

RELEVANT ADVICE FROM THE 18TH CENTURY ON PLAYING 18TH CENTURY MUSIC

Pianists for nearly 200 years have been content to approach 18th century music in many respects as they would any other music. In so doing, many expressive parameters have been overlooked, and much detail in the music has gone unrecognized. Seeking and heeding the advice provided by 18th century composers and musical writers is not just a pursuit for musicologists. Anyone's musicianship can be transformed by absorbing this crucially important and highly relevant body of information, most all of which is available in English translations.

The primary original sources for 18th century performance practice are the treatises, of which there are hundreds. The best known are by Johann Joachim Quantz, CPE Bach, Leopold Mozart, and Daniel Gottlieb Türk. These sources are referred to extensively in the information below. While footnotes are not provided here, the citations are documented in my 1985 Indiana University doctoral dissertation, "The Solo Keyboard Sonatas and Sonatinas of Georg Anton Benda: A Stylistic Analysis, Their Historical Context, and a Guide to Performance." However, copies of this 2 volume resource are only in the possession of the writer, the Indiana University Music Library, and the Sibley Music Library of the Eastman School of Music. Two more recent and easily obtainable comprehensive resources which cover the same subjects and belong in every serious pianist's library are Sandra Rosenblum's Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications, and Clive Brown's Classical and Romantic Performance Practice 1750-1900.

Tempo

Finding the appropriate tempo for any piece of 18th century music is absolutely crucial, and many 18th century composers emphasized the importance of adopting the appropriate tempo:

"When a work by Beethoven had been performed, his [Beethoven's] first question was always, 'How were the tempi?' Every other consideration seemed to be of secondary importance to him." (Schindler) "Correct tempo contributes to expression to a very large degree. . . . The most excellent composition has little or no effect, when it is performed in a noticeably wrong tempo." (Turk) "A small degree faster or slower can do much damage to the effect of a composition." (Sulzer) "There are substantial considerations, which are absolutely necessary and upon which everything else depends, namely: First, the right tempo. . . . The whole character of the piece will be distorted by a false tempo." (Czerny) "Tempo selection is by which the true worth of a musician can be recognized without fail" (Leopold Mozart)

Until significantly into the 19th century, when performers assumed the license to create their own, sometimes idiosyncratic concept of a piece, and when much of the newly composed literature lent itself to this subjective approach, there were guidelines which were understood and accepted by experienced musicians.

With no metronome in existence until the second decade of the 19th century, musicians utilized the meter signature and the note values contained in the score to determine the appropriate tempo. If the composer provided Italian words at the beginning of the piece, these were also factored into the decision. Later 18th century composers put much attention on selecting the ideal word. This is evidenced by their frequently having changed their instructions, either by adding qualifiers or substituting an entirely different word. Mozart did this literally hundreds of times. The almost universal absence of tempo/character indications in the works of J. S. Bach is not evidence that any tempo was acceptable, but rather, that Bach assumed the player would arrive at the appropriate tempo based only on the evidence of the meter signature and the note values he provided. The fact that on a number of occasions, Bach changed the note values and meter signature he had originally employed is significant. Mozart and others very frequently changed common time to alla breve, or vice versa. That

there were a large number of different meter signatures employed in the first ½ of the 18th century also testifies to the fact that the choice of meter signature contained huge implications in the 18th century.

These implications governed not only tempo selection, but also the accentuation patterns which were an essential expressive element in every performance. Eighteenth century musicians would be horrified that most people playing their music today are not aware of the fundamental role which accentuation was expected to assume in performance.

It must be understood that it is a mistake to overgeneralize about tempo choices in the past. Like so many aspects of performance practice, tempo has varied according to the chronological time period, the nationality or region, and the individual composer. There has not been one long steady, uninterrupted line of development in any single direction.

Proof of the variety of tempi observed in different regions can be seen in observations emanating from Berlin in the mid-18th century. Quantz (1752) wrote of contemporary Italian violinists: "The Adagio they play too boldly, the allegro too lethargically." C. P. E. Bach (1753) wrote: "In certain other countries there is a marked tendency to play adagios too fast and allegros too slow. . . . Here [in Berlin] . . . adagio is far slower and allegro far faster than is customary elsewhere."

The differences between German and Italian tempi were also noted by Mozart. In 1770, an audience in Naples was so amazed by the speed of Mozart's Presto that they attributed magic to a ring he was wearing at the time. Mozart himself viewed Clementi as a charlatan partially because of Clementi's habit, influenced by the practices in his native Italy, of marking an *alla breve* movement presto or prestissimo and playing it in what Mozart, under German influences, viewed as 4/4 Allegro time.

Curt Sachs (1953) explained Germany's difference from other countries with regard to tempo as a result of its being "in general less classicistic than her neighbors, England, France and Italy. . . . Tempo has always been intimately connected with the degrees of classicistic or anti-classicistic attitude within a given country, time or style. Classicism, it is true, appears in numberless shades. But all of them, whatever they are, share one leading quality—moderation. In terms of tempo, this means in the first place abstention from any extreme in speed and in slowness. Germany, less classicistic than her neighbors, would then have a wider range in tempo."

Yet, the Italians had not always favored more moderate tempi than the Germans. In 1701 Georg Muffat wrote: "In directing the measure or beat, one should for the most part follow the Italians, who are accustomed to proceed much more slowly than we [Germans] do at the directions adagio, grave, largo, etc., so slowly sometimes that one can surely wait for them, but at the directions allegro, vivace, presto, piu presto, and prestissimo much more rapidly and in a more lively manner."

Quantz (1752) confirmed the slowness of German tempi in the era previous to his own: "In former times most of the instrumental music of the Germans looked very confusing and hazardous on paper, since they wrote many notes with three, four or more crooks. But since they performed them at a very deliberate speed, their pieces still sounded flat and indolent rather than lively....What in former times was considered to be quite fast would have been played almost twice as slow as in the present day. An Allegro assai, Presto, Furioso, etc., was then written, and would have been played, only a little faster than an Allegretto is written and performed today. The large number of quick notes in the instrumental pieces of the earlier German composers thus looked much more difficult and hazardous than they sounded. "

It is against this background that comments with respect to J. S. Bach's tempi should be evaluated. There is no doubt he favored what were perceived as fast tempi, since his obituary, written by C. P. E. Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, stated: "In conducting he was very accurate, and of the tempo, which he generally took very lively, he was uncommonly sure." Forkel further reported: "When he played his own music Bach usually adopted a brisk pace." But it should be remembered that Bach's training began in the 17th century and much of the music which he heard then was that which Quantz

stated was performed so extremely slowly. Even if J. S. Bach was a believer in tempi considerably faster than the norm of his time, Türk's statements, occurring in the 1802 edition of his *Klavierschule*, which were written exactly 50 years after Quantz's treatise, should be kept in mind before adopting extremely fast tempi in J. S. Bach's works: "A far more moderate tempo is taken for granted for an Allegro composed fifty years or more ago than that employed for a more recent composition with the same superscription."

Therefore, according to the writings of Quantz and Türk, tempo supposedly doubled by 1750, and increased "far more" by 1800. Although the present writer cautions against taking these observations too literally, Quantz's statements do provide the basis for not allowing one self to be misled by the small note values abundant in much early 18th century music, and consequently adopt inappropriately fast tempi.

Eighteenth century writers frequently warned against excessive speed. Quantz advised: "Your principal goal must always be the expression of the sentiment, not quick playing. . . . Those who wish to touch people must play each piece with its proper fire; but they must also avoid immoderate haste, if the piece is not to lose all its agreeableness. . . . Everything that is hurriedly played causes your listeners anxiety rather than satisfaction."

W. A. Mozart frequently expressed his concern regarding excessively fast performance. Regarding Abbe Vogler's frantic, and consequently inaccurate, reading of one of Mozart's concerti, he wrote: "It is much easier to play a thing quickly than slowly: in difficult passages you can leave out a few notes without anyone noticing it. But is that beautiful?" Mozart stated shortly thereafter that he preferred to hear his works played by the inexperienced Aloysia Weber, rather than by Vogler, because she played "slowly but without missing a single note." Johann Friedrich Rochlitz stated in 1798: "Nothing roused Mozart to livelier protest than did 'botching' of his compositions when performed in public, mainly through excessively fast tempi. 'They think that will add fire to it,' he would say, 'The fire has got to be in the piece itself—it won't come from galloping away with it.'"

Young performers are often especially guilty of excessive haste, since, according to Quantz, they "possess neither ripe judgement nor a true feeling for how each piece ought to be played in the tempo and style appropriate to it. Such young people usually play everything they encounter, whether it is Presto, Allegro, or Allegretto at the same speed. In doing this they even believe they are excelling others. . . . Those who do not soon correct this error, which is caused by youthful fire, will persist in it, if not forever, at least until far into their mature years."

But neither should one perform quick movements too slowly. Even Türk, who took many opportunities to criticize overly fast performance, and whose taste tended toward slowish tempi, had harsh words for those who turned a Presto into an Allegro moderato.

Excessively slow tempi for slow movements were not exempt from disapproval either. Quantz often warned against such tempi, which he viewed as occurring because one loses "himself so much in the sentiment that he forgets the tempo."

However, slow tempi should not be allowed to move too quickly either, as Türk warned. Although written in the 19th century, Robert Schumann's dictum—"Dragging and hurrying are equally great faults"—is not inapplicable to 18th century music.

Tempo Measurement

The most famous system of measuring tempi before the existence of the metronome was that of Quantz. In Berlin in 1752, 60 years before the invention of the metronome, he measured his pulse, which he determined to be 80 beats per minute. He made that representative of his basic moderate tempo, which he termed Allegretto. He called twice as fast (160 beats per minute) Allegro assai. Half way between Allegretto and Allegro assai, (120 beats per minute) he created a category which he referred to as "a kind of 'moderate Allegro.'" He also created a category at half the speed of Allegretto,

which he termed Adagio cantabile (40 beats per minute). Quantz allowed for a variation of 5 pulse beats plus or minus his 80. Therefore his tempo recommendations ranged as follows:

Allegro assai	150-170
Allegro	112-128
Allegretto	75- 85
Adagio cantabile	38- 42

The above was most applicable to compositions in 4/4 meter. If the meter was alla breve, the note values were performed approximately twice as fast. The shortest note values used in a piece in 3/4 and compound meters determined whether the piece was to be performed in a “moderate” or “fast” manner. For example, a piece in 3/4, 6/8 or 12/8 which employed 16th notes as the fastest note value was played approximately half as fast as a piece in 3/4, 6/8 or 12/8 which employed 8th notes as the fastest value. In 3/8 a piece with 32nd notes or 16th note triplets as the fastest value was played approximately half as fast as one with 16th notes as the shortest value. Quantz’s guidelines were most applicable to instrumental pieces, with vocal music performed a bit slower, and church music still slower.

Türk, living in Halle in 1789, proposed a similar, but different, system—one which employed the ticks of a pocket watch. His suggestions result in a tempo of 132 for Allegro assai and 66 for Allegretto, which would imply 99 for Allegro and 33 for Adagio cantabile.

Quantz’s tempi were faulted by others in Europe for prescribing too fast tempi for fast movements and too slow tempi for slow movements. But this is not surprising since Berlin, where Quantz lived, was noted for exceptionally fast fast movements and exceptionally slow slow movements. Türk’s tempi seemed slow to some in his day, as well as in the years since. But they should be given credibility since they were provided by an influential keyboard teacher and composer who wrote at a time when Haydn and Mozart had already written a majority of their works and were still composing.

When Türk, whose tempo suggestions in 1789 have usually been viewed as slow, wrote that tempi were far quicker than 50 years previously, and Quantz in 1752 had stated that in former times tempi were nearly half as fast, tempi in the early years of the 18th century in Germany must have been extremely slow by later standards. Haydn is credited with increasing the tempi of fast movements as his career evolved. Beethoven, who was famous for his unprecedented fast tempi in fast movements, especially influenced an increase in fast tempi at the tail end of the 18th century and the early 19th century. His metronome indications confirm without doubt his love of very fast tempi in fast pieces. The tremendous popularity of Rossini’s music and the performances of Mendelssohn likely accelerated fast tempi still further.

While the tempi of fast works often remained quite quick through most of the 19th century, tempi of slow works tended to become slower and slower. This was due partially to the influence of Wagner who wrote: “The true Adagio can hardly be played too slowly.” Virtuosity and subjective personal expression became ends in themselves as the 19th century developed, and color, emotion and atmosphere replaced balance and structure as the foundation of musical composition.

This increase in the range of the extremes of tempi, which the 19th century promoted, goes against the overall practice of music of the centuries previous to the 19th. Robert Donington (1977) has provided very sage advice applicable to most all music written before Beethoven and even to much music written after Beethoven: “One of the commonest mistakes in the interpretation of early music . . . [is] taking slow movements too slow and fast movements too fast. Most baroque slow movements need to go faster, and most baroque fast movements need to go slower than first thoughts may suggest.”

Just as the system of accentuation would become lost in the 19th century, so did commonly accepted guidelines and approaches to tempo selection. But further discussion of tempi in

Beethoven, and tempi in Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, and other 19th century composers is the subject of another discussion.

Tempo Flexibility

While a player was expected to maintain a uniform tempo throughout a movement or piece, the belief that tempo in music of the later 18th century and early 19th century should not fluctuate at all unless marked is false. As early as 1615, Frescobaldi had advocated slowing at cadences and near the ends of his Toccatas.

Czerny, in 1839, provided guidance which summarizes the best approach to later 18th century and early 19th century music: "Before everything else, we must consider it as a rule, always to play each piece from beginning to end, without the deviation or uncertainty, in the time prescribed by the Author, and first fixed upon by the Player. But without injury to this maxim, there occur ALMOST IN EVERY LINE SOME NOTES OR PASSAGES where a small and often almost imperceptible relaxation or acceleration of the movement is necessary to embellish the expression and increase the interest." (caps mine)

But Czerny also stated: "There is a positive manner of playing melodic passages more peacefully and yet not noticeably slower, so that everything seems to flow in one and the same tempo and that a person would notice the difference at most only if he was using a metronome. One must not permit oneself an obvious change of tempo, except in such a place where the composer has expressly indicated it with a *piu lento*, *ritardando*, etc."

This echoes what, according to Schindler, Beethoven had maintained with regard to the slow movement of his Sonata, Op. 10, No. 3: "The pace of this rich movement must be changed fully ten times, though only so as to be perceptible to the most sensitive ear. The principal theme is always to be repeated in the tempo of its first statement: all the rest is subject to variation in the tempo, EACH PHRASE ACCORDING TO ITS OWN MEANING." (caps mine) Beethoven himself wrote, in 1817, on the manuscript of his song "Nord oder Süd, WoO 148: "100 according to Maelzel, but this is only valid for the first measures, since feeling also has its beat, which however cannot be expressed completely by this tempo."

Türk, in 1789, listed instances where ritards could be performed in slower pieces:

- at cadences
- at caesurae (pauses or breaths in a melodic line)
- at fermate
- at *diminuendi* or *smorzandi*
- when a major passage is repeated in minor
- at an "extraordinarily tender, longing, or melancholy passage"
- when a "languid thought" is repeated
- where two characters of opposite types are represented
- where a tender passage occurs between two "lively and fiery thoughts" (instead of a gradual slowing in these instances, an immediately slightly slower tempo was recommended)

Czerny suggested ritards could be employed in a number of situations. These included:

- at 'gentle cadences'
- passages which return to the main subject'
- before a fermata
- "on sustained notes that are to be struck with particular emphasis, and which are followed by shorter notes"
- during a transition to a new tempo or a different movement
- where lively passages give way to a *diminuendo* which includes a soft, delicate run
- "in heavily marked passages, where a strong crescendo leads to a new movement or to the

end of the piece”

--“in very whimsical, capricious or fanciful movements, in order to highlight their character better”

It was reported by Ries that Beethoven “usually kept a steady beat and only occasionally pushed the tempo, and even then, seldom. Among other things he held back the tempo in a crescendo with a ritardando, which made a very beautiful and highly striking effect.”

Increasing the tempo was suggested by Türk in the following situations:

--“where a vehement affect is unexpectedly to be aroused”

--“where gentle feelings are interrupted by a lively passage”

--when a musical idea is repeated at a higher pitch level

--in the most forceful passages of a piece ‘whose character is vehemence, anger, rage, fury and the like”

The statements above certainly prove that 18th century music was not intended to be performed metronomically, though it is always to be remembered that any flexibility of tempo was expected to be handled with great subtlety and discretion.

Accentuation

There were two kinds of accentuation in 18th century music: metrical and rhetorical.

- 1) Metrical accents were systematic stresses on strong parts of beats, strong parts of measures and strong measures. Such stresses were created by holding the strong note longer and playing it louder. Quantz, Leopold Mozart, and Türk urged the employment of this practice, and Clementi and Beethoven definitely employed it. Czerny recommended marking “by a small accent the beginning of each bar, or indeed even every good part of the bar.” Evidence that such accentuation practices represent mainstream thinking in the 18th century is found in Liszt’s exhortation in 1856 that “perpetually emphasizing strong and weak beats” should be Abandoned.
- 2) Rhetorical accents called attention to significant melodic notes through increased duration and volume. Those notes included dissonances, appoggiaturas, non-diatonic notes, high and low notes and syncopations. A sub-classification of rhetorical accents was “pathetic” accents, which consisted of stressing by duration and volume the especially intense dissonances.

Metric and rhetorical accents imparted a “speaking” quality to musical performance, akin to poetry’s long and short syllables. Otherwise, seamless playing occurred, which was perceived as meaningless, as it still should be perceived today. Beethoven was critical of those who “accentuate badly.” That Liszt considered such an approach to be inappropriate for his music, or his manner of playing, is not reason to neglect the fact that metric and rhetorical accentuation was considered essential by 18th and early 19th century musicians, and this expressive practice is no less needed when performing this music today.

Phrasing

Music in the 18th century was equated to rhetoric and much complex verbiage was devoted to this relationship. What is most relevant today is that various degrees of punctuation were viewed as occurring in music, just as in speech. Major breathing points occurred at the ends of sections. But less obvious breathing spots were to be felt at the ends of phrases and even at the ends of smaller units than complete phrases.

Players who today play straight through these breathing points are ignoring one of the most crucial, essential aspects of musicianship when playing 18th century music. It was a requirement that this music be allowed to breathe—at cadences and at lesser breaks in the music. The running together of ideas meant to be separated can be caused by adopting too fast a tempo, or just an ignorance of the

importance of feeling musical punctuation. Pianists would exhibit so much more expressivity in 18th century music if they would breathe like singers and wind players.

Dotted Eighth-Sixteenth Note Figures

The performed length of the 16th note after a dotted 8th note was frequently discussed in the 18th century. There was virtual unanimity that the 16th note be performed much shorter than its notated value, with Quantz even suggesting that it be as short as a 64th note. Some writers allowed that in slow movements it need not be quite as short.

Dotted 8th-16th note figures occurring simultaneously with 8th note triplets provided a controversy which raged in the 18th century, as its performance still does in the 21st century. C. P. E. Bach and Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg advocated performing the 16th note simultaneously with the last note of the triplet. Quantz, on the other hand, favored performing the 16th note after the last note of the triplet. Agricola agreed with Quantz, except when it occurred in a fast tempo. J.A.P. Schultz and Türk also favored playing the 16th note after the triplet, unless the player found such execution to be too difficult. Czerny's need to mention that one should play the 16th note after the triplet in the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 27, No. 2 ("Moonlight") is evidence that this was not the universally accepted practice at the time, and that many people played the 16th note and the triplet simultaneously. This simultaneity or lack of simultaneity of dotted 8th and 16th note vs. triplet issue is still hotly debated today, especially with regard to the performance of Schubert's music.

Repeat Signs: To Take or Not to Take

The main reasons to observe repeats include the following:

- 1) To add embellishment to what was written. This improvised embellishment was expected in the Baroque and early-Classic eras.
- 2) To provide the listener an opportunity to hear for the second time the exposition of a movement in Sonata-allegro form.
- 3) To add length to a section or piece.

Today very few players have the skill to improvise embellishment, or to invent and learn embellishments ahead of time. Therefore, for most players, this reason to observe a repeat has almost ceased to exist. A partial substitute is for a pianist to vary voicings, dynamics and melodic shapes during a repeat. But this is done all too rarely, and most repeats taken today provide little new insight into the music.

The binary form, which was the origin of Sonata-allegro form, caused repeat signs to be preserved in both portions of most 18th century Sonata-allegro form movements. Many 18th century treatise writers said both sections were to be repeated. But perhaps this was done partly out of obligation, since Quantz, in 1752, even advised playing a fast piece a little faster upon its repetition "in order not to put the listeners to sleep."

The practice of repeating the second portion died out first, with Clementi, in 1801, writing, "The second part of a piece, if very long, is seldom repeated, notwithstanding the dots." The practice of repeating the exposition persisted longer, with the purpose being viewed as providing listeners with additional acquaintance with the material. But not everyone believed this should be done. The composer Andre Gretry, in 1797, expressed his opposition to any repeats in Sonata-allegro form movements, and praised Nicolas Hüllmandel for not writing repeat signs in his sonatas composed in the 1770's and 1780's.

Beethoven gave a lot of thought to his employment of repeat signs. For example, he initially wrote he did not believe the exposition of the *Eroica* first movement should be repeated due to its length, but subsequently changed his mind. In his last string quartet, Op. 135, he wrote in the score of the last movement, in Italian, "Repeat the second part if you wish."

Gradually, expositions came to be repeated less and less. It is obvious from the 140 timings left by George Smart, the principal conductor in London from 1819-1843, that long repeats were not observed in the symphonies of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, and probably not even many of the short ones. In the 1830's, the leading Beethoven conductor in France, Francois Habeneck, did not observe the repeats.

Dvorak, in the manuscript of his 6th Symphony wrote, "Once and for all without the repeat." He also wrote with regard to the Schubert symphonies, "If the repeats are omitted, a course of which I thoroughly approve, and which indeed is now generally adopted, they are not too long." Richard Strauss, when conducting, did not even observe the repeat of the 80 second exposition of the first movement of the Beethoven 5th Symphony. When Brahms conducted his own 2nd Symphony, he did not take the exposition repeat written in the score. When questioned about this he replied, "Formerly when the piece was new to the audience, the repeat was necessary; today, the work is so well known that I can go on without it."

Certainly today most of the repertoire which we hear is extremely well known, eliminating this reason for taking an exposition repetition. Even if the first ending contains music unique to the movement, taking a repeat is not necessarily essential, as Alfred Brendel convincingly argues in the case of the Posthumous Schubert A Major and B-flat Major Sonata first movements.

In many Baroque variations it was acceptable to pick and choose amongst them as to which to play. Rameau even wrote, "Generally speaking, one may omit doubles [variations] and repeats of a Rondeau that one finds too difficult." The 19th century was wildly cavalier in allowing huge liberties by performers. One practice was commonly cutting whole portions of pieces. Grieg himself omitted a huge part of the finale of his Op. 7 Sonata on his recording.

Harold Schonberg, the legendary critic for the *New York Times*, wrote in a 1966 essay "Modern Literalism and Repeats": "The new concept of observing every repeat [especially in Classic and such early Romantic works such as the Schubert sonatas] can give the music the aspect of being seen through one of those freak-lengthening mirrors. . . . If the performer is one of the conscientious but uninspired players, the results can be excruciating. Instead of a performance being dull, it is twice as dull. A great imaginative artist can get away with it, but great imaginative artists are always rare. What all others end up with is the letter but not the spirit of music."

Like a good meal, a performance is better served by listeners being left wanting more, rather than having been given too much. The potential lack of sophistication and musical experience of one's particular audience is another factor a performer needs to consider.

Beethoven gave Ferdinand Ries the options, when introducing the Hammerklavier Sonata to London, of omitting the Largo introduction to the 4th movement, of omitting the entire 4th movement, or performing only the first movement and the second movement "and let them form the whole sonata." He continued, "I leave it to you to do as you think best."

Over the years, I have read numerous complaints made by composers regarding performances of their works, but have never seen one that complained of repeats not being taken. But should all repetitions be avoided? Certainly not. But none should be taken automatically without thought, solely because a repeat sign appears in the score. When playing 18th century music, today, ideally the player will observe the repeat signs at least on many occasions, and add embellishments, if qualified to do so appropriately. If not possessing the requisite experience to embellish 18th century music, and when playing 19th century music, one can follow Beethoven's advice and "do as you think best."

George Fee
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