (i.e. soft, light), not melodically as by Gringolts. She adds scales in bb. 26 and 28 rather than melodic outlines of harmony as Gringolts. Her linking runs in b. 32 and 10 are played before the beat, giving emphasis to the downbeat and not affecting the basic pulse. Overall, her performance remains closer to the score and thus metrically steadier with a less altered melody line. In fact, her embellishments heighten the rhythmic-melodic-harmonic character of the music whereas Gringolts's constantly flowing light flourishes seem to cover up these underlying structures.

The image shows a musical score transcription of the B minor Sarabande repeats. It consists of six staves of music. The first staff shows measures 7-12, with a triplet in measure 8 and trills in measures 7, 10, and 12. The second staff shows measures 13-18, with a trill in measure 13 and first/second endings in measure 18. The third staff shows measures 19-25, with trills in measures 19, 21, and 23. The fourth staff shows measure 26, which is a long melodic line with a trill in measure 26. The fifth staff shows measures 29-32, with trills in measures 29, 30, and 31, and first/second endings in measure 32. A piano (pp) dynamic marking is present in measure 29.

Figure 7: Transcription of Mullova’s performance of the repeats in the B minor Sarabande

Tognetti and Luca add less (Audio examples: [Tognetti](#), bb. 8 and repeat of 1-8; [Luca](#), repeat of bb. 9-32); Tognetti mostly just trills, some short (bb. 7-8, 21, 30) others with longer appoggiatura (bb. 3-4, 24). Some are added in first play only (b. 24), others in repeat only (bb. 3-4), but most are performed on both occasions. Luca plays faster and performs dotted rhythms in certain bars (first time bar, b. 4) which give energy, whereas Tognetti’s version is more “soulful.” Apart from lower appoggiaturas preceding mordents (bb. 2, 16), Luca also adds short trills (bb. 7, 10, 23) and trills with long upper appoggiaturas (bb. 4, 31). Furthermore, there are melodic neighbor notes and fillers (bb. 2, 3, 17, 23), often energized additionally through rhythmic accentuation (dotting or agogic stress, bb. 10, 30) or shaped melodically, preparing-embellishing a cadence (bb. 15-16). He also varies the accenting, articulation and rhythm during repeat compared to first play (e.g. b. 15 played with paired slurs in repeat only). Although the added decorations often fall on the downbeat, their shape, rhythm and delivery tend to function to give impetus to the second beat of the bar, which is traditionally accented in sarabands (e.g. bb. 2, 3, 10).

Except for Luca adding two graces in bars 6 and 21, Faust is the only violinist who embellishes the D minor Sarabande, although I have heard it embellished by others in live concerts.³⁷ Just like Mullova’s in the B minor Sarabande, Faust’s graces and additions are placed to highlight the meter, a melodic gesture or harmonically important moment. Apart from the transcribed first thirteen bars (Figure 8), she adds mordents in bars 16 (top G

³⁷ For instance, Barnabas Kelemen played it as an encore during a London Philharmonic concert in Festival Hall, London, 29 January 2011.

downbeat) and 17 (high B flat) and a trill in bar 19 (downbeat B natural). These are further emphasized by long appoggiaturas in bars 16, 17 (only to the prescribed trill) and 19. The last variation to the score is the arpeggiation of the two chords in bar 21. This enhances the dramatic power and sonority of the harmonies, but Faust goes an extra step: she plays the second chord (notated half notes a-D'-F'-A'-D''-F'') as a broken triad from bottom A to its octave, but instead of adding the written top D and F as well, she plays those as melodic eighth notes on the last beat, gracing the D with a mordent ([Audio](#) of Faust playing repeat of bb. 16-22). The only other performer who arpeggiates the chords in b. 21 is Luca. But unlike Faust, he does it rapidly rather than dramatically. He also adds an appoggiatura to the top F of the second chord. The only other ornament he adds in this movement is another upper appoggiatura, to highlight the dotted A quarter in b. 6.



Figure 8 Transcription of the embellished repeats of the D minor Sarabanda (bars 1-13) in Faust's performance

Conclusions

Summarizing the lessons of observing ornamentation practices in the selected recordings, two findings can be highlighted: the increasing liberty in performing these works—once regarded as monumental and untouchable—brought about a playful attitude that seems to delight in manipulating the material through added trills and slides, appoggiaturas and other graces or even changes in melodic turns, filling in gaps between notes, ornamentally highlighting gestures and, ultimately, re-writing bars and entire passages, like the final or penultimate statement of the theme in the E Major Gavotte en Rondeau or the arpeggiation of chords at the end of the Ciaccona by Holloway, or in bar 21 of the D minor Sarabanda on Luca's and Faust's recording, not to mention Gringolts's plentiful fancy diminutions in the A minor Andante and B minor Sarabande. All the graces and flourishes are delivered "gesturally," with a sense of play, abandon, improvisatory freedom, especially in the recordings of Mullova, Faust and Luca, who ornament the most, but also in all the others whose additions are transcribed in Figures 2-8. What has to be emphasized though, and this is the second most important finding, is that non-specialist violinists far outnumber HIP violinists in creating such readings of the works. Apart from Luca's groundbreaking early recording and Hugget's and Podger's versions from the later 1990s, no other baroque specialist extensively

embellishes any of the movements (Wallfisch and van Dael's Loure count as *ornamented* rather than *embellished*). At the same time, several non-specialist violinists (Gringolts, Tognetti, Mullova, Faust, and to a lesser extent Tetzlaff and Barton Pine) display a confident "ownership" of the pieces conveyed by a sense of exuberance, daring fervor and convincing personal authenticity.³⁸ However, if we now reconsider Quantz's opinion, namely that he saw a danger that all-too-rich diminutions would deprive the melody of its capacity to "move the heart," and recommended that instead of indulging too freely in diminutions, players should render a simple melody nobly, clearly, and neatly,³⁹ then our examination should perhaps conclude with the verdict that Gringolts has probably gone too far. His versions can still strike us as appealing and musical—especially if somebody has never heard the pieces before—but not quite appropriate *if* we desire to preserve the style and compositional aesthetics of Bach. His lack of rhythmic definition and pulse and constantly shifting dynamics and timbre make his embellishments sound ungrounded, restless and over-elaborate, bringing to mind the aesthetic reactions of seventeenth-century commentators who originally used the word *barocco* in a pejorative sense to denigrate an over-elaborate piece by comparing it to a misshapen pearl.

Although it is undeniable that these embellished versions represent a minority group among the thirty-odd recordings studied here, the variety and creativity of solutions found in them proves that there are violinists today who are not afraid of putting their personal stamps on Bach's works. The fact that embellished versions seem to grow in numbers as we pass through the decades provides ground for hope that performers are leaving behind the modernist "Urtext-mentality" of the 1950s to 1980s period to reclaim their prerogative to bring compositions to life rather than just let them speak for themselves.⁴⁰ While the influence of HIP is undeniable, the examination did not show this to cause homogeneity. If so much diversity could be found in relation to ornamentation, it is likely that a study of rhythmic projection, phrasing and articulation would bear further evidence of plurality and individuality—a healthy state of Bach performance at the dawn of the new millennium.

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³⁸ It should be noted that several of the listed violinists openly acknowledge the influence of HIP on their playing. Tognetti, Barton Pine and Mullova (in 2008 only) play with a baroque bow. Barton Pine is a member of the period ensemble Trio Settecento, and Mullova has also been performing and recording with period ensembles and instrumentalists. Tognetti fitted his violin with gut strings and tuned it lower for his recording of the Bach solos (see CD liner notes).

³⁹ As recalled in Neumann (above, n. 3), *Performance Practices*, 538.

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