Chapter 5: How to Improvise Renaissance Music, with Voice and Instruments

See in the T. McGee book, Medieval and Renaissance Music, …

Chapter 5: How to Improvise Renaissance Music, with Voices and on Instruments

In this chapter, my intention is to provide a series of very concrete tips on how to achieve ornamentation and improvisation, through the writings of several colleagues. I decided to divide the entire material with practical ideas on how to improvise early music into three parts:

A.Practical Tips on Ornamentation and Improvisation

This section is intended for all instrumentalists and singers who wish to learn, understand, and experiment with how ornamentation and improvisation likely looked and functioned in the Renaissance and early Baroque periods, on early or modern instruments. I start with the advice of Austrian composer and pedagogue Cesar Bresgen, which can principally be applied to any musical style. I continue with Timothy McGee, and his practical advice on embellishing early music to which I have added the opinion of my English colleague and good friend, Mr. Bernard Thomas. It follows McGee's proposals how to improvise – his ideas how to reconstruct the lost practice or art of Italian improvisers of the 15th century on the basis of Italian *trecento* music, you shall find in the Chapter 7, p.53.

Further follows the practical instructions from Australian recorder player Mr. Benjamin Thorn and Swiss colleague Mr. Andreas Habert, as both authors are primarily oriented towards the youngest and beginner audience – a kind of excellent introduction to the advice from the manual of French virtuoso on the Renaissance *cornetto*, Mr. William Dongois.

The entire set of tips from this first part can certainly be applied to what you can find in the third (C) part of this chapter.[1]

B.Introduction to the Practice of "Singing on the Book":

This practice, which we discussed in detail in Chapter 4, has been increasingly popular in the last 20 years and has led to the founding of several excellent ensembles (mostly associated with some higher education institutions in America (Canada) and Europe (France and Switzerland)). Since it is a very serious activity that requires a good knowledge of written counterpoint and its numerous rules, I have limited myself here to quote two experts in this field, Canadian professor and scientist Mr. Peter Schubert and French specialist Mr. Barnabé Janin, who 2014. published the second edition of his extraordinary practical manual on "singing on the book." In Chapter 7, and in the the Appendix, under musical examples and through links, you will find the appropriate sheet music or links to a series of videos on the YouTube channel where you can hear and see what it's really about. In chapter 4, there are also some rules concerning the "Singing on the book", see under 4.1. Ferand, 4.2. Bent, 4.3. Canguilhem, 4.6. Schubert and 4.10. Janin.

C.Selected Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation:

Here, as the essence of everything, I have extracted the most important things to remember (or learn by heart) before embarking on a small adventure of ornamentation and a larger,

[1] To make everything more clear, I decided to put some more Rules on Ornamentation etc. in Appendix/ Various rules.

creative improvisation. I primarily use the writings of Timothy McGee, Benjamin Thorn, Andreas Habert, William Dongois, and Barnabé Janin.

5.1. Cesar Bresgen:[2]

Bresgen's advice primarily relates to work in music therapy and elementary education, but I believe it can offer some interesting ideas for other areas and styles of music. Those who may consider this section unnecessary can freely skip it and move on to the advice by T. McGee, 5.2. and beyond, page 5.

> All passing things are transitory; only what serves higher purposes has its skill value.
> Robert Schumann

Building Blocks

Improvisation with sound generators of indefinite pitch, Significance for music therapy

Building blocks are gray, unattractive material until they are organically arranged. Our building material is "tone," initially "tone in itself." It is entirely possible to develop fascinating improvisation dealing exclusively with the quality of tone, regardless of its pitch, interval relationship, and even melodic order. Even rhythmic order can be to some extent excluded. Such a state is encountered in the realm of magic, in cult and folk customs - think of cultures of non-European peoples; part of it has survived to this day, even in Europe, for example, in the alpine tradition with the sound of bells at *Perchten* (*Tresterer*), "little wild men," and similar figures. ... The dull, dark sound of deep bells, disturbing, indefinite sound of large drums, on the other hand, the wailing of sirens, cracking of whips, or loud metallic rattling evoke in our imagination a series of connected processes, images of suffering, restlessness, but also joy, awakening, and other feelings.

Structured Melodies (Preludes)

Improvisation with instruments that have specific pitches creates different conditions. Let's first deal with inventing a melody.

In elementary education, there are two main methods that are useful as a kind of introductory aid for the natural formation of melodic processes.

First method: leads through one's own voice or through modulation of sung tones. Melodic figures are created here, which emerge from words and sentences, mainly calls or calls similar to melodies:

Example V-1, Bresgen ex.3 – 5 [3] …

As the examples show, dances derived from (vocal) calls are mostly instrumental in nature. Without the inclusion of the idea of movement, i.e., rhythm, such design, even in its simplest form, would not be possible. The expansion of larger melodies should

[2] Bresgen, Cesar: *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, Heinrichshofen Verlag, Wilhelmshaven, 1983, in the series Musikpädagogische Bibliothek, vol. 27.
[3] See Music Examples A Ch. V-1 Bresgen ex.3-5.

therefore be preceded by dealing with rhythmic form; only both together lead to further refinement. Before we delve into this issue in more detail, let's point out another way of inventing melodies.

Second method:

Here, the principle of voluntary limitation to a tonal space as narrow as possible is recommended; we follow the traces of the oldest folk music, our great teachers. It will turn out that our imagination does not need to be overly strained to create "satisfactory" melodic structures from groups of three or four tones. Without defining rhythm, small melodic tonal groups like the following should be formed in singing and playing. Alternating movements in whole and half tones promote listening to scale degrees; at the same time, basic melodic patterns [modules] arise, which we will encounter again - in a broader context - later.

Example 2, Bresgen ex.6 and 7[4]

a) Groups of three tones ("Terno")

To expand such approaches or "melodic cells," it is now advisable to use the following two means:

1.Transposition or chaining

Most effective will be the shifting of such "melodic cells" by a perfect fourth up or down, a principle that occurs in the same way in folk songs, but also in Gregorian chant. Individual steps in half or whole tones are adjusted to the appropriate scale or the one you "heard." Transpositions in different intervals can have a surprising effect.

2.Mirroring (inversion)

This applies to the actual or free interval (tonal, i.e., adapted to a certain range of tones).

Example 3, Bresgen ex.8-10.[5]

b) Groups of four tones ("Tetrachord", Quaterno)

Traditional folk music gives us many suggestions here as well. For now, a few smaller exercises will suffice; in connection with rhythmic design and a lying fundamental tone (drone), there are richer possibilities for creation. Working with a variable distribution of half and whole tones is very productive.

c) Pentatonic

It is a tonal system based on a scale series within one octave of five tones with different interval arrangements (anhemitonic, with only whole-step intervals, and hemitonic, which also includes half-step intervals).

[4] See Music Examples A Ch. V-2 Bresgen ex.6, 7.
[5] See Music Examples A Ch. V-3 Bresgen ex.8, 9 and 10..

It is of fundamental importance for the history of melodies in general and is best preserved in East Asia, in Africa, Indians, but also in Europe (such as Ireland and Scotland). ... The lack of half tones creates a balanced melody, less susceptible to tension, although a certain narrowing is simultaneously imperceptible; to avoid monotony or mannerism, it requires a certain economy and experience. ...

Gregorian chant, which in its simpler forms has many pentatonic features and is mostly of improvisational origin, can also provide strong melodic suggestions.

Terno, tetrachord, and pentatonic music have led to melodic forms that had to emerge completely or predominantly from the idea of a line. ...

Since the end of the Middle Ages, purely linear thinking has increasingly shifted towards vertical sound perception, perhaps clearer in Romance or southern European countries than in the north or east. Therefore, it is no wonder that it is far more difficult to improvise based on triads than in older sound spaces. We will also take advantage of the abundance of opportunities to structure melodically triads in our improvisations; if sufficient exercises in "linear thinking" preceded this, the risk of melodic improvisation "drowning" in a purely harmonic form is reduced. ...

Ostinato (from "*il basso ostinato*") can initially perform the same function as the so-called drone (*Orgelpunkt*): it "supports" the melody by creating simple sound connections; real *ostinato*, however, brings rhythmic (often melodic) independent groups of tones or motifs. ...

Harmonic Model:

The harmonic models of German and Austrian folk music today are generally determined by the relationship tonic-dominant-tonic; if the IV, II, or even III degree appear, it is already perceived as something special. The seventh chord and nonachord have done the most damage to this music. Still elementary in yodels, its frequent use in songs and instrumental music has a sentimental effect. ...

Talented improvising musicians know how to find new charms even in familiar formulas like I V V I or I IV V I. ...

To familiarize ourselves with classically oriented improvisation, it is useful to recall well-known harmonic models, which have served as the basis for countless, mostly anonymous, players but also composers of high esteem. For example, the following scheme attributed to lutenist Hans Newsidler (16th century):

Part A: I I IV IV / I I V V
I I IV IV / I V I I

Part B: IV V I I / IV V I I ...

Models that deviate from these schemes can be easily formed, but it should be noted that Central European, especially German [and Austrian] musicians, will almost never achieve the same self-evident confidence in free polyphonic improvisation with rhythmic and

harmonic "deviation" as musicians from the Balkans [or Southern Europe in general], for example.

Centuries of practice and experience have enabled these musicians, as well as those in the entire oriental world, to perform a particular improvised art. If in the case of Westerners, perfection is seen in a mature, or quite fulfilled form, which then seeks to take on its written form that cannot be changed for all time, for Easterners, this unique, unrepeatable, completely subjective improvisation or variation is the highest possible artistic expression.

Modal Harmony

For those who wish to improvise with melodies that trace their origins from before the year 1600 (including *Minnesänger* songs ...), it is necessary to confront the harmonic world of modes (Gregorian modes, Gregorian scales). ...

A.For chord accompaniment:

Begin by practicing chords whose tones belong to the corresponding mode. The gain is a stylistically satisfying form of melody. ...

B.New, additional parts, and ostinatos: good results can be achieved by playing an additional "counter"/opposite/ voice. The starting point is the appropriate scale, played in its entirety or partially, at a constant and steady pace (especially on the harp or guitar) as a "counterpoint" to the melody. ...

5.2. T. McGee, Basic (Early) Musical Issues [6]

Of all the musicologists who, from the late 1970s, through the 1980s and 1990s, and beyond, intensively dealt with the problem of ornamentation and improvisation in early (mostly medieval and Renaissance) music and dared to give very concrete practical advice instead of mere theories and hypotheses, Timothy McGee undoubtedly did the most. Therefore, a series of his tips will find their place in this chapter too, and they go (once again...) from broader, from basic problems, through ornamentation (which we rightly can consider a “soft” form of improvisation) to the completely "serious," real improvisation.

Basic Musical Problems

The location of stresses within the flow of the melodic line, the placement of text to support this flow, and the tempo and style of the composition are all basic to the way in which a composition is performed. Unfortunately, of all the problems encountered by modern musicians wishing to re-create early music, these present the greatest difficulties. All four areas allow a high degree of individual interpretation and thus the discussions here should be considered to be more an exposition of general concepts, approaches, and guide-lines rather than a set of rigid rules to be applied without further subjective consideration. For the subjects of text underlay and tempo there are contemporary writings which provide us with some practical information on which to base our ideas, but there are

[6] This and other citations are taken from the book: Timothy J. McGee: *Medieval and Renaissance Music*, A Performer's Guide, University of Toronto Press, Toronto Buffalo, London 1988.

no contemporary writings about either melodic-rhythmic flow or style; my discussions of those topics are entirely extracted from the music itself. …

In the discussion of bar lines in chapter 2 I stated that much early music does not involve a regularly recurring stress. A large amount of early music has as its major ingredient a sophisticated use of rhythms - both melodically in single lines and in rhythmic counterpoint between two or more parts - and it is precisely this important element that modern bar lines tend to destroy. …

The principles used in assigning the irregularly spaced unit markings above are quite simple; they are not mentioned in any writings of the period but would appear to be the only ones available to a musician reading a single line without bars:

1.Long notes indicate stress; short notes do not. That is, the rhythm flows from long to long, through the shorter values. This is supported by the natural rhythmic flow of Medieval European languages, which flow from long to long, not stressing short syllables. Since music is so closely aligned with text, this principle has been assumed for music in the absence of any direct theoretical commentary either supporting or contesting it. …

2.Even note patterns are divided evenly unless unusual melodic skips indicate otherwise.

It is important to note at this point that the division by unit markings above or the designation of any note as first in its rhythmic group does not imply accent. The word ‘stress’ would be a better way to express the function of first as long as it is understood to imply only that subtle kind of emphasis which marks off a melodic line into sub-units and causes the phrase to flow forward. The use of more obvious stresses or accents depends on other kinds of criteria such as text accent and representation of the spirit of the work. …

3.Short-value rests (that is, shorter than a longa = ) indicate the absence of the initial member(s) of a group, thus rendering the note or notes following the rest up-beat(s). …

This rule has been abstracted from the music itself and has an exception: if the new phrase begins with an accented text syllable, the first note is considered to be the beginning of a group. It will be found, however, that in the majority of cases the new syllable will be unaccented. Experimentation has found rule 3 generally applicable to instrumental performances. …

A bar line gives a false message to modern performers because it signifies a regular recurring stress on the first beat of every bar. This is a product of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in whose music rhythmic flow is usually quite regular and sophistication lies in other elements of the composition, often the harmony. The polyphonic music of the earlier centuries, however, grew from the simple harmonies of the Middle Ages - simple because polyphony was begun as a ‘dressing-up’ of a single line. Early music therefore retains elements of its origin, the intricate rhythms of monophony, and the earlier the music, the more complex are the rhythms and the simpler the harmonies. …

5.3. T.McGee: Ornamentation[7]

> The tradition of improvising entire compositions and ornamenting existing works is as old as music itself. In the past each performer was to some degree a composer, and when he was not inventing whole compositions of his own, he was 'assisting' other composers by filling out their works with graces and divisions. There is evidence that the practice continued unbroken from the earliest times until finally in the nineteenth century it was restricted to folk and dance musicians while so-called 'serious' or 'classical' musicians were constrained to play only what was printed on the page.[8] …
>
> The task confronting twentieth-century musicians wishing to learn to ornament and improvise early music is both different and more difficult than that which faced musicians of the early centuries. For musicians living in the Middle Ages and Renaissance era there was a tradition which would have been learned as soon as instruction began and would have continued to develop throughout a career. Best of all, there would have been only a single style which would have evolved slowly but would have been common to all performers living in a given area at the time.
>
> Present-day musicians, on the other hand, must learn the entire technique of inventing music after having received a training which specifically discourages this sort of activity and, to further complicate the problem, must learn all at once a variety of styles from several different centuries and places. Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties, modern performers are encouraged to attempt ornamentation and improvisation which, when finally mastered, will add greatly to the authentic re-creation of the early repertory.[9] …

Here some important details from McGee's book:

THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

1.The notes of the original are usually included in the ornamental passages, although there are occasional exceptions.

2.Motion is stepwise for the most part.

3.When there is a skip of a third the motion usually turns back on itself; that is, it often appears as a move from upper neighbour to lower neighbour (or the opposite), …

4.Ornamental figures commonly used include:

a) decorations revolving around a single note (these are like graces but one commonly thinks of graces as being quicker and specified by sign rather than written out): 1/ upper neighbour; 2 lower neighbour; 3/ both upper and lower neighbour;

b) decorations filling in the interval: 1/ direct stepwise motion for larger intervals; 2/ running passages involving upper and lower neighbours for short intervals.

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[7] Timothy J. McGee: *Medieval and Renaissance Music*, …

[8] Certainly, one of the reasons I didn't like at all being an orchestral musician…

[9] And as Mariani wrote we ought to 'unhear', to forget or – ideally – to ignore those "few" centuries of music "in between", what we learned during our musical studies…

5.Ornamental passages vary in length from two notes to running passages three and four bars in length. …

THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The ornaments found in these instrumental compositions vary from the earlier examples in small details. Still present are both the upper and lower neighbours for ornamentation of a single note and the filled-in intervals to connect notes. Changes include the following:

1.the flow of ornaments is smoother, as is the rhythm of the originals; fewer of the quick, mordent-type ornaments are written out, although they could have been inserted by the performer without specific direction;

2.passaggi appear to be in duple division for the most part rather than triple, as was prevalent earlier;

3.the running passages tend to be even more consistently stepwise;

4.especially in the Agricola examples[10] there are extended smooth scales after a skip of a fifth or an octave;

5.ornamentation is still concentrated in the superius part although some is applied to other lines; in terms of frequency and quantity of ornaments the order is: superius, tenor, contratenor;

6.in the accompanied melody style (Agricola examples) all accompanying parts receive an almost equal amount of ornamentation. …

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

It was in the sixteenth century that instruction manuals for ornamentation began to appear, the first written by Silvestro di Ganassi in 1535. Supporting that information were lute and keyboard intabulations of all kinds of vocal music which parallel the instructions in the manuals in their use of passaggi and thereby lend some support to the method I have used to derive the ornamentation style of early centuries. The instructions are given by vocalists and instrumentalists alike, and all writers made it clear that at least in Italy, Spain, and parts of Germany the style was basically the same for voices and instruments. The fact that there are more instructions for instrumentalists than for singers and statements by some theorists of the time have led Brown to conclude that ornamentation was probably required of all instrumentalists but not necessarily of all singers.

Professional singers apparently could be excused the lack of ability to ornament as long as their voices and other kinds of expression were superior, but probably no such leeway was granted to instrumentalists; they were all expected to adorn the music with ornaments to some degree, and a virtuoso performer was one whose ornaments included those of a highly technical nature. …

[10] See Music Examples A Ch. III-12 McGee ex.7.14 and 7.15a Agricola.

Basically all the sixteenth-century ornaments turn out to be hardly different from those we have seen in the preceding two centuries. Ornaments can still be thought of either as decorations to or around a single note or as passages of longer duration which connect the notes of the original. The difference is that the sixteenth-century manuals acknowledge that there are different types of embellishments for a single note and that the different intervals or note patterns allow for various kinds of inventive passaggi. The information is more detailed than what we have extracted from earlier music, but not really different, either in essence or in application. The following rules are a distillation of the various instruction books as they apply to voice and to most instruments:[11]

1.*Graces*

a)An upper neighbour used as a trill: may continue to the end of the note value; may occupy only a part of the value of the note; or may be sounded in anticipation,

b)An upper neighbour may be used as a mordent

c)A lower neighbour may be used only as an inverted mordent.

d)Upper and lower neighbours, similar to a turn, may be used alone or in conjunction with a trill or with upper or lower mordents.

e)There are no clear instructions as to the use of vibrato; Ganassi (1542) says it is to be used to reinforce the sad emotions.

2.*Passaggi*

a)Passages are mostly stepwise.

b)Skips of a third generally turn in the other direction.

c)The original notes are usually included within the ornament.

d)The ornamental passage is often constructed so that the final note of the original is used as the final note of the ornament, although there are many exceptions to this,

e)A variety of rhythms can be used.

f)Passaggi are of varying lengths from four notes to several bars; they can be all of a single rhythmic and melodic style or can be combinations.

REPERTORY FOR SOLO ORNAMENTATION

Virtually every composition, sacred or secular, is a candidate for ornamentation, although there is some evidence that ornaments added to sacred music were a bit more conservative than those for the secular repertory of the same period. Any composition can be considered a soloist piece, including those with melody line plus accompaniment and

[11] See Music Examples A Ch. V-4 McGee ex.7.3 Cadence ornaments and V-5 McGee ex.8.1, 8.2 Ileborgh, 8.3 a) and b) Parallel organum.

those performed by an ensemble of instruments, whether they be homophony, imitative, or of the various medieval styles.

A melody line with accompaniment allows the soloist more freedom (for example, a lute song or a frottola with lower parts reduced for lute or keyboard), but it is also possible to have solo ornamentation performed by only one of an ensemble of voices or instruments - usually the top voice but occasionally the bottom.

REPERTORY FOR ENSEMBLE ORNAMENTATION

For ensemble ornamentation the most convenient repertory is the imitative material, both sacred and secular, from the sixteenth century because of the relative case of avoiding simultaneous ornamentation. But other types of compositions from that century will allow for a modest amount of ornamentation by all members, and occasional short graces can be used without tear of confusing the harmonies or causing great dissonances.

SUMMARY

The evidence that has survived tells us that ornamentation was regularly added in performances of early music. Certain figures peculiar to each century and location were the particular elements of local style, but the basic ideas of graces, *passaggi*, and cadential figures were common to all. In a modern re-creation of this music performers should be prepared to add some of these according to the proper styles, as discussed above, and to decide how much to add within any particular style. It is not necessary for all embellishments of, say, a sixteenth-century Italian composition to take on the florid extremes found in some of the manuals, nor is it wise for many even to attempt this.

The performers must decide how much they feel capable of adding. The fact that a sixteenth-century virtuoso wished to display his technical prowess does not indicate either that it was considered in good taste or that everyone in his era strove to emulate him; that some performers in the early centuries displayed their technique at the expense of the music is well documented.

What is suggested here is that some ornaments should be added to most early music, and that the quantity and type should be decided according to the evidence of style, the ability of the performer to execute them gracefully, and the effect the ornaments have on the composition. It is up to modern performers to decide for themselves the degree to which they will decorate the music and/or display their technique. The two elements are not incompatible, and each case must be decided on its own.

5.4. Bernard Thomas: Divisions in Renaissance music[12]

A rich source of ornamentation of all kinds - if one knows what to do with it - is tablature, both for fretted instruments, and for keyboard. Obviously tablature, which in its purest form is a set of instructions about where the player puts his fingers, relates much more directly to actual performance than does mensural notation; so it is not surprising to find

[12] *Companion to Medieval & Renaissance Music*, ed.: T. Knighton and D. Fallows, J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd, London 1992

that written-out divisions are much more common in lute and keyboard music than in music written in parts.

The lute-player today is in a unique position compared to his colleagues playing wind and bowed instruments. He has a large repertory in which melodic ornamentation is often completely integrated into the music, though there is much evidence to suggest that additional graces such as mordents and short trills, were assumed at times. He even has division parts designed for ensemble use, as in the solo lute parts of the English mixed consort repertory, and there are many examples in music for two or more lutes of single-line divisions of a contrapuntal kind, as in the '*La Spagna*' settings in the Siena lute book.

… Much of the ornamentation in this repertory sounds quite ridiculous when applied to other instruments. …

Once again, this has to be treated very circumspectly if we are to use the material for other instruments. The divisions in these collections often involve a great deal of passing dissonance, which is not in itself a problem in music with a clear chordal structure (see below), but it also involves irrational leaps from one register to another, as in ex. 1.

If we were to transfer the moving passage to a melody instrument such as a *cornetto* or recorder, the leaps would sound quite bizarre, but when the whole is played on one or more plucked instruments, the ear smooths out the melodic progressions. Even bowed instruments can get away with a little of this, but not wind instruments. The difference between lutes at one extreme, and wind at the other, can be summed up in the fact that lutes often had their lower courses doubled at the octave. If we imagine a recorder consort, or indeed any wind consort, in which every note below middle C was doubled an octave higher, the differences become clear. …

To some extent we have to assume that every instrument had its own idiom: flue instruments may well have been played with a lot of finger vibrato, as they are in traditional music in many parts of the world (eastern Europe, China, Ireland, etc.). It is reasonable to assume, however, that instruments capable of playing both chords and melodies would have had a radically different approach to divisions from those confined to a single line, which would presumably have had essentially the same approach to musical intervals, and a roughly comparable range, as has the human voice.

So singers and players of sustaining instruments have to be very selective in adapting material from lute and keyboard divisions. Perhaps ornate intabulations are more useful as a general guide to the way a decorated piece is shaped and paced, than as a specific model to be actually transferred to another instrument.

5.5. Ulrike Engelke:

Summary of Rules from Tutors by Ganassi, Ortiz, Finck, Caccini, Friderici, Bevicelli, Diruta, and Praetorius

1.Avoid embellishments at the start of a composition.

2.Begin to use embellishments toward the middle and increase their number towards the end, but beware of exaggeration.

3.All longer notes are embellished.

4.Use *coloratura* on long syllables.

5.Generally, use embellishments with moderation at the proper places, not incessantly.

6.Every part may be embellished. Some composers except the bass.

7.If several singers use *coloratura*, special care has to be taken and it is advisable for them to come into prominence alternately.

8.It is even permitted to use *coloratura* in a choir, although this cannot be done without discordances.

9.All kinds of compositions can be embellished.

10.In a fugue diminution, the ornaments must be strictly retained in all parts.

11.The measure must be strictly adhered to in *fioriture*.

12.On the other hand, an appropriate freedom of measure is permitted.

13.Offences against the ban on fifths and octaves are irrelevant, as they can hardly be noticed due to the speed of the movement.

Accento

Praetorius in Syntagma musicum (1619): "*Accentus* means, the note stems have to be drawn in the following way.

N.B. The note with two flags, marked by a 3., means it really has to be a note with three flags, of which 2. are needed to fill a bar."

Accento was the collective term for the shorter ornaments.
According to Praetorius: "It was up to the singer to start the intonation (*internatio*) with the proper note, or to slide up from the lower second, third or fourth."

Mordent (Mordant)

Ammerbach writes in 1571: "A mordent is a shake from one key (*clavis*) to the next one, which brings adornment and loveliness. It exists in two kinds, namely ascending or descending."

Ammerbach's mordent always starts with the principal note and, when ascending, uses the lower auxiliary note, when descending the upper one

Tremolo

Praetorius: 'Tremolo is nothing but the shaking of the voice on one note: organ players call it mordent or 'moderant'."

'This concerns organs and instruments with quills more than the human voice."

Shakes — Tremoletti

Praetorius always writes down tremoletti with the upper auxiliary note.

Tremoli, tremoletti and groppi always start with the principal note; the upper note is the auxiliary note in the tremolo (what we call trill), only in the groppo (the predecessor of the trill with termination) is the lower one used.

The duration of tremoli and tremoletti is half the note value.

Tiratae (Tirades)

Praetorius: 'Tiratae are long fast runs played gradually up and down the keyboard."

The faster and the more sharply-defined these runs are played, the better and more graceful it will be: each note must be heard and understood clearly."

Trillo

Praetorius: 'There are two kinds of trills: one is played unisono, on one line or in the space: i.e. many quick notes are played in succession."

'The other trill concerns various modes."

Praetorius uses the following signs for these trillo (trills): ***t, tr, tri.***

Table of ornaments made by Emilio del Cavaliere the year1600.[13]

Groppo

Praetorius: "Groppi are used in cadenzas and formal clausulas and must be more sharply defined than the tremoli."

A groppo can be played in two ways:

1.exactly in time

2.slightly delaying its end.

"It should not end with the haste it has started."

Methodical Instructions for Diminutions in Our Time (Engelke)

1.Division of the note to be diminished into equal parts upwards and downwards.

2.Combination of varying note values by means of a rhythmic pattern.

[13] See Music Examples A Ch. V-6 Engelke, Cavalieri.

3.Combination of varying dotted note values.

4.Paraphrases involving the second, the third, the fourth and the fifth upwards and downwards.

5.Leaps, upwards and downwards, going as far as the fifth. (But according to Ortiz, the leap at the end of the diminution must contain the same interval as the undecorated melody.

6.Octave leaps at the start of a melody are possible; they must be executed diatonically up- or downwards.

5.6. T. J. McGee I: *Cantare all 'improvviso*[14]

5.7. B. Thorn: Renaissance improvisation - do it yourself[15]

In this practical chapter, I wanted to add two more learning systems, approaches to improvisation (primarily) of Renaissance and early Baroque music, the first by Australian author Benjamin Thorn (2001) and the second by Swiss pedagogue Andreas Habert (1995). Both are intended primarily as teaching manuals (with the help of a teacher or for self-learners) for children or beginners regarding improvisation of any kind. Additionally, both systems utilize what we have already mentioned and what we will encounter again in William Dongois' improvisation manual - the so-called *ostinato* or ground basses. These are essentially sequences of chords, harmonies,[16] of relatively short duration that were repeated while singers or instrumentalists improvised above them, ranging from simpler to very virtuosic diminutions. Both systems are primarily intended for performance on recorders, but of course, they can work excellently on other early (or modern) melodic instruments, such as the flute, violin, viola, lira da braccio, or *cornetto*.

I will start with quotes from Benjamin Thorn's manual "*Renaissance Improvisation - Do It Yourself*":

> Initially the best way to approach improvisation on the various ground basses, is to play the piece as written, which in each case involves at least three times through the ground, and then while the ground repeats, to try and continue to play over the bass. The reason for playing the written part first is that it both gives you some ideas for what sounds okay and also enables you to begin to feel how the harmonic progression works. After you have had some experience you can reduce this introduction to the first cycle of the bass or even just start improvising.
>
> For groups, play through the written part in unison and then take turns to improvise for one cycle of the bass each.
>
> Do NOT be discouraged!

---

[14] *Improvisation in the arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. T. J. McGee, Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2003. See in the Chapter 7, p.53.
[15] Benjamin Thorn: *Do It Yourself Renaissance Improvisation*, Orpheus Music, Armidale, N.S.W., 2001.
[16] Exclusively based on the principle, something similar to what jazz musicians refer to as "Rhythm changes."

When you start doing this it is quite likely that you will play things that you really wish you hadn't. Everyone does it and you should accept it as part of the learning process.

Hints for improvising[17]

Improvisation can involve lots of fast notes and filling the gaps of the original melody etc. but it can also involve simplifying the original melody. You can get an attractive effect by being almost minimalist.

Look at the bass line and work out what notes will fit against it.

Try and develop a repertoire of musical gestures that can be combined when you improvise. This is the basis of most styles of improvisation.

Arpeggios at any speed will always work.

Simple scales often work well too.

Learn from your mistakes. If what you do is a total disaster try to remember what you did and don't do it next time. Again, do NOT be discouraged! If you never make a "mistake" you're probably not being adventurous enough.

If you end up on a note that you would prefer not to be on, try to turn it into an appoggiatura or other type of ornament. A lot of exciting improvisation is generated by getting out of scrapes.

In the appendix at the end of the book there are simple examples of possible ways of moving across particular intervals in the space of a bar. If you feel stuck, look at them and practise them so that they can become part of your repertoire of gestures. You should also practice them in different keys and tempi.

Groups

If you are working in a group, after you have each tried improvising alone you should try to improvise in pairs. This is a little bit trickier since you have to listen to what your partner is doing as well as make up something yourself.

Generally (to start with) at least one of the pair should try to play something that is quite simple. Don't be afraid of rests. Try to avoid being too clever, such as using triplets (even if they're perfectly okay when you're by yourself).

You can also try imitating each other.

After you've tried pairs you can also try trios and quartets (anything much more than a quartet is liable to be a bit confused).

Bass lines

[17] See Music Examples A Ch. V-7 and 8, Thorn Intervals 1 and 2

The bass lines in these pieces have largely been written in whole notes. They need not be played like that however. Different rhythmic patterns can be used (sometimes this is useful since it helps the soloists to keep in time!) and the bass can also do its own improvisation. Adding percussion will also work well for these pieces.

The most important thing is to have FUN!

The Ground Basses[18]

A number of ground basses were commonly used in the renaissance for dance and sometimes art music, many of them, as will be seen, differing from each other only slightly. Generally they were eight bars long with the fourth bar ending on the fifth (dominant). The main differences between grounds often depend on what the note the first and fifth bars use. Two four bar grounds are also included: *Bergamasca* which has closed ending on the tonic and the *recercada* which has an open ending on the fifth. …

For more details and for musical examples see in book by Benjamin Thorn, *Do It Yourself Renaissance Improvisation*, Orpheus Music.

5.8. Andreas Habert: *all' improvviso*[19]

Improvisation can be learned; improvisation is not only an expression of genius and inspiration, but for the most part the result of stylistic experience, knowledge of musical rules, and - to be sure - practice.

This guide to improvising in the style of the 16th and 17th centuries aims to create situations that allow for initial improvisation experiences without nurturing fear of wrong notes through too many rules. Some courage is still necessary; courage to engage in something unpredictable; courage to endure the mistakes necessary in every learning process; courage to trust one's own imagination. We have tried to design the improvisational situations in such a way that no one should feel overwhelmed….

Due to its diverse possibilities for realization, this guide is suitable for self-study as well as for individual or group lessons.

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the diverse forms of improvisation in the 15th century (solo *recercare*, lute prelude, organ fantasy, diminution, etc.), an improvisational model emerges that has fascinated improvising musicians and composers throughout the following centuries: the variation over an *ostinato* (i.e., constantly recurring) harmonic sequence. D. Ortiz calls it in 1553 "*Recercadas sobre Tenores Italiano*," later it is called "Partita," "Chaconne," "Passacaglia," or "Division on a Ground."

Its roots can be found in Spanish-Italian gallant music, in the harmonic structure of ballads, and in the improvisation technique of 15th-century dance musicians. It is suitable for simple dance music as well as for elaborate chamber variations, for soloists as well as

[18] See Music Examples A Ch. V-9 Thorn, Examples of ostinato basses

[19] Andreas Habert: *all' improvviso*, Musikverlag Pan AG, Zürich (pan 172), 1995.

for chamber music, for melody as well as harmony instruments, occasionally combining with the rondo and even the canon. What makes this form so fascinating for musicians of all epochs is probably that it combines the immutable (the ostinate harmonic sequence) and the ever-changing (the variations thereon) within itself.

For an introduction to (historical) improvisation, the form of variation over an ostinato harmonic sequence is particularly suitable for the following reasons:

- The harmonic sequences sound quite familiar to our ears trained in Classical and Baroque music.

- Ground melodies associated with various harmonies ("guidelines") serve as a guide for the first improvisational steps.

- The degree of constraint is variable, meaning the player can decide whether and to what extent to follow a "guideline," whether to use one or more motifs in a variation, etc.

- This type of improvisation is very suitable as preparation for learning 16th-century diminutions, "doubles" in French Baroque music, and improvisations in folk music.

<u>For practical application:</u>

*The proposed progression from drone[20] (one and the same harmonic sequence for the entire piece) to changing drone (alternating between two harmonies) to the "*passamezzo antico*," perhaps the most commonly used harmonic sequence of the 16th century, is primarily intended to minimize rules for beginners at the beginning and thus reduce the fear of wrong notes as much as possible.

*From one exercise to the next, the rules become stricter, while the harmonic possibilities simultaneously expand. To avoid both overburdening and feeling lost, one should only move on to the next exercise when feeling comfortable and confident in the previous one, able to improvise with joy.

*Each of the following exercises is preceded by a short composition serving as an introduction and an example. The selection and arrangement were made based on methodological rather than stylistic considerations; therefore, they do not reflect historically accurate performance practices (for example, a pavane would certainly not have been accompanied by a drone!).

*As solo instruments for improvisation, the following are suggested: recorder (in C or F), flute, oboe, violin, or the right hand of the harpsichordist or pianist; all examples can be transposed to other octave ranges if necessary. While it is fundamentally possible to perform the improvisation with a bass instrument (cello, viola da gamba, bassoon), it is not possible to convey the specific rules required for harmonically correct realization within the scope of this guide. In this case, prefer the higher range of the instrument.

[20] IP: We know that it was often used in medieval music and is still used in traditional music of many European countries (including Croatia) as well as in classical music from non-European countries, for example, in India.

*Accompaniment can be provided either by the accompanying CD or by a 2-3 part ensemble (alto, tenor, bass), or alternatively by a bass instrument alone; guitar or a keyboard instrument, including the left hand of the harpsichordist, can also be used if the right hand is improvising.

Simultaneous improvisation by two soloists (except for exercises VIII-X) is not recommended.

*Both when playing with the CD and when improvising with an accompanying ensemble, it is advisable to use the rondo form frequently, i.e., a regular alternation between a fixed refrain (e.g., the prelude or a part of the examples) and improvisation, as described under 176-8. This avoids overburdening the soloist with overly long improvisation phases and prevents excessive boredom for the accompanying ensemble.

Comments on the musical examples: see this and examples in the A. Habert's book, *all' improvviso.*

See also in the Appendix/ Various Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation.

5.9. William Dongois: Learn to Improvise with Renaissance Music[21]

The French virtuoso on the *cornetto* (in the Renaissance and early Baroque periods), pedagogue, and improviser rightly entitled his manual "*Methodology of Improvisation*." Since this is one of the few but extraordinary modern manuals of this kind, I attempted to present the most essential points through the following quotes - thereby giving those who might be interested in further, more in-depth study a strong reason to acquire the second edition of this work, which has been out of print for many years. At this point, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to colleague Dongois for kindly allowing me to use a copy of it after my numerous unsuccessful attempts to obtain the book through a French antiquarians. It is great that since 2023, this marvellous manual exists again in a second edition!

According to the author, this manual is intended for:

..."All those who have learned an instrument through notation as the sole medium and who would like to be able to go beyond this framework of practice. Singers are invited to join instrumentalists. During the Renaissance, diminution was primarily a vocal practice that instrumentalists must imitate. ..... These are also the first written methods for learning (music/instrument). In the Renaissance, learning to play or sing meant learning to diminish. On the other hand, if we refer to all sources dealing with diminution, statistically, it seems to be primarily a vocal technique. As for other aspects of improvisation (creating new melodic lines, ornamentation), sources clearly refer primarily to vocal practice. Nevertheless, since I am an instrumentalist and want to stay within my skills, I could not avoid directing this method towards instrumental work, which is my main activity. .....

[21] William Dongois: *Apprendre à improviser avec la musique de la Renaissance* Méthodologie d'improvisation, Éditions Color & Talea, Gennevilliers, 2008., 2nd edition 2023. See Music Examples A Ch. V-10 to V-13 Dongois.

For those who might take this task too seriously, the following warnings may not be unnecessary:

1.A written improvisation method for learning improvisation is [in itself] nonsense, absurd...

2.Nevertheless, some things that cannot be reduced to written expression must be established in this way as criteria.

3.Everything that follows is very incomplete: other pedagogical approaches are necessary.

4.Above all, it is important to practice with others; to begin with, attend a course, socialize with people who can improvise more or less; from time to time, "dive in," trying to improvise at all costs. The method of work must arise from desire and/or need. Theory in this field must be a way of organizing for the sake of practice efficiency. It simply serves as a criterion.[22]

5.The written repertoire is an inexhaustible source of ideas. Many compositions are closely related to improvisation practices. .....

The objectives of this methodology

*Provide everyone with the means to take a step towards improvisation.

*Not to give illusions without dramatization. It is neither easy nor difficult to improvise; it is the result of regular work in a certain state of mind. .....

*The improviser does not speak about improvisation: he [she] improvises.

*Practice is the best method, and necessity/need is the best guide. Motivations: this is an essential parameter. They vary from person to person and must be clear and conscious. ...

Treatises on diminution/ornamentation show a close connection between learning the instrument, acquiring technique, and improvisation. Therefore, it is partly about relearning how to play one's own instrument.

Improvisation, diminution, and ornamentation, which are not within the realm of the "notated," are a necessity in the professional context of early music. .....

For many other important thoughts and advice, please consult the Dongois book, see above.

See also in C.Selected Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation, p.23

[22] Speaking from my own experience, the method of “dive in” can be warmly recommend for any style of music.

B.Introduction to the Practice of "Singing from the Book":

5.10. Peter Schubert: Introduction to Improvisation[23]

In Chapter 4, we have already encountered a very interesting article by Professor Peter Schubert, a musicologist and artistic director of several vocal ensembles, who has been teaching modal counterpoint for years and working with his colleagues and students on the revival of the practice of "singing from the book."[24] I highly recommend to anyone who may be interested to find and watch several of his YouTube videos on this topic.

Schubert wrote that during the Renaissance era, contrapuntal improvisation served as the fundamental training ground for composition. Adrian Petit Coclico penned a treatise in 1552 detailing the high regard in which the renowned composer Josquin Desprez held improvised counterpoint, recognizing its significance for aspiring composers:

(Coclico)

> There are many who pride themselves on being composers because they have composed many pieces, having followed the rules and types of composition but making no use of counterpoint; my master Josquin thought little of them and held them as a laughing-stock, saying they wish to fly without wings. The first requirement of a good singer is that he should know how to sing counterpoint by improvisation. Without this he will be nothing. Secondly, he should be led to composing by a great desire, and by a certain natural impulse he will be driven to composition, so that he will not taste food nor drink until his piece is finished, for, since this natural impulse so drives him, he accomplishes more in one hour than others in a whole month. Composers to whom these unusual motivations are absent are useless.

Musical training began with improvised singing in church. Coclico describes in a bit more detail how counterpoint was taught. Once the pupil knows all the vertical consonances (from a third to a triple compound sixth, or a twenty-seventh), he then[25]

> provides himself with a slate on which one may write and erase: he takes a tenor from plainchant and at first writes note against note, using these intervals. Whenever he has gotten used to making note against note by improvisation and has become practiced in it, then he can go on to florid counterpoint. In this, when he has become trained, he will put aside the slate and learn to sing in improvising on a plainchant or on figured music printed in a book or copied on a sheet of paper. But this is a task for continual exercise.

Most treatises that teach counterpoint are really teaching improvisation. The examples in this book that are taken from treatises illustrate what a ten-year-old boy might do on the spot. They aren't supposed to be particularly elegant or artistic, but simply correct and roughly within the style. If you improvise, concentrate at first on not breaking hard rules. Once you get fast and proficient, you can worry about being stylish.

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[23] Peter Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint*, Renaissance Style, Second Edition, New York Oxford Oxford University Press, 2008

[24] At Canadian McGill University, Schulich School of Music, Montreal.

[25] The following has been already quoted in the Chapter 4., Schubert p.22.

If you want to try this (or your teacher insists), you should be aware that improvising is just very fast composition. If your teacher says, "Who wants to try improvising against these two notes?'' it's OK to raise your hand. In the few seconds before you are called on, you can be thinking about what notes you will sing in your solution. If you need more time to think, stand up, adjust your collar, cough, etc. Remember, there are a lot of correct solutions (there were 37 in Ex. 3-lc-d).[26] You're almost bound to get one of them. If you make a mistake, it's no big deal; remember: it's "a task for continual exercise."

Visual, Auditory, Tactile, or What?

How will you do this? I remember a student who came to audition for my chorus. When I asked him to sight-sing, he held the music in his left hand, and as he sang he moved his right forearm up and down. He was a trombone player, and he was pretending he was moving the slide in and out. He sang correctly and very in tune! He was using what is called a "physical referent"; i.e., he associated the sounds of the notes with his arm position. We often see pianists or trumpet players moving the fingers of their right hands as they take dictation, for the same reason. The problem for singers is that they don't have such a reference: There is no "place" in the throat where a D is.

When you improvise, you are doing something like sight-singing, and you need to use whatever works. If it helps you to imagine a keyboard, so much the better. I believe, based on Coclico's description cited earlier, that the referent for singers has to be musical notation. After you have seen some series A exercises, you may be able to visualize both the CF and the counterpoint. Some authors recommended a staff with more than five lines for this purpose so that the student could really "see" both the CF and the added line in the same space.

For instance, Ornithoparchus, an early sixteenth-century author, says: "It is necessary for young beginners to make a Scale of ten lines, then to distinguish it by bounds [add bar lines], so that they may write each time within each bound, by keys [clefs] truly marked, least [lest] the confused mingling together of the Notes hinder them." His example shows a ten-line staff with five clefs: low G (Gamma ut), F (bass), C (alto), G (treble), and high D (written dd). This pretty much covers the entire space in which Renaissance music lies! The CF is written in breves and the improvisation in black notes below. Play one voice and sing the other (note that there are two flats in the signature).[27]

This corresponds to the slate of Coclico. Only after using a visual aid for a while could the student "put away the slate" and look at any line from any source, without all the extra lines, and imagine an added part. Eventually you will just "hear" in your head what's about to happen, and your "inner ear" will develop.

For practical application see in the C.Selected Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation, from p.24.

[26] See Music Examples A Ch. V-14 Schubert ex.3-1c and 3-1d.
[27] See Ornitoparchus rules in the Appendix/ Various Rules

5.11. Barnabé Janin, Singing from the Book (in Practice)[28]

Here I provide an introduction to the practice of "singing from the book," taken from Barnabé Janin's book, along with the first in a series of tips on how to improvise. I recommend reading (and practicing if you're interested) the rest from the mentioned book.

ADVICE FOR IMPROVISING

You can "sing from the book," gathered around a score placed on the music stand.

Seek pleasant, if not flattering, acoustics.

Sing legato. This will bring out the phrasing and expression specific to each melody. Improvise with friends or future friends.

• Never speak before the end of the piece.
Do not stop at every mistake to comment on it! Mistakes are inevitable and necessary for progress. Finish, then start again: the second time will always be better.

• From time to time, write down your improvisations. Have your accomplices sing them. Accept the critiques [of your colleagues] with humility; accept their compliments with pride.

• Cantus firmus. The one singing the written melody must do so with a firm and solid voice; he [or she] is also responsible for the beat and tempo of the piece.

• Sing the written repertoire:
your improvisations will be enriched by it. …

Practical advice

For beginners, it is good to follow some guidelines - which, with experience, can gradually be abandoned.

Before starting

• Position yourselves facing each other comfortably for visual contact

• Choose a mode and check the vocal ranges

The choice of mode (see p. 184) determines a modal octave, with possible extensions. Both partners sing the octave assigned to them according to the type of canon, and adjust it in pitch to their vocal range.

• Choose lyrics

[28] Barnabé Janin, *Chanter sur le livre*, Manuel pratique d´improvisation polyphonique de la Renaissance (XVe et XVIe siècles), drugo izdanje, (Edition) Symétrie, Lyon, 2014. See also: J.-Y. Haymoz: Improvisation *à la Renaissance* - Singing on a Book, in Ch.4, pp.34-5. IP: see See Music Examples A Ch. V-23 Janin.

According to your needs and the progress of your work, you can choose to sing the canons:

- on the names of the notes (to anticipate and control the intervals used);

- on a well-sounding syllable (for pitch accuracy and vocal quality);

- on an existing text, in French, Latin, etc. (See "Texts for improvising," p. 181).

Here we go! Advice for the antecedent improviser

• Beat a clear and distinct pulse marking each beat

• Create a short canon ending with a beautiful cadence

C.Selected Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation:

1. T. McGee in general:[29]

See on p.5 in this chapter.

[The same author on underlaying, signing the text in the 16th century]:

1.Long notes receive strong beats; shorter notes are considered grouped with long ones and therefore should receive unstressed beats.

2.The first note of the composition and the first note after a rest receive a beat.

3.The last note should receive a final beat (but see rule 4).

4.A ligature receives only one beat, on the first note. If the last note of a phrase is part of a ligature, the final beat is assigned to the first note of the ligature.

5.If there are more beats than notes, the notes must be divided (but see rule 6).

6.A dotted note usually does not need to be divided. If it must be done, care should be taken so that the last value - the dot - is not unnecessarily emphasized. This is especially true in cases where there are harmonic suspensions,... In this case, there is a danger of overstressing dissonance if the beat is sung on the dot position.

7.Repeated notes at the same pitch must receive individual beats.

8.If there are many notes left at the end of a phrase, the last note is assigned to the last beat, and the rest is sung on the beat before the last. But if the last beat is unstressed, the melisma is assigned to the third beat before the last, ...

[29] T. McGee book, *Medieval and Renaissance Music*, …

2. McGee on Ornamentation:[30]

How to Ornament in Solos:

Start by selecting those pieces from the repertoire that have simple rhythms and melodic phrases, ...

1.Play or sing through... as written several times at the correct performance tempo (approximately a half-note = 120) until you feel comfortable with it. Memorize it.

2.Choose a simple cadential formula from example 7.3[31] and play through the phrase adding the cadential ornament at the point marked c until you feel comfortable.

3.Choose two places within the phrase, such as those marked a and b, to add simple grace notes, upper or lower "neighbour," as described earlier.

4.Play or sing through the entire phrase several times adding the same cadence formula and the same graces until you can do it easily and the additions sound graceful. **Do not write down the ornaments**; they are intended to be spontaneous, and one of the things you are trying to overcome is your dependence on the written page. [My emphasis.]

5.Play the same phrase many more times, adding the same type of ornaments to a series of other places.

6.When you are able to add one type of ornament almost anywhere without disrupting the tempo, try another type and start over.

7.When you are able to handle multiple types of graces, try combining them.

8.Start over, but this time add simple passaggi, filling in the interval, for example, at the place where [in the notation example] there is d and e.

9.Add to this two different graces and play the combination with passaggi and the cadence formula.

10.Move on to the next phrase in the same piece and start again from step 1 above. The entire composition should be worked through in this way, phrase after phrase. Once you have finished and are able to ornament in this way with ease, you have mastered some form of neutral ornamentation that can - with minor changes - be adapted to various styles.

11.At this point, you must consider stylistic points such as what and where to add. See tables 10 and 11 to determine the stylistic characteristics of the country and century of your piece[32] ...

12.Make additions, deletions, and corrections, and you have completed one ornament.

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[30] Ibid., McGee…
[31] See Music Examples A Ch. III-10 McGee ex.7.1 to 7.3.
[32] See Music Examples A Ch. III-13 McGee, Tables 10 and 11.

13.Choose additional compositions from the same country and period until you finally understand a particular style and apply the correct ornaments to a good portion of that repertoire. ... As you gain more confidence in your abilities and become acquainted with the variety of possible ornaments, you will gradually - one by one - remove actions until finally, probably after several months of constant practice, you will be able to add a small mixture of graces, passaggi, and cadence formulas to an entire piece, after first becoming familiar with its unadorned version. This approach can be applied to all the various ornamental styles described here.
When learning ornamentation, pay attention to the following points:

1.**Never write down your ornaments!** [My emphasis.]

2.When adding ornaments, it's a good idea to know the original version by heart.

3.Always practice ornamentation at the correct tempo.

4.Learn one style at a time. Continue working with various compositions from one era until you feel comfortable with your ability to stay within the boundaries of that specific style.

5.Continuously check what you have done [by comparing] with examples from the repertoire.

6.When you have enough confidence in ornamentation in public:

a) Try out your ideas preferably in an ensemble rather than in a solo piece; this is Zacconi's advice for beginners, as mistakes in an ensemble are less likely to be immediately noticed.

b) Choose a set of ornaments in advance and stick to them, but don't write them down. When you gain more confidence and experience, you can be even more spontaneous in public,

c) Initially, add only a few short ornaments to build confidence.

How to Ornament in an Ensemble

The application of ornaments in an ensemble is essentially the same as for solo performance. The only difference is that each member ornaments in fewer places, and the style is more restrained: no one engages in prolonged, virtuosic, soloistic style as can be seen in example 7.17.[33]

It follows that each ensemble member must first learn the soloistic technique described above. After that, proceed as follows:

1.Choose an imitative composition from the sixteenth century. (There is little evidence that ensembles practiced ornamentation in earlier centuries.)

[33] See Music Examples A Ch. V-15 McGee ex. 7.17

2.Learn the composition well without ornaments, as if it were to be performed that way, i.e., work out the tempo, expression, and so on.

3.Once the composition is learned, ornament first at the cadence in as many voices as possible, bearing in mind that only one performer may ornament [at a time]. This is easiest to achieve in imitative situations where voices reach the cadence separately, but it can also be applied in other situations by general agreement of ensemble members. (If, for example, the cadence occurs in two voices, you will have to decide which performer will ornament, but first look at the voices; not all voices will be suitable for ornamentation at that moment.) The ornament is applied to longer notes in the passage immediately before the cadence, but not to the cadence itself (pay attention to example 7.22).[34]

4.If the same passage is ornamented by several performers in short intervals [one after the other], they should try to make the ornaments resemble those of the first person who started ornamenting that passage, although they do not have to be identical - this is very difficult to achieve "on the spot."

5.Several other ornaments can be added throughout the entire composition, especially at a new imitative entrance, but avoid the first two notes so as not to disrupt the tempo of the composition and throw others off rhythm.

- It is not necessary for all ornaments, for example, in the performance of Italian compositions from the sixteenth century, to embrace the ornamental extremes found in some manuals, nor is it wise for many to attempt it at all.

- Performers must decide when and how much they feel capable of ornamenting. The fact that a sixteenth-century virtuoso wanted to showcase his technical skill does not mean that it was considered good taste, nor that everyone in his time sought to emulate it; it is well documented that some performers in earlier centuries demonstrated their technique at the expense of the music.

-Here it is suggested that some ornaments should be added to the majority of early music and that the amount and type should be decided in accordance with style sources, performers' abilities to execute them excellently, and the effect ornaments have on the composition. It is up to today's performers to decide to what extent they will ornament the music and/or showcase their technique. These two elements are not incompatible, and each case must be decided on its own.

3.T. McGee on improvisation in practice:[35]

[Opening] Prelude:

To decide on the notes to emphasize in the prelude, you must first analyse the composition it is meant to introduce, so you can decide where:

1.The modal note *finalis* - almost always the final note of the composition;

[34] See Music Examples A Ch. V-16 McGee ex. 7.22
[35] Ibid., McGee…

2.The dominant - the next most commonly used note, usually the fifth above the finalis note (you can determine this by simply observing which note, besides the finalis, is most used as a cadence and in important places in the melody);

3.Other notes frequently used in the composition.

The two notes you must emphasize the most - the final and the dominant -can be brought out by repetition, and therefore the goal is to find interesting ways to vary your presentation of the essential two notes, using the other notes of the mode to do this. The following possibilities are available:

1 *Variable tempo* Preludes usually contain a mixture of fast and sustained passages in a free tempo, presented in a dramatic manner.

2 *Variety of rhythm* You are not constrained to choose rhythms from the composition to follow, although you may do so as a source of raw material. These rhythm patterns should be developed in a far more dramatic way than they are in the composition.

3 *Melodic line* There is usually no real melody to a prelude, although you may choose a characteristic melodic figure from the composition to follow, as in the case of the rhythm. You are also free to develop your own melodic and rhythmic figures as long as the prelude continues to emphasize the mode.

4 *Scale* One method of bringing out the notes of a scale with emphasis on its final and dominant is to single out each note individually and invent a melodic-rhythmic passage around it showing its relationship to the final. … The rhythmic and melodic variations possible in this technique should provide material for preludes of any length. The only caution is that you should return to the final and dominant more frequently and more elaborately than to any other note in order to keep the emphasis balanced in their favour.

5 *Contrasting sections* Many compositions involve at least one section in which there is a change of mood, tonal area, or note emphasis. These contrasts can also be emphasized in the prelude in various ways … The above comments refer to both the monophonic preludes and those of the chordally accompanied type from the fifteenth century. The chordal additions were merely simple consonances - open fifths and thirds in the mode - to which was added a free-flowing treble line, …

4. T. McGee on counterpoint:[36]

Rules of two-part counterpoint

To construct a single line of counterpoint either above or below an existing melody the following rules were observed:

1.Only perfect intervals can be used at the beginning and end of a phrase: unison, fifth, octave. (Intervals larger than the octave were considered to be the same as those within the octave: for example, a tenth = a third.)

[36] Ibid., McGee.

2.Stepwise motion should be used wherever possible.

3.Contrary motion (moving in the direction opposite to that of the cantus firmus) is preferred.

4.Parallel motion is not permitted for the perfect intervals : for example, there should not be two or more fifths in a row.

5.Consecutive perfect intervals of different sizes can be used: for example, an octave followed by a fifth.

6.Several imperfect consonances - thirds, sixths - of either the same or different sizes may follow one another.

7.If the cantus firmus leaps, the counterpoint can move by step in similar (rather than contrary) motion to a perfect consonance.

There were more rules given by the theorists in the various centuries, but these were the essential ones needed to be able to construct a second part to an existing melody. Whether the second voice is written completely above the cantus firmus, completely below it, or crossing it, the rules remain the same concerning the kinds of motion, intervals, and sequences of consonances.

Of the two imperfect consonances it would appear that the sixth was less used and has less freedom of motion than the third. The sixth could be used between perfect intervals and within a passage of thirds, but two or more parallel sixths were used only to signal that the next note was to be the cadence. Parallel thirds did not necessarily have to become a cadence.

The rules given all refer to one note of counterpoint against a single note of the cantus firmus, but the rules can be applied to the composition of a second voice at a variety of ratios to the cantus firmus, as can be seen in the following examples. …

Cadences

A basic first step in improvising to a cantus firmus is to establish phrase lengths by locating cadence points. Cadences were determined by the melodic shape of the cantus firmus; generally they occurred on the last note of a passage in which the cantus firmus descended stepwise. Common cadence points were on the final note of such patterns …

Cadences were not frequent, and if possible notes important to the mode of the cantus firmus were chosen for the cadence, that is, the final, the dominant, or the note below the final.

Improvising two-part counterpoint

The musicians of the early centuries were apparently able to invent these improvisations extempore by merely looking at the original with the rules in mind. There is nothing to

stop modern musicians from writing down either simple or elaborate contrapuntal lines, **but it is more challenging and more authentic to learn to do them by sight**. …[37]

First you will need to build a small repertory of stock phrases which you should commit to memory. Certain note patterns are common to all melodic lines, and if you memorize their harmonic solutions it will greatly speed up learning to improvise. This does not mean that the invention of a second line is to be reduced solely to set formulae, but you should have a ready solution to most situations which can be used by habit if nothing more original occurs to you - a technique used by most twentieth-century jazz musicians.

1.Write out and play or sing into your tape recorder dozens of three- and four-note common melodic patterns such as those in example 8.8.[38] Play or sing each one at various pitch levels and in various modes. Then transpose them to the point of involving scales of up to two flats and two sharps.

2.Learn the rules of counterpoint above and work out one or more solutions for each pattern. At first you can write out the solution for a few of the patterns until you are familiar with the technique according to the rules. But, just as with ornamentation, you should be learning this without reading the solution. As soon as possible commit the counterpoint to memory so that you can add a correct second line by looking only at the cantus firmus. You should learn to improvise both above and below the cantus firmus, and you will therefore need to memorize two different sets of solutions for each melodic pattern. You can either learn both at once or concentrate on either the upper or the lower line until you have acquired facility, then go back and learn the other.

3.When you have memorized a number of solutions to common melodic patterns, apply your technique to larger phrases. Select a simple melodic line such as the Kyrie from example 8.5,[39] given above as example 8.9[40]; the line should be mostly stepwise and have a limited range,

a.Write out the cantus firmus as whole notes.

b.Mentally apply the counterpoint rules for the first eight to ten notes of your example, looking for places to apply the patterns you have memorized. Consider this much of the cantus firmus to be a complete phrase and play your second line in such a way that you form a cadence at the end. Exactly where the cadence should occur must be determined in accordance with the discussion of cadences, above.

c.Once you have successfully completed a short phrase, reflect on what intervals you used and check the intervals and progressions against the rules.

d.Try it again with the same phrase until you feel confident that you have invented according to the rules,

[37] My emphasis.
[38] See Music Examples A Ch. V-17 McGee ex.8.7-8.12
[39] See Music Examples A Ch. V-18 McGee ex.8.4 and 8.5
[40] See Music Examples A Ch. V-17 McGee ex.8.8

e.Proceed to the next phrase in the same manner, thinking it through first and then playing or singing it. When you have finished the entire cantus firmus, go back to the beginning and attempt the entire melody. Speed is not important but a steady pace is.

4.Select many more melodies from the repertory and write them out as whole notes, gradually increasing their difficulty as you gain facility, that is, more skips and larger ranges. Proceed as above for each until you have acquired facility in inventing note-against-note counterpoint to a variety of melodic shapes. Gradually increase the tempo until you can add your part at approximately whole note = 90.

5.This would be a good point to change sides if you have worked with only an upper or lower voice. Go back to step 1 and learn to improvise the other line.

6.Next, choose melodies with simple rhythms and, beginning in rhythm but slowly, work on your ability to add your line to a part that has rhythm. The complexities of the rhythm should increase as you develop facility.

At this point you have learned a neutral kind of two-part improvisation of the one-to-one type.

Simple Accompaniment

Your one-to-one technique can now be adapted to the simple style of accompaniment in which the added part moves more slowly than the original melody.

1.Look for the structural notes of the melody - those of longer duration and in important rhythmic positions.

2.Add your part according to the rules of counterpoint considering only the structural notes. You may also add an occasional passing note between your own accompanying notes. These should be added in contrary motion to the cantus firmus, but if they move quickly they need not be considered harmonically.

Florid improvisation

Inventing a florid line requires a combination of the rules of counterpoint and the technique of ornamentation discussed in chapter 7, as can be seen in the following instructions:

1.The first and last notes of your florid pattern should be harmonically compatible with the notes of the original according to the rules of counterpoint.

2.The other notes can be fairly free provided that they do not dwell on notes dissonant with the original and notes harmonically compatible with the original are used at points of major subdivision.

3.The rule forbidding parallel motion of perfect intervals should be observed as far as possible.

For other details on Three-part counterpoint etc. and music examples please see in the T. McGee's book, *Medieval and Renaissance Music*, A Performer's Guide, University of Toronto Press, Toronto Buffalo, London 1988.

5. William Dongois: Learn to Improvise with Renaissance Music II:[41]

Basic Elements for Improvisation:

...

Improvisation is listening, predicting, playing, and reacting to support, in a specific context.

.....

Learn to play freely again on the harpsichord, on a single lying note..... Explore what you can and move around boundaries and blockages... just to see.

Learn to play canons (improvised or not) **without any written support**[42], repeating on the ear what another player suggests … This canonical practice aims to reactivate the "auditory aspect of musical practice"...

On the other hand, you must play while listening to another person. Exercises on canons also highlight the speed of reaction of everyone between the idea and the produced note, and thus the degree of automation of the technique. This is a very good test. Do not be discouraged from the beginning...

Then, for fun, move on to an improvised canon (unison or octave). To do this, consult a counterpoint teacher specialized in these issues... The basic rule is simple: where the voices meet (among which we put passing tones), melodically connect only thirds, use sixths and octaves to change the cycle of thirds and direction. Fifths are possible, but not two in a row, and clearly avoid sequences of seconds. If necessary, fill in these support points with diminution.

Consider notes, formulas, and figures (see my definition of these words below) as tools. Then use them as part of your musical vocabulary.

Read (virtuoso) repertoire and consider it a reserve of figures; recognize repetitions and variations of figures. It is interesting to remove the diminutions of a sonata and find the anchoring points of the composition.

Dongois presented two kind of formulas, static and dynamic ones and analysed the three ways of diminution according to Ortiz. Author also speak about the memory formulas (see about latter in Chapter 7.):

Memory of formulas:

To remember them, they can be classified and grouped according to "affinities": they are, for example, retrograde movements or are opposite to each other; it is interesting to note the place of intervals or characteristic dynamic directions and changes of direction.

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[41] William Dongois: *Apprendre à improviser avec la musique de la Renaissance, …*

[42] My emphasis.

Formulas are basic modules of three, four, and five notes; simple formulas of six, seven, and eight notes found in the first examples of each Ganassi's *regole* can already be considered as figures.

Further Dongois give very important advice how to work, with numerous music examples, his manual is for sure one of best to find, especially useful for instrumentalists but also vocalists or anybody interesting in the practice of ornamentation and improvisation à la renaissance. See my choice in the Appendix.[43]

6.P. Schubert: Introduction to Improvisation II[44]

Improvisation and Ear Training

Improvisation is an excellent adjunct to ear-training courses. You will learn the physical sensation of being inside a fifth and how different it "feels" from a fourth or a third. Playing one line and singing the other is the best ear training there is, because you are in control of both voices, even though they may be moving independently. Your fingers do one thing, your voice another; if you can control two voices, you will be that much better at two-part dictation.

Solfège and Improvisation

The question of solfège syllables is a difficult one. Fixed doh works fine in modal music, but movable doh is a problem, since in each mode the semitone positions are different, and no single doh can be defined by semitones. It will work to sing English note names (FG, etc.) or even just nothing ("la la la") because you are already so busy figuring out where the next note will be.

Step by Step

1.The first thing is to decide if you will do this alone or with another singer (or player). If you have a colleague and you are doing first species, you can indicate with a wave of the hand when he/she should change notes, giving you time to figure out your next move. In other species, however, the rhythm has to be steady and unyielding (and slow!). If you are doing it alone, you can play the CF on a keyboard or guitar (or cello or marimba—any instrument that you play with your hands).

2.Choose an exercise from Series A, C, or D.[45]

3.Range: You must be able to improvise both above and below a CF. If you are a baritone and you are improvising above, you will have to move the CF down to where it will be below you when you are in a comfortable range. Do not play the CF where it is written in "Series A Warmups" and sing below it, thinking you are above. Thus if the CF has middle C and you mean to sing G a fifth above and instead sing G a fourth below, you are making a serious mistake.

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[43] See Music Examples A Ch. V-10 to V-13 Dongois.

[44] Peter Schubert, *Modal Counterpoint*, …

[45] See Music Examples A Ch. V-19 Schubert Serie A, V-20 Schubert Serie B, V-21 Schubert Serie C and V-22 Schubert Serie D.

4.The first move: When you get right down to it, a kind of geometry is at work here. Let's say the CF starts on C and moves to D, and you start a fifth above the first note (singing G). Then you must ask yourself, where can I go? How far and in what direction? You might remember from your Series A Warmups that F would be safe above the D (thirds are always safe to approach); then you have to know how to get from G to F. This mental process can be summed up: "How far down do I have to go to get to a note a third above the DT The answer: a whole step down.

5.An alternative to the mental process described in step 4 is quickly to choose any note, evaluate its legality, and accept or reject it. You might do this if you need to go in a specific direction (you are at the bottom of your range, you don't want to cross voices, etc.). Then you might start with a nearby note in that direction. In our example, if you didn't want to go down for some reason, you would say to yourself: "Can I stay on *G*? No. Can I move up to *A*? No. Can I move up to *B*? Yes."

6.Moving forward (stepping stones): The initial C-G fifth was like one rock in a river. You got to a second rock, the D and the F you're on now. Now from the D-F rock you have to move to the next one. Suppose the D moves down to B; if you go up, there are a lot of places you can go, because contrary motion is always safe. Each second rock becomes the first of a new pair, and a new "first move" is required. Don't bother looking ahead more than one rock until you have had some experience!

Improvising Homework

Series A and C Exercises can be improvised in class, but you should at first improvise Series D Exercises at home at your own pace. Remember to play the CF in an octave that makes your singing fall into a comfortable range. In first species, there is a requirement that the added line cover the modal octave, so you should mentally mark in advance your high and low points (a good plan is to put your high point near the lowest point of the CF. and vice versa, to facilitate contrary motion). Now you need to look a little more than one note ahead. Take your time—savour each vertical interval, harmonize with the piano! After you have done a few notes you like, see if you can remember them and write them down. Memory training is an important side effect of this whole process.

7. Barnabé Janin, Singing from the Book II (in Practice)[46]

Check the advices by J.-Y. Haymoz (Ch.4, p.34) and B. Janin (Ch.4, p.36).

See the music example in Appendix V-23 Janin and please consult his manual in a university library or buy it, like I did.

To remember and repeat:

A.Practical Tips on Ornamentation and Improvisation

[McGEE] p.5 Basic Musical Problems, p.6.Ornamentation,

p.9.Graces and Passagi, p.10.Ensemble ornamentation,

[46] Barnabé Janin, *Chanter sur le livre*, …

[THOMAS-Divisions] p.10.

[ENGELKE] p.11. Summary of Rules from Tutors by Ganassi, Ortiz, Finck, Caccini, Friderici, Bevicelli, Diruta, and Praetorius

[McGEE] *Cantare all 'improvviso*, p.14.

[THORN] p.15. Renaissance improvisation - do it yourself, p.16. Hints for improvising, p.17. The Ground Basses

[HABERT] p.17. *all' improvviso*, p.18. Variation over an ostinato harmonic sequence

[DONGOIS I] p.19. Learn to Improvise with Renaissance Music,

p.20. The objectives

B.Introduction to the Practice of "Singing from the Book":

[SCHUBERT I] p.20. Introduction to Improvisation I,

p.22. Visual, Auditory, Tactile, or What?

[JANIN I] p.22. Singing from the Book (Advices)

C.Selected Rules on Ornamentation and Improvisation:

[McGEE] p. 24. General Rules, Ornamentation (How to ornament in solos),

p.26. When learning ornamentation, pay attention to the following points, How to Ornament in an Ensemble,

p.27.Improvisation in practice (Prelude),

p.28. On Counterpoint (Rules of two-part counterpoint),

p.29. Cadences, Improvising two-part counterpoint

p.31. Simple Accompaniment, Florid improvisation

[DONGOIS II] p.31. Basic Elements for Improvisation, p.32. Memory of formulas:

[SCHUBERT II] p.33. Introduction to Improvisation II (Improvisation and Ear Training, Solfège and Improvisation and Step by Step)

p.34. Improvising Homework

[JANIN II] p.34. Singing from the Book (see in Chapter 4. or in his book.)

Reading recommendations:

BRESGEN, Cesar: *Die Improvisation in der Musik*, … See also in the Appendix, 8.1.GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

DONGOIS, William: *Apprendre à improviser avec la musique de la Renaissance,* … See 8.1. Ibid

ENGELKE, Ulrike: *Musik und Sprache,* … See 8.1. Ibid

HABERT, Andreas: *all' improvviso*, … See 8.1. Ibid

JANIN, Barnabé: *Chanter sur le livre* … See 8.1. Ibid

MCGEE, T.J.: *Medieval and Renaissance Music*, … and *Improvisation in the arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, … See 8.1. Ibid

SCHUBERT, Peter: *Modal Counterpoint, Renaissance Style, …* See 8.1. Ibid

THORN, Benjamin: *Do It Yourself Renaissance Improvisation*, … See 8.1. Ibid