

Expressive and Structural Ornamentation in Handel's Vocal Music: A Literature and Score-Based Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the stylistic features and functions of ornamentation in Handel's vocal arias, addressing the challenge posed by the absence of detailed notations in his works. The research focuses on the dual role of ornamentation as both decorative and structural, aiming to bridge historical scholarship with modern performance practices. The methodology involves a comprehensive literature study of historical treatises, including works by Tosi, Agricola, and Quantz, alongside a score-based analysis of selected Handel arias to identify and interpret ornamentation practices. Findings highlight the expressive and structural functions of ornaments, such as enhancing melodic connectivity, harmonic depth, and emotional expression. The study emphasizes the performer's discretion in applying ornaments, particularly in improvisatory contexts like da capo arias. This research contributes to understanding Handel's compositional intentions and offers valuable insights for historically informed performance (HIP). Future studies could explore cross-genre ornamentation, technological applications, and evolving audience perceptions of Baroque vocal embellishments.



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INTRODUCTION

The absence of notations in Handel's works, as indicated by historical sources and modern scholars, poses a considerable challenge. In contemplating a framework for the study of vocal performance, it is essential to explore three key areas. The initial focus pertains to the systematic analysis and identification of the particular ornamentation features utilized by Handel in chosen compositions. Gaining insight into these features will enhance the thorough cataloguing of ornamentation practices in Handel's compositions, illuminating the subtleties of his stylistic decisions. The second aspect pertains to connecting the theoretical understanding of ornamentation with its practical application by integrating the identified features into live performances. The third pertains to the interpretive dimension of the artistic intentions underlying Handel's application of ornamentation.

Baroque music, under the influence of composers like as Claudio Monteverdi, Antonio Vivaldi, George Frideric Handel, and Johann Sebastian Bach, added intricate melodic embellishments, altered musical notation, and established opera as a distinct musical form (Swain, 2023; Walls 2017; Ceulemans, 2010). Parker (2003) states that for more than 150 years, the Western world has held George Frideric Handel in high esteem as one of the most exceptional composers in history. His renowned oratorio, *Messiah*, has been consistently played worldwide every year since its premiere in 1741. In contrast, his operas lost popularity around fifteen years before to his death and remained mostly neglected until the twentieth century.

George Frederick Handel is credited as the pioneer of the English oratorio and is regarded as one of the most distinguished Christian composers of the Baroque era (Whytock, 2012). Handel's compositions predominantly exhibit Italian characteristics; however, they also incorporate discernible elements of the French style. Consequently, musicians should be attentive to these conventions when interpreting and performing his works (Cudworth, 1959). Handel's musical composition for *Queen Anne*, which was inspired by a libretto written by Giacomo Rossi, achieved significant acclaim, solidifying the prominence of Italian opera in England for the subsequent twenty years. Handel's initial Italian compositions were shaped by the musical atmosphere of Rome, emphasizing technical skill and a fresh perception of sensory exhilaration (Marx,

1988). Prior to 1735, the primary performers in Handel's operas were often highly skilled Italian virtuosos who possessed substantial training and expertise in the practice of embellishment (Dean, 1970). These singers did not need the composer to notate embellishments for them; in fact, they would have taken offense if he had attempted to do so. Pietro Francesco Tosi and Johann Friedrich Agricola explicitly censured vocalists and composers who resorted to premeditated notation of embellishments, including cadenzas (Tosi, Agricola, & Baird, 1995). This Italian tradition differs from that of French and German Baroque composers who methodically add embellishments (Donington, 1978).

The singer commonly employed improvisatory embellishment, whereas the harpsichordist frequently utilized the realization of figured bass. Aesthetically, Francesco Geminiani one of Handel's Italian colleagues as quoted by Donington (1974) stated that the need for embellishment is because, although melodies are pleasing to everyone, they rarely convey the highest degree of pleasure. Artistically, the intention behind such ornamentation was to infuse vitality and radiance into the melody, as well as to enhance the harmony by incorporating non-harmonic tones (Baird, 1995). Francesco Algarotti stated that constantly hearing the same thing can be unpleasant. Therefore, it is reasonable to allow singers to have some opportunities to showcase their skill, imagination, and emotions (Tosi, Galliard, & Pilkington, 2002). The level of vocal embellishment became increasingly elaborate over the course of Handel's operatic career and beyond. The increasing elaboration of vocal embellishments in Handel's operatic works and beyond can be attributed to several factors.

The first factor is related to Baroque aesthetics. During the Baroque era, which encompasses much of Handel's career, ornate and expressive ornamentation was highly valued. Ornamentation was seen as a way for singers to showcase their virtuosity and emotional expression (Timmers, & Ashley, 2007). Composers and performers alike embraced the idea of embellishing vocal lines to add individuality and flair to their interpretations (Yonan, 2018). According to Ernst (1972) Handel had a penchant for tailoring his compositions to the strengths of specific singers. As he worked with exceptionally talented and renowned vocalists, he allowed them the flexibility to embellish their parts (McMahon, 2014; Jerold, 2008). This personalized approach contributed to the increasing complexity of vocal ornamentation, as singers sought to showcase their unique abilities.

The second factor is related to competitive atmosphere of musical environment in Baroque era. Handel operated in a highly competitive musical environment, particularly in the term of opera. Handel's company, which included renowned performers such as Gioacchino Conti and Domenico Annibali, was on par with the rival Opera of the Nobility, creating a highly competitive atmosphere (Roberts, 1987). Singers were often in direct competition with each other, aiming to outshine their peers and captivate audiences. Elaborate ornamentation became a means for singers to distinguish themselves and attract attention (Kruglova, 2022). According to Menerth (1966) in Baroque era, over time, vocal performance practices evolved, influenced by changing tastes, cultural shifts, and the emergence of new musical styles. This evolution contributed to the gradual elaboration of vocal embellishments not only in Handel's time but also in the years following, as performers continued to build upon and reinterpret established traditions. Audiences of the time were accustomed to and appreciated the art of vocal embellishment (Dean, 1950). Elaborate ornamentation became a hallmark of virtuosic singing and was eagerly anticipated by listeners. Composers and performers responded to audience expectations by incorporating increasingly intricate embellishments into vocal works (Ferand, 1958).

The third factor is related to Freedom in improvisation of *da capo arias*. Baroque music, including Handel's operas, often left room for improvisation (Austin, 2008). According to Pilcher, Cortazzi, & Jin (2014) singers were encouraged to embellish and ornament their parts, especially in *da capo arias* where the repeat section allowed for additional adornments. This practice gave performers a degree of creative freedom to experiment with different ornamentation. The combination of these factors contributed to the flourishing of vocal ornamentation in Handel's operas and continued to influence the performance practices of later composers and singers. The tradition of embellishing vocal lines persisted through the Baroque and into the Classical era, albeit with evolving stylistic characteristics.

Handel's arias occupy a central place in the Baroque vocal repertoire, celebrated for their expressive depth and their capacity to showcase virtuosic vocal display. Yet, while scholarly investigations often address questions of textual interpretation, dramatic context, and historical reception, the domain of ornamentation remains only partially explored. In particular, the nuanced relationship between decorative (i.e., embellishments that highlight the performer's skill and add colour to the melodic line) and structural ornamentation (i.e., elaborations that reinforce or enhance the underlying harmonic or contrapuntal framework) warrants closer scrutiny. During the Baroque era, ornamentation was not merely a decorative

flourish but a foundational element of compositional design and rhetorical expression. The performer's role in shaping and realizing these ornaments was equally crucial, governed by period conventions outlined in historical treatises—such as those by *Johann Joachim Quantz*, *C.P.E. Bach*, and *Pier Francesco Tosi*—which provide insights into appropriate performance practice. However, Handel's own specific practices, intentions, and conventions regarding vocal ornamentation remain a point of debate among musicologists and performers.

By examining Handel's arias through the lens of ornamentation, this study seeks to (1) identify the stylistic features that characterize his approach to vocal embellishments, (2) elucidate his compositional intentions regarding how these ornaments interact with melodic, harmonic, and dramatic structures. A more profound understanding of Handel's ornamental language has the potential to enhance both academic discussions and practical performances. On an academic level, it elucidates the role of ornamentation in enhancing the structural, rhetorical, and emotional dimensions of Baroque vocal writing. From a practical standpoint, it allows contemporary performers to interact with historical practices in a manner that is both musically credible and reflective of Handel's artistic environment. Encouraging this connection serves to unite historical research with the ongoing tradition of performing Handel's compositions, thus safeguarding the enduring vitality and significance of his arias in contemporary concert and operatic performances.

RESEARCH METHODS

According to Hiller (2001) musical ornaments serve as accents to highlight specific notes and syllables. Since Historically, appoggiaturas were referred to as accents, a term still used in France. However, besides accentuation, there are other motivations for ornamentation. Tosi, Agricola & Baird (1995) provide four reasons for ornamentation: (1) to enhance the melody's connectedness; (2) to address perceived gaps in the melodic movement; (3) to enrich and diversify the harmony; and (4) to enhance the vividness and brilliance of the melody. Taking into account from Italian, German, and French trends of the Baroque era. Neumann (1983) categorized ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque music into One-note graces, the slide, the trill, the mordent, various tiny ornaments in the form of turn, and free ornamentation.

This study employs a comprehensive analytical framework to explore the significance of ornamentation in Handel's arias as showed at figure 1. The methodology aims to thoughtfully integrate theoretical and historical to identify, categorize, and interpret ornaments in a way that respects Baroque practices while remaining relevant to contemporary performance contexts. The primary aim is to bridge the notated score and period treatises with modern scholarship, thus illuminating the complex interactions through which Handel's ornamentation serves both expressive and structural purposes.

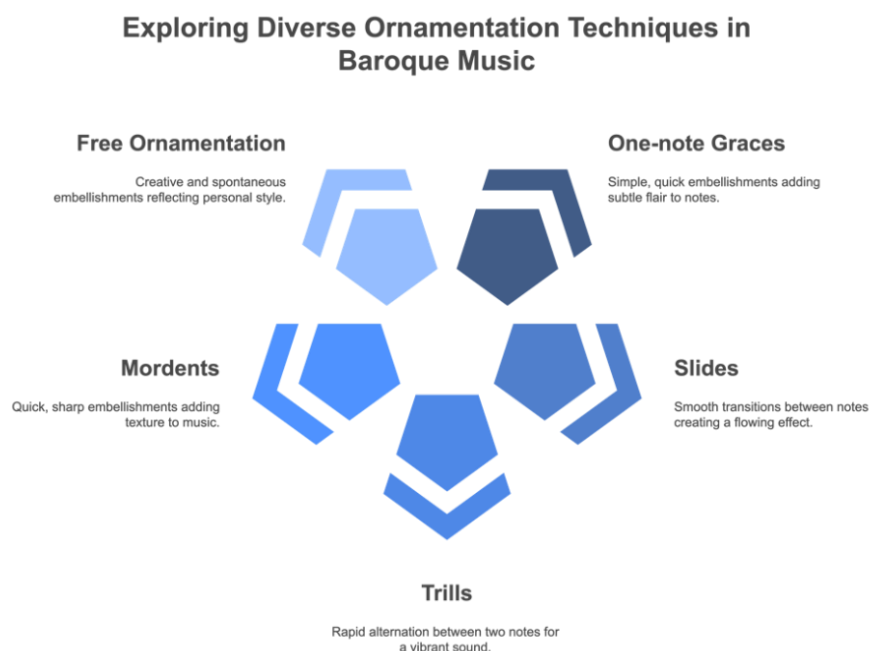


Figure 1. Baroque Ornamentation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One-note Graces

Ornaments consisting of a single tone shall be referred to as one-note graces. Just like any other ornamentation, a one-note graces cannot exist independently and must be connected to a principal or parent note that it is meant to embellish.

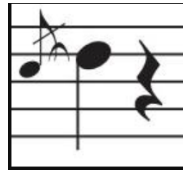


Figure 2. One-note graces

Grace-notes duration varies depending on musical context and individual differences between performers, with most being "stolen" from the preceding melody note and a small contribution from the following note (Timmers, & Ashley, 2007). Expressively, "grace notes" are being performed softly rather than as accents to the principal note (Ivey, 1970). Even, Baroque ornamentation offers flexibility for individual expression, so feel free to explore different vocal techniques and find the nuances that work best for your voice and the specific piece you are performing. But every singer has to ensure each note, including the grace note, is distinct and well-defined.

The Slide

The slide ornamentation, also known as glissando or portamento, is a technique used in vocal music to create a smooth and expressive glide between two pitches. The Baroque era slide, sometimes known as a two-note grace, is a brief ornamentation commonly used by two neighbouring auxiliary notes come before the primary note and transition seamlessly towards it. This ornamentation is executed on the beat and emphasizes the main note. Neumann (1983) identifies three primary designs in the typical slide with various rhythmic dispositions. Figure 3 illustrates milestones in a gradual transition continuum, with Type 1 labeled as *anapestic*, Type 2 as *Lombard*, and Type 3 as *dactylic*.



Figure 3. Three primary designs of Slide

The abbreviated slide structure features two-note graces. Occasionally, the slide includes more than two more notes. A slide including three or more improvised notes in a small scale is referred to as *Tirata* in Italian, *Coulade* in French, and *Pfeil* in German (Donington, 1982). The slide serves as a melodic decoration rather than contributing to the harmony, and it is executed in several manners. While both accented slide and pre-beat slide were present in the Baroque period, the on-beat slide was the usual choice in Baroque performances, as shown by Donington (1963) in figure 4.

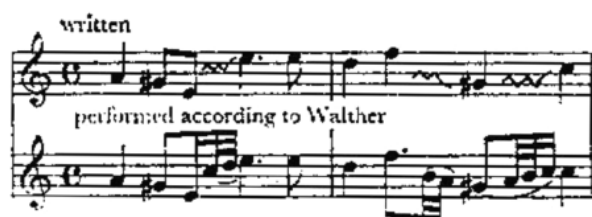


Figure 4. J. G. Walther, 'Praecepta,' 1708, Slide Anticipating Rhythm

There are several vocal technical approaches for performing the slide ornamentation in Baroque. The first is related to timing and context. Choosing appropriate moments for the slide ornamentation is its critical factor to add expressiveness to certain intervals or as a connection between two notes, particularly when transitioning between phrases or emphasizing specific emotional content. Consider the emotional context of the piece and use the slide ornamentation to convey specific emotions. Adjust the speed and intensity of the slide to match the expressive intent of the music.

The second is related to smooth transition of glide. In this case, gradually increase or decrease the intensity of the slide. This can be achieved by subtly altering the volume or intensity of your voice during the glide. The goal is to create a seamless connection rather than a sudden shift. Execute the slide with control, ensuring a smooth and controlled transition between the two pitches. Avoid a rapid or exaggerated glissando effect, as the goal is to create a subtle, expressive connection. Even though the slide involves a continuous transition between pitches, maintain clear articulation. Each note should be distinct, and the slide should not result in a blurred or indistinct vocal line. While the slide involves a smooth transition between pitches, it's crucial to maintain pitch accuracy. Focus on hitting the target pitches precisely, ensuring that the slide does not compromise the overall pitch control of the vocal line.

The third is related to steady breath control. Proper breath support helps control the intensity and duration of the ornament, allowing for a more controlled and expressive execution. Integrate the slide ornamentation seamlessly into the overall phrasing of the passage. The slide should enhance the musical line and contribute to the expressive quality of the performance. As with any ornamentation in Baroque music, the key is to approach the slide ornamentation with sensitivity, musicality, and a deep understanding of the expressive context within the composition. Experiment with these techniques to find the right balance that suits the style of the piece and enhances your overall vocal performance.

The Trill

A trill is a musical embellishment that involves quickly alternating between two neighbouring notes. The trill is commonly represented by a thin undulating line that connects the two notes. It is utilized to enhance and add decorative elements and emotional depth to a musical section. Trills are prevalent throughout a wide range of music genres, such as Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and beyond. Handel's opera series, musicians should understand the fashion of the contemporary styles for trills.

Most of Handel's singers were Italian, and they naturally produced Italianate vocal ornamentations. The present-day musicians should especially focus on the Italian manner to recreate Handel's operatic arias. In the early Baroque period, either the upper auxiliary note or main note could be performed as the beginning note for trills. Neumann (1983) categorizes three models of trill depending on rhythmic disposition which the term refers to C.P.E. Bach, as depicted in Figure 5. The trill beginning with the major note is referred to as a *main-note trill* (Ex. a). *main-note anchored* are those where the primary note is consistently stressed (Ex. b). A main-note trill with only one alternation is referred to as a *Schneller* (Ex. c).

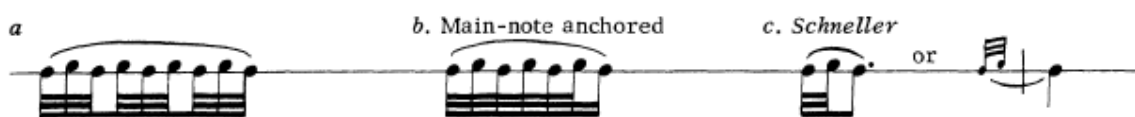


Figure 5. Three Models Of Trill Depending On Rhythmic Disposition

Roseman (1975) identifies trills have two ending styles as shown at figure 6. The first is the turned-ending which called *Nachschlag*, and it played with the same speed as the trill. The second is *anticipation-ending* which the speed of the trill changes by lengthening the note value before the anticipation.



Figure 6. Two Ending Styles Of Trill

Below is a concise table 1 outlining the key characteristics and considerations regarding trills, organized by category.

Table 1. Key Characteristics & Considerations		
No.	Aspect	Key Characteristics & Considerations
1	Execution	- Involves a quick, alternating movement between the principal note and the upper auxiliary (note above the principal). - Produces a trembling or vibrating effect, adding excitement or ornamentation to the music.
2	Notation	- Typically indicated by a "tr" symbol above the note, often accompanied by a wavy line extending over the trill's duration. - The starting note (principal vs. upper auxiliary) can be influenced by key signature or composer's markings.
3	Duration	- Often not precisely defined in the score, leaving it to the performer's discretion. - Generally sustained for a length that suits the character of the piece and the surrounding musical context.
4	Variations	- Can be whole-tone or half-tone trills depending on harmonic context and stylistic conventions. - May incorporate additional nuances (e.g., turns or ending patterns) for interpretive flourish.
5	Beginning & Ending	- Commonly begins on the principal note; in some traditions or contexts, it may start on the upper auxiliary. - Usually ends by settling on the principal note, discontinuing the rapid alternation.
6	Expressive Use	- Serves as an embellishment to enhance expressiveness. - Often occurs near cadences, phrase endings, or in virtuosic passages, emphasizing important structural or emotional moments.
7	Speed	- Executed at a rapid rate, but the exact tempo varies based on the piece's tempo, style, and performer's interpretation. - Flexibility in speed can underscore rhetorical or affective dimensions of the music.

The Mordent

The Italian phrase "*mordent*" signifies "biting" and is typically performed on the strong beat, but it may occasionally occur before the beat (Jackson, 1988). Basically, a mordent is a musical ornament that involves a rapid alternation between a principal note and a lower auxiliary note. There are two types of mordents: the upper mordent and the lower mordent. The standard symbol for a mordent is a short vertical line through a note, accompanied by a squiggle or a small vertical line attached to the line. Here are the two types of mordents:

1. Upper Mordent:
In an upper mordent as shown at figure 7, the auxiliary note is a step above the principal note. The rapid alternation typically involves playing the principal note, the upper auxiliary note, and returning to the principal note.



Figure 7. Upper Mordent

2. Lower Mordent:
In a lower mordent as shown at figure 8, the auxiliary note is a step below the principal note. The rapid alternation typically involves playing the principal note, the lower auxiliary note, and returning to the principal note.

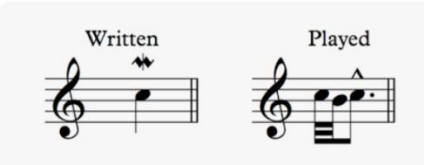


Figure 8. Lower Mordent

Mordents are often used to add ornamentation, embellishment, and a sense of flair to a musical passage. The specific execution and interpretation of a mordent can vary depending on the style and period of the music, as well as the performer's artistic choices. It's important to note that mordents are different from trills, which involve a more extended rapid alternation between two adjacent notes. In notation, a mordent is

typically written as a short vertical line through the note with the squiggle or line. However, the interpretation of the mordent, such as the speed and duration of the ornament, is often left to the performer's discretion and the stylistic conventions of the musical era in which the piece was composed. Even the simple mordent has a melodic connective rather than rhythmic-accentual function. Neumann (1983) identify mordent rhythmic-accentual function as shown at figure 9, which it can anticipate (Ex. a), straddle (Ex. b), or avoid altogether by delayed entrance (Ex. c). In other case, it can avoid the metrical stress (Ex. d) or somewhat slow the alternation into a gentle melodic inflection (Ex. e).



Figure 9. Rhythmic-accentual function of Mordent

The execution of mordents in Baroque vocal music demands a nuanced approach, and a comprehensive review of existing literature sheds light on various vocal techniques employed by singers to render these ornamental figures with authenticity and expressiveness. Scholars such as White (1988) emphasize the importance of precise breath control and thoughtful phrasing when approaching mordents. Maintaining a controlled and steady breath stream allows for the articulation of the ornament without disrupting the overall vocal line. Sundberg, & Rossing (1987) discusses the significance of clear articulation and pronunciation in executing mordents effectively. Achieving a crisp, well-defined mordent involves meticulous attention to consonant clarity and vowel shaping, contributing to the overall clarity of the ornament.

According to historical treatises studied by Harris (2014), dynamic variation plays a crucial role in the expressive rendering of mordents. Singers are advised to explore subtle dynamic contrasts within the ornament, adding depth and emotional nuance to the overall performance. The examination of ornamentation treatises, such as those by Quantz and C.P.E. Bach, as discussed by Haynes (2007), provides valuable insights into the stylistic considerations for mordent execution. These treatises offer guidance on the appropriate placement and duration of mordents within the musical phrase.

In the context of vocal flexibility and agility, insights from Kruglova (2022) and Högset (2001) underscore the importance of specific vocal exercises to enhance agility, particularly in the execution of ornamentation such as mordents. These exercises aim to improve vocal dexterity and control. Literature by Leopold 1768 and Mattheson 1739, explored by Dean (1997), sheds light on historically informed practices regarding mordent execution. Understanding the ornamentation conventions of the Baroque era informs singers on the stylistic nuances integral to authentic performance. By integrating insights from these diverse sources, this literature review establishes a comprehensive understanding of the vocal techniques crucial for singing mordents effectively in the context of Baroque vocal music. This synthesis of scholarly perspectives provides a foundation for singers and researchers aiming to delve into the nuanced world of Baroque ornamentation.

The Turn

The turn is a musical ornamentation that involves the rapid alternation between four adjacent notes: the principal note, the note above, the principal notes again, and the note below. The turn is typically used to embellish a melody, adding ornamentation and expressiveness to the music. The ornament is notated with a small symbol resembling the letter "S" lying on its side, positioned above or below the principal note.

The components of a turn are as follows:

1. Principal Note:
The starting note of the turn, usually the main melody note.
2. Upper Auxiliary Note:
The note immediately above the principal note in pitch.
3. Principal Note Again:
A return to the principal note.
4. Lower Auxiliary Note:
The note immediately below the principal note in pitch.

Donington (1963) classified slide, mordent, and turn to be separate ornaments. Lee (2020) stated that Baroque musicians incorporated ornaments by adding extra auxiliary notes in accordance with the lyrics and subtleties. The turn was executed by principal note in the beginning with the higher auxiliary note, then moving to the main note, followed by the lower neighbouring note, and concluding back on the principal note as depicted in figure 10 (a). Additionally, there was an inverted form of the turn, which begins on the lower auxiliary note and ends with the principal note as indicated at figure 10, (b) The order of these notes in a turn can vary, but a common sequence is principal note, upper auxiliary note, principal note again, and lower auxiliary note.



Figure 10. Donington's Turn

Neumann (1983) discovered two species of turns in the Baroque period, labeled as types 1, as depicted in figure 11 and 12. The initial note may vary, but all variants conclude with the principal note.

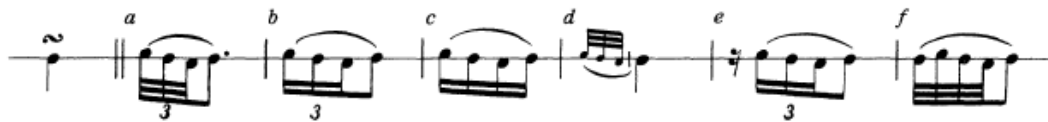


Figure 11. Neumann's Turn type 1

The rhythmic dispositions of Type 1 (for an assumed quarter-note parent) a-c show the very common on beat start with the design adapted to tempi varying from slow to fast. Example d shows the fairly frequent anticipated entrance, with the dash indicating the location of the beat; Ex. e gives the fairly rare delayed entrance, and Ex. f the occasional start with the principal note. The designs apply in analogy to the inverted species (Neumann, 1983). Meanwhile. The rhythmic configuration of the "embedded" Type 2 can change significantly based on speed, length of principal note, affect, and melodic and rhythmic background. Figure 12 displays a limited number of models representing several options for either a binary note (e.g., a-f) or a dotted note (e.g., g-l). The grace was of a connected nature; thus an additional neighbouring element was used for enhanced clarity.



Figure 12. Neumann's Turn type 2

Lee (2020) states that several rhythmic values can be used to execute the Baroque turn. The first note typically advances rapidly, with the development gradually decelerating towards the conclusion of the cycle, as illustrated in figure 13 according to the *Turn* classification by Bigler & Lloyd-Watts (2005).



Figure 13. The Turn classification by Bigler & Lloyd-Watts (2005)

Interpreting the ornament of the turn in vocal music demands a nuanced understanding of historical practices (Campbell & Lord, 1962) and a mastery of specific vocal techniques (Reiter, 2020). Since Baroque ornaments, such as trills, turns, and mordents, are expressive and cannot be translated into exact note-values (Collins, 1973). Ornamentation treatises like Quantz (Hefling & Quantz, 1987) and Agricola (Agricola & Baird, 1997) to provide insights on singing techniques and ornamentation. The ornamentation treatises of Quantz and Agricola focus on appoggiaturas, trills, divisions, recitatives, arias, cadenzas, and improvised melodic variations. Agricola contributed to Quantz's flute book, which included thorough information about German schools and universities, voice practice, and Johann Sebastian Bach's keyboard fingering (Jerold, 2008). Quantz's ornamentation book, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, contains specific guidelines regarding the duration of appoggiaturas in music (Reilly 1964). Quantz's paper on ornamentation contains interval-based tables, note-by-note performance directions, and advise on cadenzas (Reiter, 2020). However, treatises from the 17th and 18th centuries frequently simply describe how to get from a sign to an ornament, not when and how to improvise an ornament (Spitzer & Rousseau, 1989).

Free Ornamentation

Neumann (1983) defines "free" ornaments as ornamentation symbols not indicated in the score but inserted by the performer at their discretion, either spontaneous or premeditated. These complimentary decorations can range from a simple one-note embellishment to elaborate decorations and, according to some authors, even lengthy cadenzas. Handel embellished the melodies in his operatic *arias*, *oratorios*, and *cantatas* using simple elements, as indicated by his manuscripts and the writings of contemporary scholars, save for the cadences. Musician's improvisation often embellished cadences. William Babell, an accompanist for Handel's *Rinaldo*, arranged Handel's "*Lascia ch'io pianga*" on the keyboard. Babell's transcription restricts the ornamentation of the melody with few embellishments (Neumann, 1983). Charles Burney (1785) describes Handel's rehearsal anecdotes in his work "Musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey and the Pantheon," highlighting the composer's response to singers' inaccurate improvisation. Handel restricted singers from performing incorrect variations. Lee (2020) states that Handel's *Messiah* is a fine example of a free ornamentation. This may be seen in the succession of auxiliary notes in measure 8 of the upper line, as shown in figure 14. Measure 8 is defined by Shrock (2013) and illustrates the application of passage.

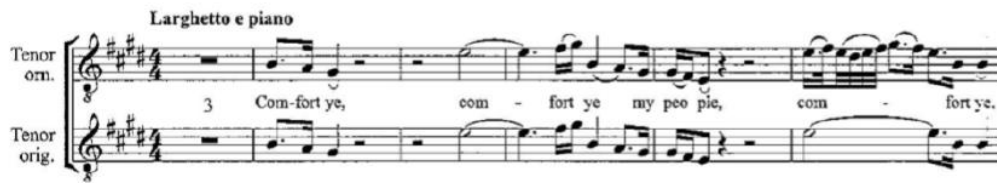


Figure 14. Comfort ye Handel's Messiah measures 1 – 8.

Free ornamentation allowed Baroque performers to showcase their virtuosity and interpretive skills (Kodenko, 2020; Reiter, 2020; Cook, 1999). The balance between creativity and adherence to stylistic conventions was a hallmark of Baroque music performance. Musicians were expected to be versatile and skilled in applying ornamentation in a way that enhanced the emotional impact of the music. Unlike written-out ornaments, which are specifically notated by the composer, free ornamentation allows for greater freedom and creativity on the part of the musician. The basic principles of free ornamentation in the Baroque era are as follows:

1. Expressiveness:
The primary purpose of free ornamentation is to add expressiveness and emotional depth to the music. Performers were encouraged to use ornaments to convey their own interpretation and feelings.
2. Improvise and Adorn:
Musicians were expected to be adept at improvisation and ornamentation. The art of ornamenting involved spontaneously embellishing the written notes, showcasing the performer's skill and creativity.
3. Understanding the Style:
Performers were expected to have a deep understanding of the stylistic conventions of the Baroque era. This included knowledge of common ornamentation patterns, the use of various ornamentation types, and an overall awareness of the expressive possibilities within the style.
4. Knowledge of Harmonic Structure:
Ornamentation was often applied with consideration for the underlying harmonic structure. Musicians would choose ornaments that fit harmonically with the given passage.
5. Appropriate Placement:
Musicians were expected to choose the appropriate places for ornamentation. This could include adding ornaments at the repetition of a phrase, during cadences, or at other points where expressive embellishment would enhance the musical line.
6. Individual Interpretation
Baroque works were encouraged to bring their own interpretation to the music. The same piece could be performed differently by different musicians, each adding their unique ornamentation to express personal style.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the intricate relationship between **ornamentation** and the expressive, structural, and rhetorical dimensions of Handel's vocal writing, emphasizing the importance of a historically informed approach in understanding and performing Baroque music. By systematically identifying, categorizing, and analyzing the various types of ornamentation in Handel's arias, the research has illuminated several key aspects of his compositional and performative intentions:

1. Expressive and Structural Functions
Ornamentation in Handel's works serves not only as a means of decorative embellishment but also as a critical element in shaping melodic connectivity, harmonic richness, and emotional brilliance. This dual purpose aligns with the Baroque aesthetic, which valued both virtuosity and affective communication.
2. Divergent Practices Among Baroque Traditions
Handel's synthesis of Italian, German, and French ornamentation practices demonstrates his adaptability and cosmopolitan approach. Italian influences are evident in the improvisatory nature and virtuosic flair of his ornamentation, while French and German traditions contribute structural precision and emphasis on rhetorical clarity.

3. Role of Performers in Realizing Ornamentation

Baroque singers played a pivotal role in interpreting ornamentation, often adding improvisatory flourishes, particularly in da capo arias. The study underscores the importance of performer discretion in realizing ornaments that reflect both historical conventions and individual artistry.

4. Historical and Practical Implications

The research bridges historical scholarship and contemporary performance practice, providing insights that enhance academic understanding and inform modern interpretations of Handel's arias. By integrating historical treatises with practical experimentation, the study offers a robust framework for performers seeking to balance stylistic authenticity with creative expression.

Future research on Baroque ornamentation could benefit from expanding its scope to include a broader repertoire, comparing Handel's vocal ornamentation with that of other composers like Bach, Vivaldi, and Monteverdi. Such studies could uncover regional and stylistic differences, as well as common practices across the Baroque era. Additionally, exploring the evolution of Handel's ornamentation practices over time or analyzing his vocal embellishments in relation to his instrumental works would provide valuable insights into cross-genre influences and compositional consistency.

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