

## EDITORIAL DECISIONS FOR ORNAMENTS IN BACH'S WORKS

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Practicing musicians are often unaware of the difficult decisions that must be made in preparing an edition of music found only in manuscript form. With ornamentation, for example, we have tended to take the view that if a little is good, more is better. We believe that composers “expected” performers to add embellishment to a composition, but the fact is that some did and some did not. According to Johann Adolf Scheibe, who had studied with Johann Sebastian Bach several years earlier, the player is not at liberty to alter pieces already embellished by the composer:

In performing the newer pieces, many of the greatest instrumental virtuosos think themselves too learned to yield to composers' sensible wishes. . . . No one knows better than the composer himself what will increase the beauty of his work. Very often the best pieces are spoiled by contempt for the composer's wishes. One of the greatest virtues of a practicing musician, indeed the most praiseworthy quality, is to be content with what the composer has written, when that is reasonable.

But it is a different matter, continues Scheibe, with pieces meant for the soloist to show his skill and invention.<sup>1</sup> Because few of these

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Scheibe, *Critischer Musikus*, 2d. ed. (Leipzig, 1745), 558 f.: “Viele der grössten Virtuosen, auf Instrumenten, dünken sich bereits weise genug zu seyn, als dass sie den vernünftigen Erinnerungen ihres vorgesetzten Capellmeisters, oder des Componisten, bey der Aufführung neuer musikalischer Stücke, nachgeben sollten. Sie müssen aber nicht bedenken wollen, dass niemand besser, als der Componist selbst, wisse, was die Schönheit seiner Stücke vermehret, und dass sehr oft durch Verachtung der Erinnerungen des Componisten die besten Stücke verdorben werden. Ich sehe es also allemal für eine der grössten Tugenden, ja für die rühmlichste Eigenschaft eines praktischen Musikanten an, wenn er sich nach den Vorstellungen des Componistens, wenn sie vernünftig sind, gebührend bequemet. Eine andere Beschaffenheit aber hat