

The Dialogues Between Sophia and Curio

A Philosophical Essay Concerning the Principles of Performance and their Relation to the Knowledge of Composition in the German *Galant Style* of the 18th Century

following ideas taken from many different treatises, chronicles, books and other compositional sources, containing also sociological, philosophical and aesthetic considerations on the status of the student in modern conservatory and other musical establishments

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Foreword

One could define music simply as sound, any sound. Be it the sounds of a running brook or the melodies of a cither, the cries of a newborn baby or a 45 minute symphony. All is music, depending on how you hear it.

An opposing view to this definition might have it that it is too broad, because the sounds of a river are not artfully produced. Only what is consciously produced by humans as meaningful sound is music.

Yet another view will even state that music does not even need to include, or includes much more than actual sound, that is, the physical pressure in a medium (air, water, etc.) that produces waves that are converted by our cognition into the conscious experience of hearing. So ideas, concepts, categories, rationalizations and all their interactions that form what we understand as knowledge are not really sound, but can also be an essential part of music. Some modern styles of abstract music have even taken sound out of the musical process, or as Buddhist saying says: “You want to hear the sound of Zen? Listen to the sound of a one-hand clap.”

But are knowledge and the substrate of music, sound, the same thing? Or to put the question in another way: Is musicology music, is analysis performance?

Whatever way one might see the relation between knowledge and making sound, the fact is that they can and they should interact, they can and they have always interacted. To some this might seem actually obvious, for how could two of mankind's most essential enterprise remain independent of each other as if we had a mind split into two dimensions that had absolutely no access to each other?

The fact is we don't have a split mind, we make analogies, we are incredibly synesthetic beings, and our association capacity lies at the root of our culture. Our very nature, I would say then, drives us into making that bridge between Knowledge, Art and sound. Some cultures transmit through their music the principles of their cosmologies. Others even believe they communicate with their ancestor and gods by listening to rivers.

For the ones concerned with music from the 18th century this should be of no difficulty to understand. During the Enlightenment, aestheticians thought music should achieve a balance in appealing no just to our feelings, or our irrational needs of sound, but also to our reason. It is far from being a coincidence that so much theory of music was written during that period. In fact the full education of a musician would comprise an enormous body of knowledge (e.g., composition, philosophy, theology), all of it intended to produce in the end sound.

But how did this body of theory interact with the actual music practices? Particularly how did the knowledge of composition interact with the moment of actual music making, performance?

Furthermore, one could stubbornly insist: Music is music, and knowledge is knowledge. Ideas do not make sound nor stir our emotions like sound does. Neither can sound compete with ideas when it comes to describing, and understand the precise workings of the universe.

However, somehow they interact, somehow they dialogue:

The First Dialogue

Characters:

Sophia – Elderly lady

Curio – Young and eager music student

Curio walks into the library of his Conservatory. He looks troubled and confused. There he finds Sophia reading a book. Sophia notices his worried look and decides to inquire him about it. They begin a conversation:

Sophia – By the way, I heard you have been doing very well at school!

Curio – Well, thank you. Although it is funny you say that. I just came from a recital where I performed, but I felt I really did not do well...

S – What happened, did you not manage to play the pieces?

C – Actually I did. I did not miss any notes, and my sound was very healthy; and even though I carefully observed all the technical recommendations of my teacher, somehow the public did not seem engaged at all!

S – So what do think the problem was?

C – That is exactly the point: I do not know! I feel that regarding performance there are good days and bad days. Playing well seems to be a simple matter of luck, pure fate. To be sure, I am a very responsible student: I wake up in the morning, and right after breakfast I practice all the daily technique exercises of my method. Scales, arpeggios, and all the exercises and *études* are diligently covered. I have already covered the canon repertoire and my technique is of high standard. My teacher is very satisfied. But when I walk on stage, oh! The dice are rolled. To be honest most of the time I think it is not bad, but often the reaction I get from the audience makes me think I was mediocre or insipid. I truly wish I could know what makes good performance good! I know that it is not just playing the notes right, there is an extra element that has to be present but that is indefinable, ineffable.

S – Oh, poor you! So you can never predict when and how you are going to play well?

C – No, for that you need *inspiration*! Some days it is there, some days it is not. And you know that inspiration is not just something you can find in any corner.

S – Yes, I suppose not. You cannot always be in the right mood. Except, of course, for my baker, he is always inspired. Everyday his bread is so fresh and tasty!

C – What! Why are you suddenly talking about your baker?

S – Oh, and my plumber too. He always does such a neat job in my house. Now that is inspiration!

C – Dear Sophia, have you gone mad?

S – Why?

C – Here am I deeply concerned about my art, music, one of the highest aspirations of mankind, and you start talking about your plumber!

S – But is your problem not being able to perform well always?

C – Yes.

S – And for you, when one performs well, one is inspired.

C – Yes, exactly, but what does that have anything to do with the man who fixes your sink?

S – He *always* does a good job, hence he is always inspired. And the same for my baker.

C – Sophia, I honestly thought you were quite wise. But how dare you compare music to baking? Art is not in the same level as all these crafts!

S – Oh, really? But Why?

C – Because music, like the other Arts, is concerned with beauty. Craftsmanship's concern is obtaining a result by simply following a recipe. In order to be a good craftsman one needs to know exactly which steps to follow in order to achieve the desired result and needs hence no extra inspiration. Good musical performance, on the other hand, demands a free spirit with a creative imagination and, to arrive at it, there are no rules, no predetermined path one can take.

S – Let me just see if I understood it clearly: You think that musical performance cannot be reduced to a set of principles or rules, and because of this it differs from other crafts in which pre-established rules are the key to arriving at good results.

C – Well put! And even if such principles could be found for music, I do not know if I would like it. I think if beauty can be explained, it will lose its magic. I would add that one can have no ultimate knowledge of what leads to a good performance of a piece.

S – I see your point. But now, Curio, let me ask you: The repertoire you play, most of it includes pieces that were composed many, many years ago, right?

C – That is correct, I love everything from Josquin to Stravinsky. Oh, but how difficult it is to play it all and well! Everything is all so different and each repertoire, each piece requires hours of specific technical practice! And sometimes I have no idea about how I want it to sound. I know I can play it though. But then again, I do not find the right inspiration for each repertoire.

S – I see that it must be really hard for you. But, tell me, what is really your favorite repertoire?

C – I particularly admire the repertoire of the 18th century: Telemann, Bach and his sons up to Haydn and Mozart. Whatever came to be known as the *Galant Style*, particularly the German composers.

S – Oh yes, that is delightful music. I enjoy it much myself. But would you agree that, generally speaking, people of that period did not see the world in the same way we do?

C – Yes, I suppose their religion, their philosophy and even their societies were considerably different than ours. But why do you ask?

S – Because perhaps, if their ideas and manner of thinking were in fact so different, the way they thought about musical performance and this concept so dear to you, inspiration, might have been also different. And since everyone knows that by comparing one's views with contrasting ideas one learns a lot, we might acquire valuable ideas by seeing how they conceived differently of musical performance.

C – Yes, I suppose we have nothing to lose from this attitude. In fact I would be very interested to know what their sources for inspiration were. Did they read a lot of poetry, go for walks in the woods, was their wine good? I am in desperate need for ideas!

But where shall we start looking for that?

S – Well, since we are here in this beautiful Library, shall we have a look at some descriptions of musical performance from this period you praise, and see if they can illuminate us on the subject of good performance?

C – Please, let us, I cannot wait. But did enough information on this subject period survive?

S – I think for the repertoire you are interested in, yes. It is not only beautiful music; it is also a highly documented moment of music History where we can find firm ground. Specifically in the 1750s many treatises that deal with musical instruction appeared in different places of German speaking countries; and some of them, like Johann Joachim Quantz's *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen* of 1752, Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule* of 1756, Carl Philipp Emmnauel Bach's *Versuch über der wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* of 1753, offer one chapter devoted specifically to understanding what constituted good performance. Daniel Gottlob Türk's *Klavierschule* of 1789, although written somewhat later, draws much from the same tradition and is of incredible detail and also contains a specific chapter about performance. I would strongly recommend that we should have a look at those texts, that is, *chapter XI of Quantz, XII of Mozart, III of Bach and VI of Türk*.

C – But Sophia, I do not want to learn from theory. I need real musicians to tell me what to do!

S – Little do you know, Curio. Most of these authors were the most prominent performers of their days and very probably their descriptions give us a thorough picture of how performance was then. Quantz, for example, was a well-traveled musician, and heard with his own ears the leading musicians of his time like Senesino, Farinelli, Scarlatti, Weiss. Much admired for his playing, he played in some of the best ensembles that period produced like the Dresden orchestra. Mozart's treatise was one of the most popular violin tutors of that period, and his son's fame makes it unnecessary to tell you of his qualities as a musical pedagogue. Türk draws heavily from Johann Sebastian Bach's tradition, he himself being a student of a student of his, Gottfried August Homilius, and he often quotes Carl Philipp Emanuel's treatise which, on its turn, was widely read well into the 19th century even by people like Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

C – If you are right, I suppose we have much to learn and much reading to do!

S – Delightful! Now let us browse through these texts and see if we can find what they said about performance and inspiration.

Sophia and Curio spend some concentrated time going through the mentioned texts.

C – Sophia, let us stop here. I am quite disappointed. I have read a good deal already, and I have found no help to make me more inspired for music.

S – Poor you! But what are you saying, are we to dispense all these writings? I think we can still make good use of them. What strikes me in these writings is that they frequently make reference to actual elements of performance: a variety of dynamic possibilities, accentuation, articulation indications, technical issues, and much more. They talk about values of sound, timber, ornamentation, rhythm, tempo, and very often in a precise physical manner. But you are right, no talk of inspiration...

C – That is indeed true. I guess all these ideas can still be useful and insightful. But one thing I found a bit strange is that they often talk in a very *prescriptive mood*: “One *should* do this, one *must* do that!” They sound very strict.

S – I cannot agree with you that they are strict, but I do contend that, yes, their objective is to prescribe *general principles of performance*. I would also like to add that it is quite amazing that all these authors rarely contradict each other! Despite the fact that they organize their texts in different orders and moods, they constantly talk about very similar things and similar values. It seems to show that they all shared a very similar aesthetics for performance.

C – Shall we make a brief summary of a couple of these principles? I might just actually use them in the future.

S – With pleasure! Perhaps we should organize them from more general till more specific issues of performance.

C – Fine, who will start?

S - I will take the lead. *Number One*, my personal favorite, to quote from Bach, paragraph 2, is that good performance comprises: “The ability through singing and playing to make the ear conscious of the true content and affect of the composition”. Notice the weight he puts on the *content of the composition*.

C – Curious, I do not see yet the importance of this... Anyway, let us continue. *Number Two* I take from Quantz, paragraph 10: “Good execution must be first of all *true and distinct*”. By that he means that the piece should be perfectly executed and articulated or what Türk calls “clarity of execution”, a subject to which he devotes a whole section. I always take care that my sound is neat, and that every little note is perfectly heard.

S – Good. Yet look at what I take to be our principle *Number Three* mentioned by all of them: *Just playing the notes is not enough*. Here is Mozart:

(...) not only must one observe exactly all that has been marked and prescribed and not play it otherwise than was written; but one must throw oneself into the affect to be expressed and apply and execute in certain good style (...) whatever belongs to tasteful performance of a piece.

C – Excellent, that might be exactly my problem and why we are having this conversation after all. I think I have been too concerned about only getting the notes right. But here is one more principle on which they seem all to agree: For *Number Four*, here is Quantz again, paragraph 13, “Execution must also be *easy and flowing*. No matter how difficult the notes performed may be, this difficulty must not be apparent in their performer”. That is why I always practice technique, technique, and technique, so I can have all the fluency I need...

S – But perhaps just as important is also what this other principle prescribes: Here is *Number 5*, “No less must good execution be *varied*. Light and Shadow must be constantly maintained.”

C – Good. I could not but agree that all these principals are very important and useful. But so far they have been too general, for how can one know from them only how to play or sing better? That performance, should be easy, varied, and clear is perhaps obvious, but exactly how I am to do that? Through which means?

S – Luckily all these authors also describe in a clear physical way many essential artifices for good performance. Again they are also quite consistent on this matter and these indications seem to form a shared system of musical declamation.

C – That is true.

S – Shall we then continue our list with these other more specific principals?

C – By all means. Now I will take the lead. One subject carefully covered by all of these authors is the importance of distinguishing between Good and Bad notes through *regular accentuation patterns*. I will take Mozart’s paragraph 9 as an illustration: “generally the accent of the expression or the stress of tone falls on the ruling or strong beat, which the Italians call Nota Buona”.

S – Yes, and at the same time that they talk about how one should have regular accents, they all refer to and seem to agree on many kinds of *irregular and unexpected accents* that a performer should also provide: Türk, for instance, in paragraphs 14 till 18 provides us with many examples and even a little list of where and how these should be made. Anyway we can sum up these two ideas as *good accentuation*.

C – They also observe how musicians should be careful to have *good punctuation and articulation*. Here is Quantz again, paragraph 10, “Musical ideas that belong together must not be separated; on the other hand, you must separate those ideas in which one musical thought ends and a new idea begins, even if there is no rest or caesura”.

S – Another commonplace is that they all give very important advice towards *values of ornamentation*. They seem to all agree that it should not be too much, it has to respect the main character of the piece and one cannot do it well without understanding the rules of composition.

C – It seems that, even though they speak about exceptions to this, having a *good steady tempo* mattered quite a lot to them. Here is paragraph 7 from Türk: “It goes without saying that security in rhythm is likewise a necessary requisite for good execution so I have not felt impelled to furnish evidence for this.” But, Sophia, of course all of these authors provide much more details on what would constitute good performance. But perhaps it would be senseless to scrutinize all of these writings right now.

S – I do agree. They all talk of other values like good tuning, a round sound, the cantabile quality, and they speak of other artifices like rhythmical alterations (inequality, *tempo rubato*, overdotting) and tempo changes (accelerandos and retardandos). In any case, the ones we have outlined already reveal much of their conception about performance. But so that we have a more certain idea that all these authors do indeed talk about similar things, I would recommend that we make a little scheme that relates each of those values and artifices to the paragraph in the chapters on performance of each author.

C – Yes, and that might be of good help latter on if one wishes to recheck a topic individually comparing all these authors. Let us begin.

Sophia and Curio begin writing out the scheme, and after some disagreements, and discussions they arrive at this table:

Value	Quantz	Bach	Türk	Mozart
1: Good Performance consists in bringing out/is adapted to delivering/redering the true content/affect/passion/intention of the composition	15, 3, 16, 17	1, 2, 4, 8, 13, 16	2, 5, 9, 26-31	2, 3, 7, 22
2: Truth and Distinction	10	6	10, 11	X
3: Just playing the notes is not Enough	2	1	4, 6	No direct mention
4: Fluency	13	9	5	X
5: Variety	3, 14, 16, 21	No direct mention	No direct mention	29
Performance Artifices:				
Regular accentuation	12	No direct mention	10, 12-14	9, 10
Irregular accentuation	15	29	10, 15-18, 32-35	8, 13, 14, 17, 18
Articulation/Punctuation	10, 15	5, 17	19-25, 36-50	11, 18, 19
Ornamentation Recommendations	15	No mention in this chapter	8	2
Good tempo	No mention in this chapter.	28	7	19

Now that we have identified all these principals, performance does start to seem more like a bread recipe! In fact it seems that the only thing you have to do is follow these principles and Carnegie Hall will give you a call immediately! It seems just too easy to be true.

S – You can be ironical about it, Curio, but just think for a moment how refined a performance would be, in which all these principles would be thoroughly executed from beginning to end; if just simply applied to any piece, they would already bring much variety and minutiae. Think of how much hard work it would take to really bring out all those details about articulation, punctuation, accentuation, ornamentation, etc.

C – That is indeed true, but is this view of performance not governed by rules too restrained? It seems to allow for no personal involvement, no individuality. It seems that belonging to this tradition of performance, to that system of declamation was far more important than the performer’s opinions and interpretation of the piece. It seems as if there was a certain distance between the performer and his Art. How impersonal, how cold!

S – You are right, though I would not call it impersonal or cold. But this external, or distanced quality was a typical characteristic of 18th century performance.

There is an interesting dialogue written in this period (although it was only published posthumously in 1830) by Denis Diderot that deals with this specific problem.

C – Oh! Diderot was one of the most important philosophers of the 18th century and he was an avid theater lover. I am sure he would agree that, since theater's purpose is the true imitation of human feelings, only a passionate and involved rendering of a play can be considered good performance!

S – Actually, no. For him there was a clear distinction of quality between the actor who plays from the heart or from his own personal impulses, and the one who plays from thought. The first will be inconstant, and he will not be able to account for what are the good qualities in his acting. He might well be talented and have a good intuition, but he will always have to depend on his mood and the dispositions of his personality, which are limited and variable; he might have a couple of good performances but he will eventually fail.

C – So, according to Diderot an ideal actor should not rely on inspiration or on his personal feelings?

S – No, not really. Diderot's ideal actor will act from knowledge, from cold calculation. To describe him, I'll quote a little passage from the book. Oh, here is an English translation. I will quote from page 9:

On the other hand, the actor who plays from thought, from the study of human nature, from constant imitation of some ideal type, from imagination, from memory, will be one and the same at all performances, will be always at his best mark; he has considered, combined, learnt and arranged the whole thing in his head; his diction is neither monotonous nor dissonant. His passion has a definite course – it has bursts, and it has reactions; it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The accents are the same, the positions are the same, the movements are the same, if there is any difference between two performances, the latter is generally the better.

Or even this other one from page 16:

He has rehearsed to himself every note of his passion. He has learnt before a mirror every particle of his despair. He knows exactly when he must produce his handkerchief and shed tears; and you will see him weep at the word, at the syllable, he has chosen, not a second sooner nor later. The broken voice, the half uttered words, the stifled or prolonged notes of agony, the trembling limbs, the faintings, the bursts of fury – all this is pure mimicry, lessons carefully learned, (...)

It seems interesting how these ideas Diderot had about theater resemble ideologically those texts on music we just read. Be it theater or music, they seem to be all concerned with acquiring precise knowledge or principles as to what would result in good performance.

C - But wait! Now I got you. Look at all these passages I also found in the same chapters we have been studying. Here is Bach, paragraph 13: “A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved. He must of necessity feel all of the affects that he hopes to

arouse in his audience, for the revealing of *his own* humor will stimulate a like humor in the listener.” And this other one by Türk, paragraph 16: “It is understood that no keyboard player will manage to play well at all times and under all circumstances, since the disposition of one's spirits has a very marked influence on performance”. And this one by Quantz, paragraph 9: “Almost everyone has an individual style of execution. The reason for this is found not only in musical training, but in the particular temperament that distinguishes one person from another”. Don't they all not suggest that there is at least some connection of one's feelings or temperament with that of the piece to be performed?

S – You make a good point, but I think you did not go far enough in your quotes. Türk, slightly before your quotes, says:

The true musician should be able to identify with every affect and be able to respond to all the passions and emotions which can be expressed in music, for he will not always express himself only in a lively and jokingly manner but during the course of an hour must often lend expression to quite diverse feelings.

And again look at this other passage by Carl Philipp also in the same paragraph:

And so, constantly varying the passions he will barely quiet one before he rouses another. Above all, he must discharge this office in a piece which is highly expressive by nature, whether it be by him or someone else. In the later case he must make certain that he assumes the emotion which the composer intended in writing it.

Or still this one by Quantz, paragraph 9:

The performer of a piece must seek to enter into the principal and related passions the he is to express. And since in the majority of pieces one passion constantly alternates with another, the performer must know how to judge the nature of the passion that each idea contains, and constantly make his execution conform to it.

All these passages suggest that an accomplished performer needs the ability to switch from one passion to another. Now, If a player always bases his performance on his own feelings, how could he ever assume different feelings proposed by another person or suggested by a piece? How could he “quiet” or “rouse” feelings that sometimes might be totally unrelated to his personality. In order to become a versatile musician, one must be able to abstain from one's impulses. And notice how the continuation of Quantz's quote relates this subject to our *Number One* principle, “Only in this manner will he do justice to the intentions of the composer, and to the ideas he had in mind when he wrote the piece.”

C – But later on he even goes as far as saying: “Each person must also regulate himself in accordance with his innate temperament, and know how to govern it properly.” Perhaps Bach, Türk or Quantz seem not to be saying that one should not be governed by one's feelings, but rather that one should tame or adapt them to the necessities of the

piece.

S – That is possible. To be honest, I am not sure all these authors would have agreed completely with Diderot. The phenomenon of acting, theatrical or musical, is a delicate one and one should treat it with care. But it is interesting enough how they all touch upon the subject.

C – Yes, and in any case what I find interesting is still how little important their individualities, their personalities, their personal feelings were to good performance and how much more emphasis they put on bringing the *composer's intentions*!

S – Indeed. Moreover it seems that belonging to a style of performance, to that tradition and the correct application of all these principles was far more important than waiting for inspiration to come. What is inspiration if not a little stimulus one gets to go and do some work in which one actually learns something?

C – Now I start to understand why you wanted to show me all these texts. But was this view really different than our conception of performance nowadays? And if so, why?

S – To answer that I think we would get into a quite complicated territory of human philosophy, history and sociology, and it would perhaps enlarge too much the scope of our discussion. Yet, one has to realize how many modifications our society has gone through that might have had an impact on the way people conceive of performance. Curio, think about the importance you attach to your individuality, your liberty and creativity as a musician, artist and even as a citizen, all qualities to be admired. Where do you think all this came from?

C – I guess it is just the way I am.

S – Oh, do not be so naïf! Perhaps you do not even realize it, but you are a historical being. The way you are, the way you behave and think the way you play is connected to bigger matters. And so was the way Quantz, Bach and Mozart thought and played. You think music is just playing scales and passing your exams and auditions, do you not? I tell you, it is much more than that!

C – What is going on, why do you get so mad at me?

S – I am, sorry. I did not mean to raise my voice. I just want to make you realize how important it is that all these writings we were studying were written before very important moments in western history like the French Revolution, the American Independence and the democratic movements, the deposition of the *Ancien Regime*, or the Romantic Movement. Roughly speaking, one of the common ideas all these movements shared was an emphasis on individuality be it on a political, social or artistic sphere. Enlightenment was of course by then already a well-known idea, but was only beginning to be disseminated in society (that is if it ever really became a real ideal in our society, which I doubt). Now, do you think this individuality, this liberty that you (and I!) wish for every citizen nowadays politically, socially or artistically would have been conceivable without the social changes all these historical movements brought? Do you think the pedagogical writings we were dealing with just now, were they not written under a very different mind-set than your 21st century conservatory educational model?

C – Yes. But do you not also believe in Human Nature, do you not think people back then had just the same needs as we today? Was music not as important for them, as it is for us?

S – Yes. But still music had a very different role in their lives. It was

everywhere; in church, in public ceremonies even in war they could not conceive of any these situations without music and Art.

C – Yes, but many people go to church nowadays where there is also music.

S – Right. But back then all these rituals had ultimately to do with a view, which goes back to ancient Greek times, in which the Universe was seen as an orderly, beautiful and well-proportioned creation. Beauty was ingrained in the very essence of the world. (Just think of the Greek word κόσμος, which meant “order”, “good behavior”, or “ornament”, from which we derive “cosmology” or even “cosmetic”). Still in the 18th century there was no big distinction yet between doing something good and something beautiful. All the social endeavors, which reflected this world order had to be produced with Art. Now this worldview is lost. We live in an age that had to chew all the ideas by Darwin, Einstein, Freud, Nietzsche, Gödel and so many more that crumbled that perception of life, society, and the Universe.

C – Yes, it always amazes me how much more effort was put into *ritualistic music* during 18th century, than in the 19th century when this world image started to collapse. Just compare how many masses Haydn composed and how many Beethoven did. But how did this older different conception changed the way they played?

S – It changes because when a musician or an Artist is performing in real ritualistic situation the importance of the performance has little to do with him. It is a social happening where the performer is supposed to connect the audience, not to his or her personal feelings, but to public or religious values. The performer is only a medium for music to happen, and attaining the message envisioned by the music is of crucial importance. Hence one has to be very attentive to the *immediate and practical* solutions that will lead to excellence, and efficiency in one’s work. Not to mention that all those musicians belonged to a very specific social class. It might be interesting to mention just *en passant* that all of the authors we were just reading were sons of craftsmen.

C – You do not say!

S – Yes, Quantz was the son of a blacksmith, Mozart of a shoemaker, and Türk’s father owned a hosiery business. Even the Bachs belonged to a traditional musical family made up mostly of *stadtpfeiferen* who were simple town musicians employed to play in official festivities being no different than other crafts in terms of social rank.

C – But was music not a prestigious university subject since the Middle Ages?

S – Not the kind of music we are talking about, *practical* music, music made with instruments or the voice that you can actually hear. The one taught in universities was, one could say, the science of music. The purpose of the later was to investigate the nature of heavenly music through the study of the properties of sound and its relation to the other disciplines like astronomy, mathematics and cosmology. In fact, because the ruling class of medieval intellectuals considered this side of music, the scientific one, so important and noble, practical music suffered from a strong prejudice, which remained deeply ingrained in European thought well up to the 19th century although with a gradually decaying force.

C – But it could it not still be that because of their very beautiful trade some musicians overcame their social positions? Were some musicians like Farinelli and Weiss not quite well paid?

S – Yes. The 18th century saw indeed great social upheaval, and I think that indeed musicians then were striving for a higher social rank and more and more they

were finding other social niches where they could be distinguished. It is true that Telemann, C. P. E. Bach and Agricola, for example, went to University to study law. In the same line, allying oneself with poets, philosophers and finding a post in the courts of more enlightened despots could transform a musician's social status. Even studying music theory could elevate one's prestige in society. Nonetheless, for practical musicians themselves, society held during a long time a very definite place in society.

C – But within that social status they could find no liberty?

S – The point is that musicians were in most cases subject to some patron, court, or any other public or religious institution, which determined largely what functions and activities they had to fulfill. Just take the Mozarts' disputes with the Archbishop of Salzburg as a classic example. These musicians had an important and crucial job to do and they had to do it well, always! Like my baker, like my plumber.

C – Aha! Now I see why you were talking about all this and why you made that joke in the beginning of our conversation.

S – Very well noticed. I do apologize for my irony, but this whole time I wanted to make you see how much a musician's obligations and social conditions were (are?) like those of craftsmen, if not exactly the same and how this view has some implications for how you perform. Oh, Curio, look at the time, it is time to go home!

C – Yes, I also have to supper. I will try out these new ideas and see if they improve my playing. Goodbye!

S – Thanks for the lovely talk, Farewell!

End of the First Dialogue

The Second Dialogue

Because of Curio's eagerness to play well, he diligently tries to incorporate to his playing these principals of 18th century performance he learned from reading treatises such as Quantz's and Türk's. After weeks of work he becomes confused and frustrated for he notices that those rules are somehow insufficient. He decides he should go to the library and see if he could find once more Sophia in order to clarify his mind.

S – Curio, you do not look well!

C – Yes... Another very disturbing doubt comes to me!

S – Tell me then, what is it?

C – I have been thinking a lot about the things we discussed last time we met, but something still does not make sense. I have tried to apply all those principles and artifices, but the questions “when?”, “why?” and “how?” came many times to haunt me. These, however, if there is any reason to music, I would like to explain away. Perhaps you could help me?

S – That is why I am here.

C – Good. If I understood your point well, musicians in the 18th century had a different attitude towards performance; what you understand as musical craftsmanship.

S – Yes, that is indeed what I had argued for.

C – In this view good performance could be reduced to a set principles, resulting in a precise knowledge of the craft of music.

S – Yes. And from them we can even deduce their musical aesthetics.

C – However, would you not agree that the phenomenon of music is far too complex to be reduced to a couple of rules, and that even those authors admit that no two people could possibly play in the exact same way?

S – One could say that.

C – And would you not agree that the principles we find in these books are rather more generalizations open to exceptions, a fact recognized even by these authors themselves?

S – Yes.

C – So consider for a moment the fact that every piece of music is different. They have different harmonies, sizes, proportion and textures; each composer has their own style of writing melodies, and combining forms. I ask you then, how I am supposed to know how to apply these very *general* rules about performance to very *specific* pieces, each of them with their own needs? I feel like what Quantz should have done is not write a book on general ideas, but a book about how each piece he composed should be performed!

S – Good question. I think I have again an idea that could help you. But before I tell what it is, let me ask you: Besides studying your instrument (which you do very well) what else have you been studying in your conservatory?

C – To be honest, playing takes up most of the time I devote to music. I did follow all counterpoint, analysis and harmony lessons in school, and I did fairly well at them.

S – Good, but did you ever *use* any of the knowledge you acquired in those lessons?

C – What do you mean?

S – Did those lessons not have any consequence in your music making? Did any information you received there change the way you play or, for example, did you ever use those counterpoint or harmonic skills to compose a piece?

C – What, *Composing*? I never compose and I am proud of it! I am a performer. The requirements of being good in what I do are already big enough. I leave the task of composing to other people, and moreover, most of the repertoire I play belongs to the past, to dead people. I would not like to compose new baroque pieces, for example; that would seem to me totally out of place.

S – But what about many of those composers you admire, which form the canon of your repertoire: Palestrina, J.S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann?

C – Yes, what about them?

S – Were they not all good performers too?

C – Yes, in fact some of them, like Bach and Mozart, acquired more fame in their days from their abilities as performers rather than from their compositions.

S – Correct. But I wonder: Did not their abilities as composers have a positive influence on the way they played?

C – To be honest, I am not averse to that idea. Even though I do want to concentrate as much time as possible on perfecting my performing skills, I have often wondered how was it that people like Bach could be such a great player and still have so much time to spend composing.

S – What I find even more curious is how many other composers were also known to be very good players or singers. There are the ones I already mentioned, but here are a couple more: Caccini, Corelli and many of his students, Buxtehude, Marais, Forqueray, Hotteterre, the Couperins, Leclair, Weiss, Handel, Wilhelm Friedmann, Carl Philipp Emanuel and Johann Christian Bach, Abel, Zelenka, Bocherini, Haydn, Porpora, and some many more!

C – But what are you implying with this?

S – That, based solely on crude statistics, there was some connection between playing with excellence and having knowledge of composition.

C – But it could have been just a coincidence. I am sure that, if any of them had practiced long enough, one would have become just as good in performing without being a composer.

S – But practice in order to achieve what, manage to play all the notes? You know by now that, according to the authors we studied, getting the notes right is not the main issue of performance, which includes much more than that. And let us not forget how much attention they devote to the importance of having a good knowledge of composition. Remember what we took as our *Number One* principal: the goal of performance was to bring out the “true content of the composition”.

C – True. But is the production of music, and perhaps of all other performing Arts like dance and theater, not divided into those two very distinct moments: composition and performance?

S – Yes. You can even think of that reversely. Some art forms do not have that separation. Rembrandt’s compositions never have to be re-executed if they want to be appreciated, in the fine Arts there is no distinction between executing and composing. But now I see where you are getting at. You are trying to make an ontological distinction

between two moments of musical production. That is what Stravinsky called the *potential* and *actual* existence music. For him the first is a more platonic existence of music where it exists only in terms of idea or perhaps in terms of notation. The second is the music we actually hear, perform and I would add, the music we actually *desire*.

C – So you see that even Stravinsky himself admitted that distinction between composition and performance. I believe you are referring to Chapter 6 of his “Poetics of Music in the Form of Six lessons”, where he clearly indicates the duties of the performer.

S – Yes, and for the performers he also distinguishes two qualities they have to attend to: *execution* and *interpretation*. Execution is the rendering in performance of the essential elements of a piece, which contain nothing else than what is prescribed by the composition. (Notice again how similar is this concept to the *Number One* principal). Besides execution, Interpretation is the performer’s addition of a “loving care”, to quote Stravinsky’s own words, or other sound elements not necessarily contained in the composer’s conception or too nuanced to be contained by musical notation.

C – And it is specially this loving care that distinguishes our responsibilities as performers from those of the composers, thus we performers encounter space for our own creativity. Only there, performance can be justified in becoming and independent enterprise from composition. That is why it is so important nowadays *who* is performing. When you buy a recording, you buy Karajan’s or Menuhin’s *interpretation* of this or that piece. This is the reason why I do not have time to be a composer; to be able to deliver this care, to really put your own ideas in a piece, one needs a whole life, if not two!

S – But maybe you have to consider Stravinsky’s ideas further. The traditional means through which a composition can communicate to the performer is notation, which on in its own terms is highly imperfect. A performer will forcibly need to interpret (in the sense we defined) for all shades that are possible in performance cannot be contained in notation.

C – Yes! For example, imagine how a baroque score would look like if it had to include all those accents (regular or irregular), dynamics, bowings and articulations that Quantz, Bach, Türk, and Mozart talk about. It would not be much different than a Ferneyhough or even a Stockhausen score!

S – Yes, but the lack of all these signs in the score, does not mean that they did not include all those elements during a performance. That brings to light the fact that the act of composition in the 18th century was concerned with less detailed matters.

C – So again, perhaps something that really distinguishes performance from composition is exactly that the latter is more concerned with the basic conception and structural elements of sound. The former deals with the detailed and fine-tuned rendering of these larger elements.

S – Yes, but Stravinsky makes the point for us that a performer can go too far in this space given to him by this requirement of interpretation. He or she can become worried about things that become totally unimportant and confusing (at least in terms of bringing out the essence of a composition), like splitting hairs about getting that specific timbre or that pianississimo just right.

C – Yes. Sometimes music is more like a circus, a simple display of speed and technical flexibility that emphasizes nothing but the performer’s capabilities purely as an instrumentalist or singer. But of course Stravinsky is writing from the perspective of a composer (and a good one) who is worried if the inner message of the piece will come

out during a performance.

S – Yes, and this is a danger that every composition runs when set to performance, that is why Stravinsky (again) speaks of what he calls the *principle of submission* that is required of a performer that truly relates to a composition's elements. Let me quote you a passage from his text. He says:

This submission demands a flexibility that itself requires, along with technical mastery, a sense of tradition and, commanding the whole, and aristocratic culture that is not merely a question of acquired learning.

This submissiveness we require of the creator, we should justly and naturally require of the interpreter as well. Both will find therein freedom in extreme rigor and, in the final analysis, if not in the first instance, success – true success, the legitimate reward of the interpreters who in the expression of their most brilliant virtuosity preserve that modesty of movement and sobriety of expression which is the mark of thoroughbred artists.

C – Nice passage!

S – I like it too. It is interesting to note that, by the time he wrote this text, 1947, there was already a clear line between those who were performers and those who were composers. Stravinsky himself was never really known for any talent at the piano or any other instrument. There were still good composers in the 20th century like Rachmaninoff, and Ravel who also played very well, but the conservatory model, the one you belong to, Curio, where people are trained only to play, and not to compose was already long installed. But back in the 18th century that line that divided composer from performer was far blurrier.

C – But still composition was one thing and performance another.

S – Now you have touched a crucial point. Not only was the person of composer the same as that of the performer like we saw, but the very *act* of compositions was much closer to the act of performing!

C – But you have just said that in music these are two separate moments: Remember, potential and actual music?

S – Yes. However you have to understand that those concepts proposed by Stravinsky are related to a different manner of thinking than the one most 18th century musicians had. First of all improvisation, that is, the moment when the act of composition and performance are one and the same, was a far more common practice and an intrinsic part of musicians' life. Secondly, most music was composed in those days for immediate or personal use of the composer and moreover, the very education of composition was done mainly via practical methods like *basso continuo*, *partimenti* and improvisation of forms like menuets where performance and composition could not be dissociated. In sum, most of the times musicians had to deal with composition while they were performing.

C – But then what happened? When did things change?

S – During the 19th century both acts started being gradually separated till things got to what we see nowadays: an army of professional players and students learning their instrument, all playing a fixed repertoire or pieces composed by somebody else. That there are exceptions to this nowadays, like Heinz Holliger and others, it is not to be denied, but the majority of conservatory instrumentalists are not being educated or even

encouraged to compose.

C – But why did this happen?

S – Many factors might have contributed to this. The increasing pedagogical emphasis on technique proposed by many 19th century methods and schools, the growing bourgeois and amateur market of musical dilettanti, and even the complexity of the repertoire are facts that help explain the idea that it is just simply better to have one person composing, and another performing.

C – It is curious how during the 19th century in many fields of human enterprise one can follow a gradual but increasing separation of creator and executor.

S – Yes, like the problem in architecture and engineering. In the 18th century, both the aesthetic responsibilities of design and knowledge of means of constructions were delegated to just one person. It was only towards the 19th century that the French, for example, created the *École Polytechnique* that offered a specific engineering education separating the technical issues of building and design from the more aesthetical concerns. Nowadays both professions are clearly separated: You have the Architect (the creator, the one who makes up the plan for a building and will think about its aesthetical properties), and the engineer (the executor, the one who puts the building up); much like in music you have the composer (the inventor of musical ideas), and the performer (the one who executes them).

C – But in a way I understand that separation. It is as bit like the separation that occurs in orchestral practice between conductor and the *ripieno* (to use an 18th century word). Let me explain it to you: One of my main goals professionally is to be a part of an orchestra. There the conductor is responsible to understand the piece and lead the musicians in its interpretation. My job is to offer my technical skills to realize those ideas proposed by the conductor. This is what I, and many of my colleagues are being trained to.

S – Yes and that is perhaps a symptom of the fact that knowledge of composition is not really a part of your education. You need to delegate your performance choices to somebody else, for example, the conductor or wait for something like inspiration to come, as you admitted in our first meeting. To illustrate this point, I think it is no coincidence that conducting (as we understand it nowadays) was a fairly rare practice in the 18th century when many more musicians were also educated as composers. Think what the Dresden Orchestra must have been in the times of Quantz, Weiss, Heinichen, and Pisendel (all composers)! Conducting did exist but it was something considerably different, something more like leading.

C – By the way have you heard that joke: A man and a little boy were walking through a cemetery when the boy said, “Look, Daddy, here’s a grave where two people are buried!” Puzzled, the father looked down at the gravestone marker, and sure enough, the marker read, “Here lies a symphony conductor and a humble man.”

S – Ha, ha, but I have heard better ones. But resuming our discussion, in the baroque period in most situations the leader would be playing with the group himself and would be responsible for only a few performance matters like keeping tempo. Exceptions to this did exist like Lully who was probably very detailed and demanding if we are to believe Muffat’s descriptions in his *Florilegium secundum* of Lully’s orchestra.

C – So you do admit that it is true that many musicians in the 18th century had no knowledge of composition except for those they would acquire by being immersed in

an (possibly) rich musical environment.

S – Yes, of course. It would have been a great expenditure to educate every single musician in composition. But in any case we can ask ourselves if there is indeed a correlation between alienation of knowledge of composition and the necessity of conducting. Let me read you some other passages from Quantz's *versuch* in Chapter XVII devoted to orchestral playing that suggests the same idea:

Anyone who compares earlier music with that of the present day, and considers the differences manifest from decade to decade in only the past half-century, will find that, in regard to the invention of their ideas, composers have for some years striven to inquire into and perfect everything that contributes to the lively expression of the passions. These inquiries into composition would be of little use, however, if others were not also made into the art of performance (execution). From paragraph 1.

Since experience shows that, as a result of the efforts of composers to invent new ideas, we expect far more of ripieno players now than formerly, and that today a ripieno part is perhaps more difficult to play than a solo in earlier times, it necessarily follows that the performers of the ripieno parts also must know much more today than was required earlier if the composers are to achieve their goal. Paragraph 3

(Notice already how much emphasis he puts on good execution connected to demands of the composition). He goes on:

Yet if we consider the condition of the majority of musical establishments at courts as well as in republics and cities, we immediately note considerable defects with regard to accompaniment (...)

(...) it would be desirable, in order to gradually further the cause of music in general, to have at each place where an orchestra has been established ...

(And now attention to this part):

... at least one experienced musician who has not only insight into clear execution, but also some understanding of both composition and harmony, so that he can hit correctly upon the style in which each composition must be executed, and thus can avoid the numerous mistakes that might disfigure it and spoil it. Section I, paragraph 2

C – Yes, but this might have been only Quantz's personal experience!

S – Well let me show you some more piece of evidence. Take this quote from a curious chronicle entitled, *Wahrheiten die Musik betreffend* from 1779 written by Joseph Martin Kraus. Oh, Here it is. In page 42 he speaks about defects of having the violin player as the leader and how...

In well-organized instrumental groups or orchestras, the tempo and rhythm is maintained thus: the composer {Sophia coughs insinuatingly} who always is playing the klavier in the orchestra, and the bass players are situated-as they

should be-in the middle of the orchestra. He indicates the tempo on his klavier with the same feeling and fire that he conceived it in when he composed the musical piece. The basses orient themselves from the composer's playing and the first violinist takes his cue from him and distributes it, as it were, among the other members just as he received it from the composer, and in that fashion every piece goes on in uninterrupted tempo. This manner of conducting is a surely orderly method.

I would go further in saying that these passages do not just show that in that period there was a correlation between knowledge of composition and the necessity of having a conductor or leader, but that they are also evidence of the *correlation between knowledge of composition and good performance*.

C - But did performances then not lack general quality? I have heard that a whole orchestral performance could have been rehearsed in just one day. What a chaos that must have been! Of course our conducting practices and our high technical achievements must have remedied that problem.

S – It is of course undeniable that bad musical groups existed, as Quantz himself admits. However, I would disagree that their performances were worst than ours as you suggest. Yes, a whole Opera could be rehearsed in one day, and performed in the next. Nonetheless, this becomes less surprising if one assumes that they had not only a better and shared understanding of the execution rules (like we discovered in our first conversation) which would already avoid much ado in rehearsing, but also a finer conception of the material being dealt with. Experience with composition with their own style of music was obviously much more widespread. Opera singers, for example, often had direct contact with the composer. Michael Kelly, one W. A. Mozart's favorite Tenors, tells us in his *Reminiscences* of how he misconceived of an aria composed for him by Paisiello and how meeting with the composer actually changed his mind. Here is a little passage from page 239 of the first volume:

The song in Old Gaffurio's part, which I may say was the lucky star of my professional career, strange as it may appear, I had the folly to refuse to sing, thinking it to trivial for me. I sent it back to Paesiello; he desired to see me – I went – and he played me the beautiful accompaniment for it which he had written, but which was not sent to me, I having received only the voice part. When I was going away, this great man gave me a gentle admonition, not to judge of things rashly: a piece of advice not thrown away upon me.

C [*interrupting Sophia and noticeably irritated*] – Here you go again: one more interesting quote, Brava! Yes, I see your point... But I must confess, all this talk of yours has led me yet to nothing. All this philosophy, sociological analysis, the remarks you bring up are all but mere talk, but how often you forget that my purpose is music, sound! It is very fine and intuitive to think, "The more you know about your art, the better you do it; so composers, who knew a lot about their art, must have played well". But is this really true? It can be just as true that a person, without knowledge of composition, but granted a natural feeling for music can play truly well. Saying that the author of a text will always recite it better is just not true!

S – Curio, you stubborn little monkey! Fine, if you want me to prove my point I will prove it. Now tell me. We have seen that for them the ultimate purpose of a composition was to bring out the content of the composition, right?

C – Correct. But what does that mean anyway?

S – This is what we shall see. Let us first see how this principle might relate to the other principles of performance that we have uncovered. Whatever the true content of the composition is, one would need to recognize it in order to deliver it well. So some sort of *recognition* was relevant for performance?

C – Yes, that seems fairly obvious.

S – And you would not dispute that fluency is a value of performance.

C – No I would not; it is much more pleasing for an audience when the musician gives an impression of easiness. But what does recognition and fluency have to do with each other?

S – Everything. How, you might ask? Let me start by asking you: Could you give me an example of what lack of fluency is?

C – A child learning how to read out loud. He reads sy–lla ble-by-sy–lla-ble making-it-ve–ry-bo–ring-to-li–sten to.

S – Exactly. Now when a child starts improving his reading abilities, he or she begins to read not just each letter, and not just each syllable, but he or she begins to read higher groups like words. Later the child begins to read not just word-by-word, but reads a whole sentence, more fluently. The more one can read ahead, the better one understands and pronounces the first parts of a sentence.

C – Oh yes, reading ahead is a very common and essential trick in sight-reading music. But why would a composer be better at it?

S – Because, the same that holds for a child learning to read, holds for a musician too. What makes the child improve his reading is his recognition of previously read material. In the beginning he reads “ba – na – na”. But after this word comes back a couple of times he reads out “banana”. And if he has had sufficient exposition to other words like “yellow” and “tasty” he can read the phrase “the yellow banana is tasty” more fluently. So he has recognized patterns previously presented to him and this recognition provides him with a greater facility in reading.

C – But why would composers be more fluent than in performing?

S – Because some of the composer’s basic tasks is becoming acquainted with, recognizing and working out patterns. Although I could not say that this is true for all of western repertoire, it is a fact that, at least in the 18th century, a composer’s education consisted mainly in working out worked a given material, which could have been, for example a basso continuo line, a *partimento* or a counterpoint exercise on a *cantus firmus*. But the kind of patterns they had to work with went way beyond this.

C – Could you give me an example of what a pattern is and how it would have helped a performer in better recognizing a piece.

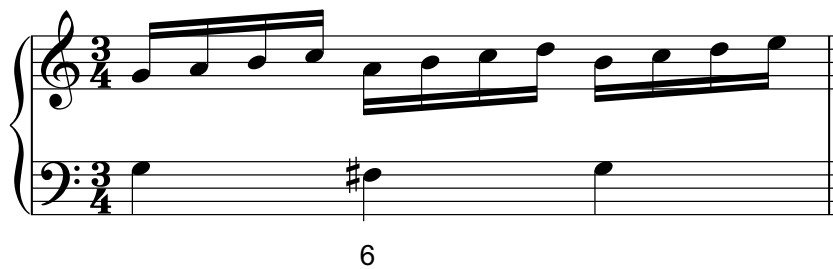
S – By all means. Patterns can be the simplest of things like this little motif, for example, which I include here without a clef on purpose:



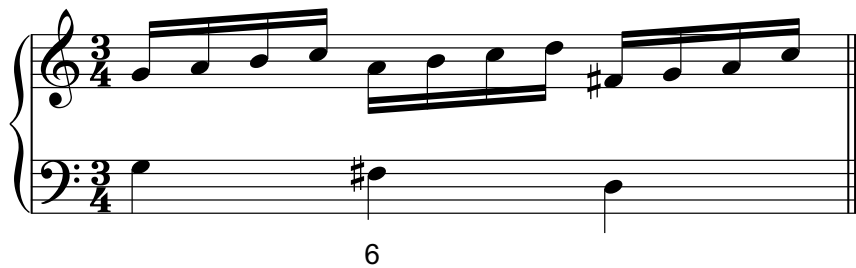
Another pattern could have been a very simple bass line like this one:



Next a composer might have wanted to combine both patterns into this:



If another bass line would have been given one could produce another line, for example:



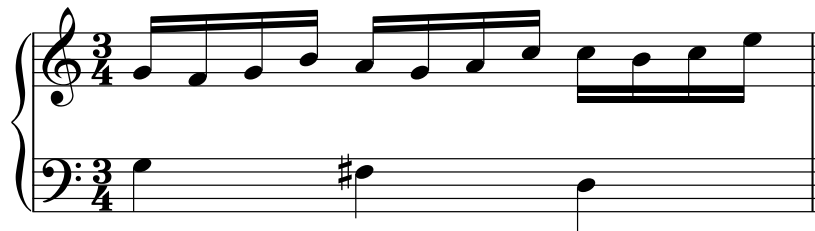
Or instead of using the first motif one could have chosen another motif, for example:



and combined it with one of the bass lines arriving at all these other combinations:

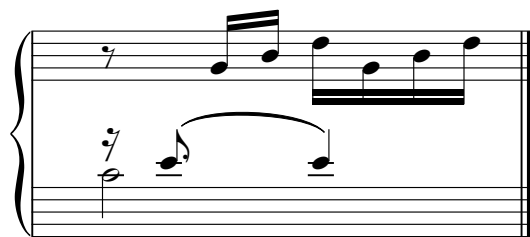


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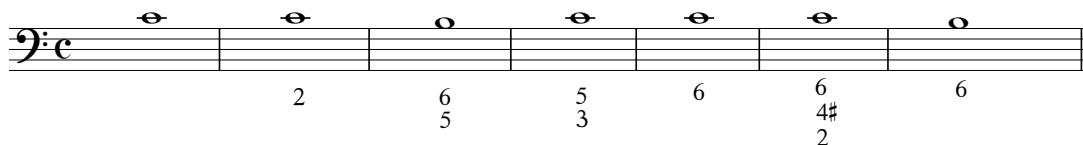


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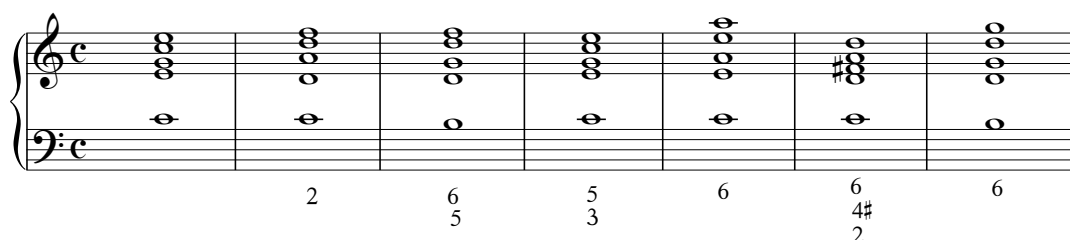
Now, these few examples already show that, through combination, from smaller patterns one can arrive (relatively easily) at many other larger figures, an ability I will call *recursivity* to borrow a term from mathematics and linguistics. Mind you that the examples I have given so far are but a little grain of dust in an infinite universe of musical possibilities composers would have been trained in. With this ability composers would have been more used to see even whole pieces as a elaboration a simple patterns making thus their reading and analytical skills far more economic. Here is an example of real music. Take the following motif:



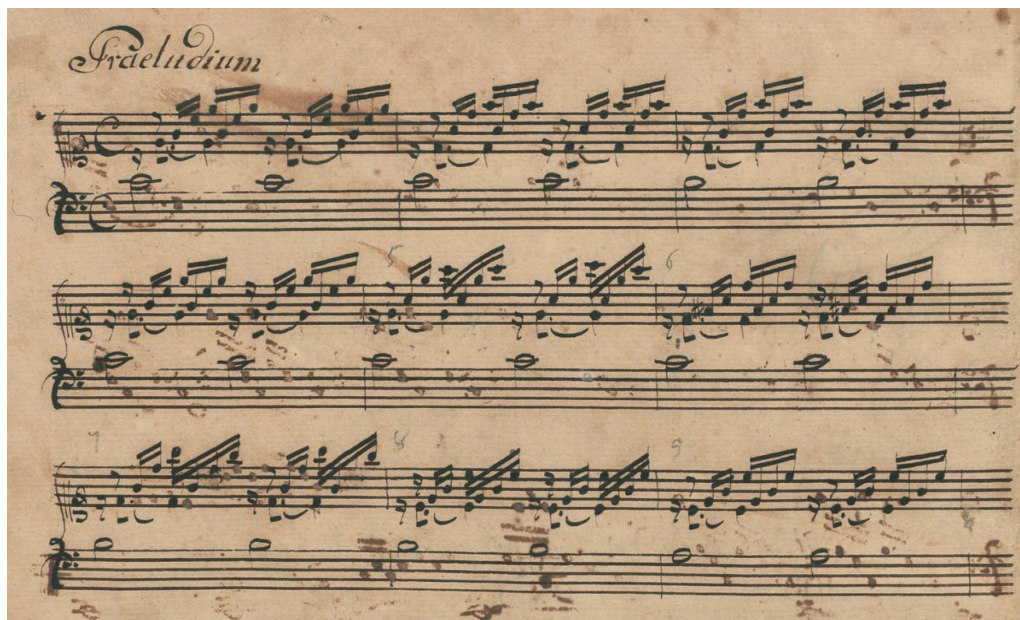
Now take this bass line:



And one possible 5 voice continuo realization of this line according to 18th century practice:



Put them all together and this is what you get:

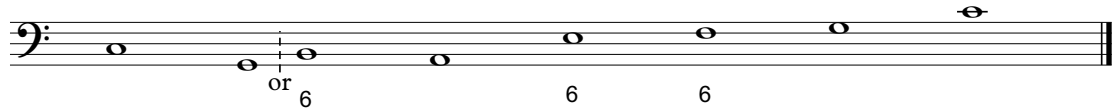


C – Ah, I know this! These are the opening measures of the Prelude of the BWV 846.

S – Yes, in fact that whole piece was probably conceived in this very way; you just stick to one arpeggio pattern and adapt it to different voice leadings of a continuo realization. I think composers would have never missed this point, and would have understood, read and played this Prelude much more swiftly.

C – But you are still talking about recognition of motifs, a very small musical pattern.

S – Yes, but larger ones existed. Composers often had an extensive vocabulary of phrases, for example, they could have used. One of these was the famous Romanesca. Here it is:



The amount of pieces just in the 18th century that are related to this pattern are innumerable. For example, all the first movements of Locatelli's opus 2 from 1732 for flute are and figured bass are different realizations of this same pattern. Here is the opening of first sonata:



Or of the second Sonata:



C – Fine. A composer acquainted with these patterns would not have read just individual notes but larger groups of notes. But this Romanesca is an example of a single phrase. But what if a composer wanted to look even further ahead? Is music not composed of much more than just small phrases?

S – Of course. However, the kinds of musical patterns a composer had to deal with were not limited to the size of figures like the Romanesca. Larger patterns, which I will call musical “forms”, also belonged to the basic vocabulary of a composer. Forms are the larger structural organizations of a piece or, in other words, specific kinds of melodic and harmonic concatenations of which whole pieces are made of. Examples of this are the many dances (Gavotte, Allemande, Sarabande, etc.), the Aria, the Concerto,

the Sonata and many others. An experienced composer would have known the specific particularities and the basic compositional expectations of many forms. Hence, when performing either a known or unknown piece set into one of these forms, he could easily recognize its normal large-scale elements and the deviations that one specific piece made.

C – So we could say a composer reading music is analogous to a chess player seeing plays further ahead. Chess (which is also a recursive activity in which from a fixed set of rules one derives infinite possibilities) consists in choosing certain moves that, one after the other, will form a concatenation of moves. And after playing many, many times a chess player will start recognizing patterns which will economize him some “thinking ahead”, and therefore he can more readily take a decision because he has seen that some 10 moves ahead there is a beneficial position for him. Chess players even often speak of fixed patterns like the “Sicilian Defense” or the known game endings, much like you have spoken of the Romanesca or the other forms.

S – Well noticed. The important point is that a composer would not have thought of piece note by note (like an experienced chess player does not always need to think each play he does), but he always see larger structures in a piece, which allowed him to see, think, recognize, plan, and play or sing ahead.

C - Fine. I am willing to grant you that composers had a better reading ability and would have conceived a piece in larger terms giving them foresight and hence more fluency. But do we have any evidence that this was true?

S – You remind me of a couple of passages from Forkel’s biography of Johann Sebastian Bach where he speaks of his facility in playing and reading. Oh, here they are, I read you from page 435:

As well in his unpremeditated fantasies as in executing his own compositions (...), he is said to have possessed such certainty that he never missed a note. He had besides, such an admirable facility in reading and executing the compositions of others (which, indeed, were all easier than his own) that he once said to an acquaintance, while he lived in Weimar, that he really believed he could play everything, without hesitating, at first sight.

He had an equal facility in looking over scores and executing the substance of them at first sight at the keyboard ... He was also able, if a single bass part was laid before him (and often it was a poorly figured one), immediately to play a trio or a quartet ...

Now, that this facility referred to here, must have been necessarily connected with his experience as a composer, who was not just busy with his own material, but eagerly seeking the works of other, goes without need of further explanation. Just notice how in this passages the subject of reading and fluency is closely connected with the subject of composing and improvising.

C – So much for fluency. But what about the other values we listed? For example how would the Art of composition help a performer play or sing with more clarity and distinction?

S – Again I would like to start with an analogy with texts written in normal language. Suppose I write a text like this:

Little Mary had a lamb. The lamb was white. The lamb had a pink ribbon. The ribbon was pretty. One day Little Mary went to School. That day Mary took her lamb to school. The teacher thought that the fact that Mary took her lamb to school was cute. The teacher also did not approve that Mary took her lamb to school . Mary had a great day at school! The lamb had a great day at school! The teacher had...

C – Stop! You are making me nervous. That text has two many periods.

S – Yes, and how would you reorganize it?

C – One way could be like this:

Little Mary had a white lamb, which had a pretty pink ribbon. One day Mary took her lamb to school, something the teacher thought was cute, although she did not quite approve of it. In any case, the three of them had a great they at school.

S – Bravo! But what makes your text more clear?

C – There is a better punctuation, or, you could say, a clearer hierarchy between the setences: You can divide my version into periods, phrases and sentences. Let me guess what you will say now: music is divided in the same way, is it not?

S – At least according to many 18th century theorists, yes. In fact, for the style we are dealing with, 18th century German music, a long tradition of writers made great efforts to describe in detail how music, like language, could be parsed or broken down into paragraphs, periods, phrases, sentences, words, etc. Johann Mattheson, a theorist deeply concerned in understanding music through concepts taken from classical rhetoric, provided analogies in his *Der Volkomene Kapellmeister* of 1739 that related musical writing to grammatical terms like, paragraph, period, comma and full-stop. Mattheson goes to the point of offering a detailed analysis of a menuet based on these ideas. Here it is:



Notice all the signs like (dot, colon, semicolon, commas) he uses in this analysis, to indicate the different parts of the melody. Mattheson was thus a forerunner of an idea that would permeate German theory of music and would achieve full maturity in the work of Heinrich Koch. His *Versuch einer Einleitung zur Composition*, especially the third volume published in 1793 gives us precise means in order to compose with, or recognize

in a piece all these different levels or musical hierarchy.

C – I would love to see an example:

S – Fine, but you do know all the different kinds of cadences are, right?

C – Cadences, what is that?

S – Cadences are to music a bit what punctuation signs are to texts. Actually they would have been one of those many basic patterns any composer would have known in the 18th century (in fact in any period of music). Their basic function was to determine the end of a musical segment. But, like punctuation signs have different degrees of intensity, so different kinds of cadences would be responsible for dividing the music in larger and small sections. Wait a second, let me take Koch's own *Musikalisches Lexikon* from 1802 where many different kinds of cadences are described. Here are some examples taken from the entry *Tonschluss* and *Halbcadenz* showing cadences in order of more strong to less strong:

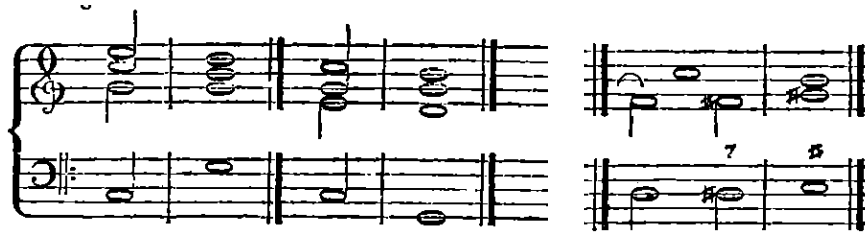
Strong:



Weaker:



Even weaker:



These are but a few examples of cadences. Koch's theory is that one can create different kinds of *Satz* (phrase) by ending it with different kinds of cadence. A phrase with a full closure, meaning, ending on a complete cadence is a *Schlußsatz* (closed phrase), and a phrase ending on an open cadence (be it an inversion of the complete cadence, a half cadence for example) is an *Absatz*. Here are examples from both kinds from paragraph 82, second volume:

Absatz:



Schlußsatz:



Two phrases can be combined to form a Period. The last phrase of a period will of necessity have a complete cadence, while the other phrases will forcibly have weaker cadences. Here is a whole piece taken from Koch's *Versuch*, paragraph 52 volume II where one finds a couple of periods set into a menuet:

Menuet.

The squares refer to the ending of an *Absatz*.

Furthermore, a smaller division than the *Satz* was often made, and that is what Koch, and Kirneberger called a *Einschnitte* (incise). Here a couple of examples taken from Koch's *Versuch* to illustrate it:

fig. 1.

Allegro. Δ

fig. 2.

Allegro. Δ

The triangles divide the phrase into incisives.

With these concepts in mind we can understand better a recommendation Kirnberger gives us in his *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik* from Page 138,

which sums up nicely the theory of period structure:

One can easily understand that every good melody must consist of various periods and phrases. (...) A musical period is a succession of connected notes that concludes with a complete formal cadence. The effect of this cadence is so satisfying to the ear that it permits it to comprehend the entire succession of notes combined in this period as a unit, without being disturbed in this sensation by the expectation of what might follow. If this close occurs in the principal tonic of the piece, the satisfaction is complete and nothing further is expected, since the entire musical speech has reached its goal, But if it occurs in a key other than the main key, the satisfaction is incomplete, since the ears want to hear the main key again.

A series of such periods, none of which but the last closes in the main key, forms a single composition. However, if one or more periods were to conclude with a cadence in the main key before the end of a composition, one would no longer have a single melody, but a composition that is made up of two or more similar melodies

Therefore, it should be a principal rule not to conclude any period but the last in an entire piece with the principal tonic.

Although there is an exception for concertos and arias, I would dare say that ninety nine percent of the pieces in this period follow this rule to the letter. So it must have been very obvious for baroque composers the general hierarchy in which pieces were constructed.

C – It is curious that I applied this same rule when I transformed your textual example into a better one. But although you might be right that composers would have recognized this structure or hierarchy in pieces, why would they play differently?

S – Like with a text you just do not mumble it out, but you punctuate, you take breaths, pauses and time; so in music you might want to punctuate, and articulate your sentences better. But you would also want to do it in an appropriate fashion. In cadences that deserve more rest, you have to give them more rest, in cadences that ask for less, less. But if you do not know which are the more important ones, how would you know how to vary your cadences?

C – You would not, I suppose. But exactly how would you do that, by which means?

S – To answer that we would have to look at some of the artifices offered by performance treatises we have already seen. For example look at this performance suggestion by Türk paragraph 15:

Every starting tone of a period must be given an even more marked emphasis than a normal strong beat. To be precise, these starting tones will be themselves more or less accented depending on them being the beginning of a larger or smaller part of the whole, that is, after a complete cadence, the [following] starting tone must be more strongly marked than after a half cadence, or merely after an incise [Einschnitte], etc. Here is a small example:



Notice how this passage is heavily embed in the theory we have just been describing. In other words, how could one apply these accents Türk asks for without understanding what “a complete cadence”, “half-cadence”, “Einschnitte” means, and where these things occur within a piece? Türk’s example is a good one, but it is not self-sufficient in explaining how one would should apply this feature in other situations; one needs to have that compositional knowledge.

C – But that only helps us in outlining and differentiating beginnings of phrases, and periods. In speaking we also punctuate the endings of phrases. Can we do that also in performance?

S – Again Türk comes in very handy. From paragraphs 20 to 25 of the chapter we have been dealing with he gives us detailed indications of what one should do in terms of articulation and punctuation in order to bring out a piece’s structure of periods, *Absätze* and *Einschnitten*. I would like to quote one part that suits our conversation. Here it is from paragraph 21:

For a very refined execution, with regard to the lifting up of the finger, one must take into consideration whether the periods are larger or smaller and more or less joined to each other. The finger is lifted sooner from the key at the end of a full cadence, or such a conclusive note is played with a shorter duration than when only a phrase member of the composition has been completed.

Notice again how this recommendation suggests the need for a good understanding of the structure of a piece.

C – I admit that adding just those two features you quoted from Türk would already make a performance give an audience many more signs that would lead them into a better comprehension of a piece. But what about variety? So far we have spoken of recognition abilities and accents and articulations that are in way very regular. But, if our intention is to keep the audience’s attention from beginning to end, is it not essential that we bring surprises and variety into our performance? And if you agree, how would knowledge of composition help a performance in this direction?

S – Indeed, I agree. But let us think about what how variety relates to attention. Imagine I start clapping my hand in a regular fashion, not too fast though, but trying to make no difference of intensity. If I would keep that for some time, what would happen?

C – I would get very bored.

S – And what would happen if I would make a regular difference of intensity, for example, for every four claps I would introduce a louder clap, and then a softer, then a half loud, and again a softer one?

C – I would be much less bored, but after a while I would still doze off. But it must be said that, by introducing that accentuation pattern, at least you create an expectation, which already gets my concentration going.

S – Yes. Would you agree that, one way of keeping your concentration going is to break that pattern?

C – Yes. Whatever difference you introduce after establishing a basic expectation will refresh my attention. It is a bit like walking at a very dense green meadow and suddenly seeing a red flower. But guard you from doing this too much, otherwise what was just breaking a pattern and going back to it, becomes either another pattern or complete chaos!

S – Good. I ask you then, have we not seen a very similar idea in those performance sources?

C – Yes. For example, all of them speak about regular and irregular accentuation.

S – So you think it is not just a coincidence that both realms of music ask for the same qualities, regularity and irregularity?

C – No. It is these qualities in composition that ask the same of the performer. So given that you understand how a piece is composed, whatever makes that piece interesting you will want to bring it out in your performance.

S – Aha! Did you hear what you just said? Perhaps without noticing you just admitted that there is in fact a direct relation between compositional knowledge and performance issues. Because of course, if you want to understand the regularities and irregularities of a performance of a piece and add variety to it, you have to understand these qualities in the composition.

C – But is that not a simple tautology?

S – In a way, yes, but only if you adopt the point of view of the composition or, in other words, if for you the purpose of performance is “the ability through singing and playing to make the ear conscious of the true content and affect of the composition”. Then it should be obvious that, if you understand a piece, and by that I mean, if you now how each of its elements are set together, if you know how a composition creates regularity and where and how it breaks it, you will naturally want to salient all these aspects in your performance.

C – Yes, but there are many ways of doing this, and each performer has his or her own way of making these compositional features salient.

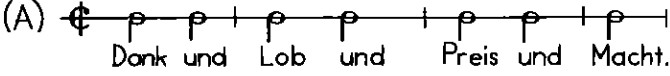
S – Yes, however when a composer puts a piece of music together he expects you to follow a certain accentuation procedure. Let me quote another passage by Kirnberger. Here it is in page 120 from Volume II:

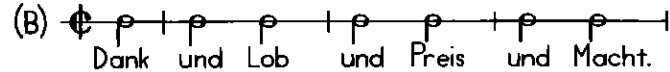
... each main note of a melodic phrase must fall on the first beat of the measure, or, as is said, on the downbeat. To clarify this for the aspiring composer, let us divide the words Dank und Lob und Preis und Macht musically and metrically. They cannot be divided other than as at (A). It would be most clumsy and unnatural if the nouns of this example were to be placed on the unaccented

beats, as at (B). The same applies to melody without words. All principal notes must fall on the downbeat, because the first beat of the measure has the greatest weight and is accented. What I mean by the principal notes here

And here for some 18th century humor:

What I mean by the principal notes here are those at which even a crude peasant nods his head or stamps his foot when expressing the feeling of the meter.

(A) 

(B) 

This passage is not only an indication for “aspiring composers” but also for performers. When we get a piece of music to perform, those accents Kirnberger wants are not in the piece of paper, we, performers, have to make them. Composers wrote down melodies expecting the performer to bring out those accents, and not only that, but the whole well-functioning of their compositions depended on the performing actually realizing those accents. Kirnberger’s example is just a very small one, and for the most basic kind of bar there is, but the same could be said for any kind of bar and for whatever piece.

C – But this concerns only regular accents. But as we have agreed, we need also unexpected accents so that the piece and the performance remain interesting. Now do we have any idea how they would have brought out these other kinds of accents?

S – Yes, and again that is very connected to composition.

C – Oh, Really? I would have never guessed...

S – Yes. Of course a piece can create regularity and break it in many levels, be it harmonic, rhythmical, melodic, or formal. Let us treat of the harmonic as an illustration. For the repertoire we are considering, we have a constant expectation of creation of tension and resolution of that tension. Tonic chord goes to dominant, dominant goes to tonic. However, this expectation can be broken, or enriched if you like, by introducing more especial chords. This is something a performer with awareness of the specialness of these chords will want to bring out with especial accents. It is no wonder that Türk, but also Bach and Quantz in their treatises offer a complete lists with difference gradations of intensity one needs to apply accordingly to the level of dissonance a chord has. Once more they are in almost full agreement. Here from paragraphs 32 to 34 are some chords Türk all think should be very forte:



And some he thinks are strong but not so much:



What again calls for attention is the fact that these authors offer these lists showing chords without a contextualization in an actual piece, which suggests the idea that one would need to know how to identify these chords in a piece, and need to understand how they would relate to the general harmonic scheme of a piece. Furthermore, exceptional accents are not limited to salient only harmony features; every level of composition can create their own pattern of expectation and can on its own terms break it, and for this the performer needs to provide a sign to tell the audience, “hey, look what the composer did!”. But you will not be able to know where these elements are, if you do not know the inner workings of composition of the style you want to deal with.

C – I understand. But so far we have seen some examples of how composition is related to fluency, clarity, and variety of performance.

S – Yes, and I suppose many more examples can be still given.

C – Good. So now we have seen how, for example, some features of execution like accentuation and articulation are related to those values. Still, there are some other elements of good performance we have not dealt with. Could it be that for those others, the performer can finally have freedom from these very imposing demands from the composition?

S – It could be. But notice the other two artifices we noted down, that is, ornamentation and good tempo. It goes without further need of explanation how ornamentation, specially extempore ornamentation is tightly connected to composition; if one adds other notes to a piece, one is just simply composing, and if one composes in a style one needs to follow the premises of that style. That is why all these authors point out the necessity of understanding the rules of counterpoint or basso continuo in order to ornament well.

C – Fine. But what about having good tempo? Why would a person gifted in composition feel more need for that?

S – Because, if he does not have this trait, he can generate neither clarity nor variety. For example, in order to create that expectation of accentuation we discussed, the audience needs to have a clear sensation of when the beats are going to come. The better one creates that expectation, the more the audience is brought in that tension, and by consequence of this, the stronger will be the effect of breaking it like, say, with an unexpected accent that emphasizes a dissonant harmony. So again it seems that performing well is perhaps simply making the composition clear to the ears of the public. But be it with tempo, articulation, accents or ornaments, one can always strive to make a piece ever more clear. That is why we can say that different performances are still performances of the same piece, even if one is worst than the other.

C – Sophia, suddenly this Principle *Number One* we have listed starts to make more sense. I confess that when I first read it, that meant that I should by some mysterious way find out or feel what that inner message of the piece was. But it seems

more and more to mean some quite simple in fact: Understand how a piece is put together, and use of some performance system to bring those elements out.

S – Yes. As we have seen, they had a school of performance, what one could call a system of declamation. However this system, this code of musical speech, if you like, would be senseless without an understanding of composition itself.

C – I am willing to admit that point as long as you admit the reverse: that knowledge of composition is void without being a good performer. One can be the best theorist, and make the most interesting analyses of a piece, but that can become senseless if he has no means of expressing himself, and finds no consequence of this knowledge in playing or singing, for at least the music we are dealing with was meant to be heard.

S – Perhaps not all of it... But let us not get too deep into this, for your interest is really performable music. But since it was typical in the 18th century to make analogies between music and rhetoric, I like to draw one myself here to: You could say that composition is grammar and style, and performance is pronunciation and declamation none of which a good orator can do without.

C – It is true that one cannot recite a poem or an oration well if one has not understood what it is about and how it is put together. passage by Türk said something very similar in this regard:

Whoever reads a poem he does not know and which is not completely comprehensible to him would probably find it difficult to declaim every single passage in such a way that a listener possessing good taste would find nothing left to be desired. This is certainly the case in music. Not until a musician knows a composition will he be able to play every part of it with complete skill and with the required expression. (That was paragraph 9, same chapter)

I think this passage sums up the idea with been searching today and it does show how, performance in the eyes of Türk and many others, knowledge of compositions was essential.

C – If I understood your position well, for the period we have been considering good performance depended on knowledge of performance artifices and knowledge of composition. The unity of both of these ideas would give a performer a clearer view of what performers would have needed while performing, and would have provided them with actual performance indications.

S – Yes. This is what would have constituted performance for the full musical craftsman and again I think it is no simple coincidence that in the 18th century most of the good performers had an advanced knowledge of the subject of composition. Now going back to the first dialogue we had the other day, if we really comprehend the many consequences of this view, performance becomes something more sound and reliable. My analogy with bakery might have been a joke, but perhaps not. Like a baker who is proud of baking a delicious bread following a recipe that he slightly improved from the one he received from his grandfather, who received his from his grandfather, musicians in that period were very proud of the musical science and system that was handed down to them and how they could be called upon to create and perform. Striving for knowledge, experimentation, trial and error, hours spent in trying to find exactly how and why you want to perform a passage is far more essential than waiting for your problems to be

resolved whimsically by inspiration or whatever other mysterious feeling. And this cannot be done without comprising in your studies the *full musical craftsmanship*: composition and performance.

C – But you do admit that there were still many musicians during that period who were not versed in composition.

S – Yes, but there were only few musicians of that kind who achieved excellence. Which leads me to the conclusion that the full education of a performing musician would have included the study of composition. In order to arrive at a fuller view of the performance of any style one has to look at both sides of the coin of the musical phenomenon. Furthermore, although Quantz, Türk, Mozart and Bach do touch on the subject of composition (specially Carl Philipp who devotes the second part of his treatise to basso continuo and improvisation), one cannot derive from them much more in order to apprehend what the Art of composition was and how composers used to think about their works.

C – How can we do it then?

S – There are many surviving sources that can help us. Many theoretical treatises devoted to different issues of composition were written throughout the 18th century, but also, compositional exercises and sketches, letters of composers, critiques and descriptions of composers' styles, but also information extracted from the compositions themselves by means of analysis, all can offer much insight into what constituted the Art of composition.

C – Is that all?

S – No. Actually that is just the tip of the iceberg.

C – You mean there is more?

S – Yes. Once one adopts the point of view of the composition, one can also choose to understand what was the cultural and aesthetical background that led a composer to write the way he did. Composers compose for a reason and music isn't just an abstract Art. It reflects the ideas and vogue of its days and understanding this can also give us a better understanding of how a piece of music is put together. However to explain how this works, would be like opening Pandora's box and we would need to meet many times more to even start understanding the problem. Suffice here to say that knowledge is never enough, and everything you know about the background of a piece can only but help you in understanding it and performing it.

C – I guess that is a very healthy advice, and I thank you dearly for that conclusion.

S – Before we conclude our conversation I would like to tell you one more thing. I admired you took the effort to learn well your technique, and also how you quickly applied yourself to learning these old styles of performance. But now you have to look further into the pieces you want to perform. Learn how it was put together, and the reasons why each note was put in there. Admire it for its beautiful architectural proportions, like when you look at a palace. Search for different textures, and layers. Make associations, relate the parts, and scrutinize it down to the last detail. All this can give you valuable insights, and unveil things you have never seen before; in the end you fall in love with music even more. Doing this can be a great *inspiration* to your needs as a performer. Oh, but look at the time! I have to go now, I am going to watch a lecture on the 18th century conception of *good taste*. Till next time!

Sophia leaves hurriedly but her last words remain in Curio's thoughts.

C [to himself] – Did she just say ‘inspiration’? And what is ‘good taste’ again? Oh yes! This is that fuzzy idea many sources on performance keep on mentioning. Interesting, they only mention it when they have no further way of explaining how to perform something and when they admit that no rules can ultimately be given to good performance... Wait, but that is exactly opposite to what Sophia has been talking about...

End of the second dialogue

Afterword

When reading a historical text I often feel the weight of a hermeneutic responsibility. Words and ideas vary their meaning over time, so one cannot be too careful to not impose one's modern understanding of a concept or expression to a text that belonged to a different world. I do not think I could convince everyone of this idea and I am not even sure that, for example, such a thing as an "original meaning" actually exists, or, if it does, that we can arrive at it. But much can be learned from this carefulness, or at least that is how I feel when trying to read and interpret a text with this attitude.

I felt a lot this weight the first time I read in Quantz that the Performer "should do justice to the ideas of the composer". I think had no idea of what that meant, or if I had it was very scant. I felt like this even more strongly when I found other writers of Quantz's circle speaking of the same problem with very similar words. So this passage and others similar remained in my mind, and I decided much before I did this Masters Program to unveil the meaning behind it. Besides studying composition, analysis, and looking at other writings about this problem, I often spoke about it with my friends, colleagues and teachers, which made me discover that this problem of the relation of the performer to composition has many facets, and produces in different people in different places and times a big variety of opinions, sometimes very contrasting.

Some people think it is their soul that speaks when they play, some people think one just plays the notes and that is it. Should you feel when you play, should you not? How much does it matter what the composer had in mind when he composed, and if it matters can we actually know what he felt? All interesting and important questions, for which I think the answers are and will remain ineffable.

What I presented here is just one of those many possible opinions, and I believe I am far from exhausting the matter. My only purpose was to incite discussion and hope that from it we can become more refined in how we understand, perform, and, let us not forget, compose music.

Acknowledgements

Most of the ideas in these dialogues do not, of course, belong to me alone. Many times when writing them I had in mind different people and conversations that helped me form the arguments in this text. Thus, many colleagues, friends and their ideas are represented in the following texts.

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