

FRENCH BAROQUE VOCAL ORNAMENTATION

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The ornamentation of the Baroque period had mainly two schools that dominated the continent for an era. These were the Italian school of free ornamentation, within reason, and the rigid French school of ornamentation. Since the rigidity of French ornamentation dominated the musical scene of Paris and large swaths of France for a good portion of the Baroque era, there is great importance in learning the nuances that pertain to this specific art form of ornamentation. Especially in the light of how many vocalists are trained in the modern age on how to read and interpret ornamentation as a whole.

Areas that are to be studied in detail for the vocalist are: the port de voix, the cadence, the tremblement or flexion de voix, the double cadence, the demi-tremblement or tremblement étouffé, the soutien de la voix, the expression or passionner, the animer, the accent or plainte, the diminution or Methode de Chanter, and the Fredon or Roulement.¹

The port de voix (harbor of the voice) is a type of ornamentation that most resembles the modern definition of the appoggiatura.² The port de voix is also often confused with the soutien (support, which in modern equivalency would be an

¹ "Ornamentation". *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

² Hugh Chisholm, "Appoggiatura" *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Cambridge University Press) 225.

anticipation. This *soûtien* would much more likely be found before a *tremblement* (tremor) or a *cadence*, which is the easiest way to distinguish between these two ornaments. The most common movement of pitch in regards to the *port de voix* is in motion from a lower tone to an upper tone. In the execution of the *port de voix*, there are three factors that are necessary: the sustain of the lower note, the *doublement du gosier* (repetition) of the upper note and the sustain of the upper note after the repetition.³

Another version of the *port de voix* is the *demi-port de voix* which only takes into consideration the first two necessities of the full *port de voix*. Due to this, the *demi-port de voix* is considered to be an anticipation to the full *port de voix*.

The execution of the *port de voix* can take many forms, the two that were generally accepted in the Baroque were *port de voix glissè* (glide) or *coulè* (color) and *port de voix perdu* (lost harbor of the voice). The *glissè* or *coulè* forms were created by sliding over the *coup de gosier* (stroke of the throat) without an accent added to the upper tone. When one gives most all the time value to the preceding note in the

³ Gardner Read, *Music notation: a manual of modern practice*.

ornament, this is called the port de voix perdu. The main difference between glissè or coulé and perdu is this absence or presence of coup de gosier.⁴

A distinguishing feature of the port de voix is in the fact that the ornament is in some ways unique to the French language. The port de voix requires that even if the preceding lower tone is unornamented, there must be some kind of inflection that is made so as to switch syllables before the coup de gosier.

PORT DE VOIX

Trinton *Verformul*

The image shows three staves of handwritten musical notation. The notation is in common time with a key signature of three sharps. The first staff begins with a bass clef, the second with a tenor clef, and the third with a soprano clef. The lyrics 'la ti di' are written below the first two staves, and 'li vi o' are written below the third. The notation includes various note heads, stems, and vertical bar lines.

With this, there are also rules that govern the total usage of the port de voix, as it is most commonly seen with the usage of intervals of a second; but, it can be used with intervals up

⁴ Edward Dannreuther, *Musical ornamentation*. (New York: Edwin F. Kalmus) 65.

to a fourth, if well thought out by the performer.⁵ Intervals of a fifth or greater are often recommended by theorists of the era to not be performed.

The cadence, as a term in the music of the French Baroque, is quite straight forward, as it is the harmonic movement to a point in which the harmony sustains for a period of time, giving form to the phrases that surround it. The cadences, however, are marked in this era not only by chordal quality and function but by strict voice leading into these areas. This is especially true when pertaining to vocal music of the time, as cadences could only follow these specific vocal actions: port de voix and tremblement. The tremblement, also known as flexion de voix (voice bending), is the stronger action between the two as it is known to the modern singer as a trill.⁶

TREMBLEMENT (FLEXION DE VOIX) / CADENCE

Printed *Performed*

⁵ Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice* 1750-1900. 492.

⁶ Hugh, 225.

There are times in this old school that the port de voix and the tremblement are not accepted. This would be the case where the cadence does not call for such a strong ending as the tremblement, such as in the modern deceptive cadence. At the same time, the usage of a port de voix would create a certain lack of elegance that the omission of it would allow. The replacement then is the animer (animate), which is a nearly imperceptible repetition of a note to still add slight ornamentation to it.⁷

ANIMER

The image shows a handwritten musical example on four-line staff paper. The key signature is F# major (one sharp). The first measure, labeled 'Printed', shows a single note followed by a series of eighth-note grace patterns: a single grace note, a grace note with a vertical stroke, a grace note with a diagonal stroke, and a grace note with a horizontal stroke. The second measure, labeled 'Performed', shows the same note followed by a more continuous series of grace notes with various vertical, diagonal, and horizontal strokes, creating a more sustained and ornate effect. The lyrics 'sol di la' are written under the first measure, and 'sol di la to do do - or' are written under the second measure.

The double cadence is another form of agrément that is performed using a certain tour de gosier.⁸ This is not a theoretical concept that was ever laid down during the Baroque period, but more of a well-recorded practice from the time. The practice of this agrément is done through the usage of having

⁷ Edward, 67.

⁸ Edward, 67.

the voice hardly appear in the phrase, only to then abruptly cut off.⁹ This is usually done through some form of lower approach tone. Contained within this double cadence, there is the workings of étouffé (choking), a kind of tremblement.¹⁰ This agrément is performed when the note preceding the cadence starts to trembler (to tremble) or starts to repeat the note.¹¹

DOUBLE CADENCE/ÉTOUFFÉ

Printed *Performed*

The accent, or aspiration as it is also known, is a unique agrément to the voice where a long tone can be accented through the preparation of the next tone. These types of agrément are used in a light tone that is more conducive to a

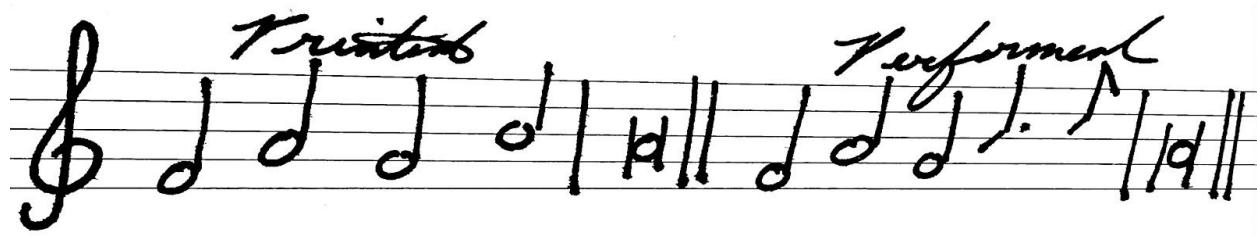
⁹ "Ornamentation".

¹⁰ Robert E. Seletsky, "Acciaccatura (It.; Fr. pincé étouffé; Ger. Zusammenschlag)", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan Publishers) 201.

¹¹ Gardner.

near stop of the voice, or an imperceptible tone. Many title this agrément plainte (plain) as they believe that it can only appear at a plain point texturally in the music, however, this is simply not the case.¹²

ACCENT/ASPIRATION



The Methode de Chanter (chanting method) was also a common vocal technique of the time and was done by the lack of vibrato, as it was a method of straight tone singing that was performed primarily through the relaxation of the body.¹³ There is no clear historical indication as to when this was performed, yet the underlying idea of the method is that the straight tone singing would be done for the duration of the piece and the embellishments would be added at the ends of phrases.

Roulement (rolling) is the last technique to be touched upon. The technique itself is rather straight forward and takes little explanation. There was no written denotation for this

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

agrément since it was totally at the singer's discretion. The practice simply consisted of choosing r's at the ends of words to roll in the style of the Spanish r.¹⁴ The only stipulation to this r is the fact that it is meant to be used strictly in chanting styles such as Methode de Chanter.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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