Overview of the French Harpsichord:

History and Performance

The Harpsichord In France

The earliest extant example of a French harpsichord is one made by Jean Denis II (1600-1672; instrument builder, treatise writer). Edward Kottick, author of *A History of the Harpsichord*, notes some typical characteristics of the seventeenth-century French harpsichord:

> Two-manual instruments all have aligned keyboards, are disposed 2 x 8', 1 x 4' and may have had couplers allowing all choirs to be played from the lower manual. In fact, the French seem to have invented the idea of aligned keyboards and the shove coupler, resulting in an important new sound concept. Buff stops are rare. Not yet mentioned is the narrowness of the French octave span – narrower than the French span would be in the next century – as well as the shortness of the key heads, particularly on the upper manual. This daintiness and small-scale elegance contrasts markedly with the large, wide keys of the Flemish and Italian schools. Judged neither as powerful nor as complex in tone as eighteenth-century French harpsichords, these instruments nevertheless have a sweetness, a clarity, and a gravity that well suits the music of Louis Couperin [c.1626-1661; composer, harpsichordist, organist; uncle of François Couperin] and Jean Henri D'Anglebert.[1]

Harpsichord building in France in the eighteenth century was dominated by the Blanchet/Taskin dynasty. Nicolas Blanchet (1660-1731) established a shop in Paris by 1689. Five generations of harpsichord builders flourished, from Nicolas through his great-great-grandson Nicolas Blanchet (dates unknown), and included Pascal-Joseph Taskin (1723-1793) who married the widow of the grandson of Nicolas, François-Etienne II (1730-1766). The Taskin side of the dynasty continued through his grand-nephew, Henri-Joseph Taskin (1779-1852). Kottick notes:

[1] Edward L. Kottick, *A History of the Harpsichord* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 168.

> The classic eighteenth-century French double-manual harpsichord, with its 2 x 8', 1 x 4' disposition, shove coupler, gold bands, gilded moldings, and Louis XV or XVI stand is the end product of a century and a half of building by a variety of masters, most of them working in Paris. . . . [The harpsichords were] strongly influenced by the work of the Ruckerses and Couchets [17th-century harpsichord building dynasty]. . . . Rebuilding of Flemish instruments . . . occupied much of the time of French builders from the end of the seventeenth century to the eve of the Revolution. And the Ruckers sound was so admired that even new instruments were made in the style of rebuilt Flemish harpsichords.[2]

As mentioned, a major part of the work of the Blanchets/Taskins was the rebuilding of instruments from the Ruckers dynasty. Ruckers instruments typically had a range of C/E-c3; the lowest key would appear to be E, but a short octave on the instrument would extend the actual range to four octaves, down to C. As Edward Kottick explains:

> In a C/E short octave tuning scheme, the bottom note of the keyboard, an E, is tuned so that is sounds C, a third lower. The accidental that appears to be F# is tuned to D, and the apparent G# is tuned to either E or Eb, depending on the requirements of the music . . . This extended the bass register from F down to C with only a slight enlargement of the case.[3]

Later French builders, wishing to modernize the valued Ruckers harpsichords, expanded the range of the keyboard downward, a process known as *ravalement*. Jean-Pierre Baconnet (harpsichord list-serve contributor) sheds light on the derivation of the word itself: "The word *ravalement* is a contraction of *remettre a l'aval, re-avaler*, that is to say 'extend the left side of a harpsichord keyboard (*l'aval*) to add other strings and keys.'" [Baconnet June 4, 2008] The typical range of an eighteenth century French harpsichord was GG-e3, expanding later to FF-f3. Typical decorations would include:

> Soundboards . . . painted with flowers in a more sophisticated style than the Flemish; the cases were painted or lacquered in any of a variety of fashionable styles, and the instruments were equipped with elaborate six-, seven- or eight-legged bases often carved

[2] Ibid., 247.
[3] Ibid., 40.

and gilded in one of the royal styles. Simpler instruments were painted in one or two colors, paneled with gold bands and mouldings and fitted with less elaborate bases but still in one of the royal styles.[4]

In summarizing the change from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century French harpsichord, Kottick explains:

> Within thirty years, the noble clavecin of Louis Couperin, d'Anglebert, and Chambonnières . . . was transformed. The French harpsichord was now heavily built and heavily reinforced . . . but it still retained the aligned keyboards, shove coupler, leathered registers, and beautifully crafted keyboards of the native French product. In the process, the true tone of the Flemish harpsichord was inevitably compromised, and what resulted was a quality half-Flemish and half-something new; but it was a powerful amalgam, creating a lush, complex, highly colored, even romantic timbre.[5]

New Grove (1980) expands on this description of the sound:

> By the time of the 1730 Blanchet instrument, French harpsichords had achieved a sweetness in sound very unlike the direct, punchy quality of their 17th-century forebears. The trebles sustain longer, the basses are less percussive and the initial attack given to each note by the quill is less assertive. By mid-century this tendency towards smoothness and sweetness of tone was even more pronounced, and French harpsichord sound acquired a caressing quality unknown in the instruments of other nations. There is a continuous gentle change in tone-color from treble to bass in each of the registers, and the overall tone quality is reminiscent of a woodwind ensemble of the Classical period – colorful and transparent. In Taskin's instruments, the treble became even sweeter and more caressing, the bass even more sonorous and velvety, and . . . there are more subtly different tone-colors, each of great beauty, than in the instruments of any other maker.[6]

PITCH STANDARDS

[4] Edwin M. Ripin, G. Grant O'Brien, John Caldwell, and Denzil Wraight, *The New Grove Early Keyboard Instruments* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 78.

[5] Kottick, *History*, 280-281.

[6] Edwin M. Ripin and Howard Schott (with John Barnes and G. Grant O'Brien), "Harpsichord," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 8, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), 254.

The current standard of pitch at a=440 was not the norm in centuries past. Bruce Haynes explains that "pitch standards were variable; however, Joseph Sauveur [1653-1716; French acoustician] measured the pitches of harpsichords in 1700 and 1713 at a=404. This level was observable in France from about 1680 to 1800, although its period of importance was the reign of Louis XIV."[7] Haynes remarks further, in *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of "A"*:

> . . . A tuning fork owned by Pascal Taskin gives the pitch of a=409[8] . . . [Furthermore,] a clue as to the most common pitch for instrumental music is a remark by [harpsichord builder] Willard Martin [in an unpublished paper called "Pitch in Harpsichords," 1994], who points out that surviving harpsichords by [Henri] Hemsch [1700-1769] and [Jean] Goermans [1703-1777] made in Paris in the 1750s-1760s "had among the longest scales in the French tradition, strongly suggesting that harpsichord pitches were not creeping higher in mid century." This suggests that harpsichords . . . were still generally at A-2 [identified as a=392 on p. lii].[9]

He expands:

> Willard Martin noticed that, in contrast to the long scalings of French harpsichords made at mid-century ("among the longest scales in the French tradition"), instruments made by Taskin made in the 1780's show noticeably shorter scales; Martin estimates a rise in pitch of about a semitone compared with earlier instruments. The lower pitch would presumably have been A-2, and the higher might have been that of the tuning fork owned by Taskin (at 409).[10]

Thus the pitch found in French harpsichords in the eighteenth century ranged from a=392 to a=409, a half step to almost a whole step below modern pitch.

TEMPERAMENT

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[7] Bruce Haynes, "Pitch," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 June 2008), http://www.grovemusic.com.
[8] Bruce Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of "A"* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2002), 309.
[9] Ibid., 274.
[10] Ibid., 311.

Temperament is a way of tuning the notes of the scale using intervals that have been modified (tempered) from their pure forms. The reason this is necessary is that if an instrument is tuned by setting twelve pure, beatless, perfect fifths upward from, for example, the lowest "C", the final "B#" is *not* the enharmonic equivalent of "C". This difference is called the Pythagorean comma, named for the Greek philosopher of mathematics fame who studied and identified this problem. The Pythagorean comma is equivalent to about one quarter of a semitone. Temperament, then, is the division of this comma and the assigning of the sub-divisions to specific intervals. In today's equal temperament, the octave is divided into 12 equal semitones and thus the Pythagorean comma is divided equally.

There were some proponents in the seventeenth century of equal temperament, but the prevailing preference was for unequal temperaments, meaning the comma is unevenly distributed over the octave. A common Baroque unequal temperament is called "meantone" because the whole tone is exactly one-half the size (that is, the mean) of the major third. In such a temperament, the usable fifths are tempered but the thirds are tuned pure, or almost so, resulting in semitones of different sizes. Thus, G# and Ab are not the same pitch and the tuner must choose between them. Monsieur de Saint Lambert (*fl* c.1700; treatise writer, harpsichordist, composer), writing concerning the flat in his *Principles of the Harpsichord* (1702) said, "The flat, like the sharp, has certain notes proper to itself and near which it is found more often than elsewhere, although it may occasionally accompany others. The notes commonly flattened are B and E."[11] Translator and editor Rebecca Harris-Warrick notes at this point that:

[11] Monsier de Saint Lambert, *Principles of the Harpsichord*, trans. and ed. by Rebecca Harris-Warrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 62.

> St Lambert distinguishes between the notes that are sharpened and those that are flattened because of the prevailing preference for unequal temperaments. Although there were some proponents of equal temperament in the 17th century, the system generally referred to as mean-tone tuning was the norm.[12]

Jean Denis II (whose instrument has already been described as the earliest extant French harpsichord) wrote the first French treatise, *Treatise on Harpsichord Tuning*, devoted exclusively to keyboard performance practice. It was first published in 1643 and was issued in its final version in 1650. Vincent J. Panetta, Jr., translator and editor of the treatise, says that Denis "advocated strongly for meantone temperament and defended it vigorously against the encroachments of equal temperament."[13] Regarding equal temperament, Denis states that, "I found [it] quite wretched and very harsh to the ear."[14] He compared it to ". . . a banquet of tainted, bad-tasting meats and vinegar to drink."[15] Denis favored, in particular, quarter comma meantone temperament. Edward Kottick states:

> The best known of . . . meantone temperaments . . . is the quarter-comma meantone. . . . In this temperament, one-fourth of the Pythagorean comma was placed on four of the fifths, which, by general agreement, were usually avoided. . . . . The glorious thing about quarter-comma meantone is that the thirds are pure.[16]

Another unequal temperament, called *ordinaire*, was also popular, especially in France. This temperament, Mark Lindley enlightens us, "required two or three fifths at the back of the

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Jean Denis, *Treatise on Harpsichord Tuning*, trans. and ed. by Vincent J. Panetta, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.
[14] Ibid., 68.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Edward L. Kottick, *The Harpsichord Owner's Guide* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 152-153.

circle of fifths to be tempered slightly larger than pure, thus producing a more pronounced difference in size and quality between"[17] some of the thirds. He continues:

> The inequalities in question were distributed not at random but in a pattern consistent enough to allow the keys to be identified by ear according to their intentional inflections. [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau [1712-1778; Swiss philosopher, author, composer; of French Protestant descent] also wrote, in 1748-1749, that the keys could thus be identified by ear, in the course of discussing a circulating form of the "ordinary" temperament as described by Rameau in 1726 [*Nouveau système de musique théorique*]. Rameau's instructions are accompanied with the following remarks: "The excess of the last two 5ths and the last four or five major 3rds is tolerable, not only because it is almost insensible, but also because it occurs in modulations little used – except for when one might choose them on purpose to render the expression more keen etc. For it is good to note that we receive different impressions from intervals in keeping with their different [degrees of] alteration. . . . Knowledgeable musicians know how to exploit these different effects of the intervals . . ."[18]

Thus, some sort of unequal temperament, whether meantone, quarter-comma meantone, or temperament *ordinaire*, was commonly found in France during the first half of the eighteenth century. Equal temperament, though not unheard of, certainly would be in the small minority. Performers of French harpsichord music (or any music of the Baroque for that matter) must seriously consider the question of temperament.

ORNAMENTATION

Ornaments are a critical part of French harpsichord music. This importance is stressed by Albert Fuller in his introduction to the works of Gaspard Le Roux (*d*?1707; composer, harpsichordist):

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[17] Mark Lindley, "Temperaments," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 June 2008), http://www.grovemusic.com.
[18] Ibid.

> Of all the post-medieval music of Europe none achieved anywhere nearly so elaborate a system of ornamentation as that of 17th-century France. During this period and the next half century, these ornaments or *agréments* became so much an integral part of the fabric of the music itself that when they are stripped away, the music loses its very breath of life and collapses like an ill-treated soufflé.[19]

David Tunley expands on this thought:

> Like many others of the time Couperin regarded the harpsichord as a 'perfect' instrument – perfect in all but its incapacity to swell and diminish its tone through finger action. Yet even the absence of this aspect of musical expression can be largely overcome, he declared, through recourse to the fine art of ornamentation "established by my predecessors and which I have tried to perfect" (preface to Book One). Thus the primary role of ornamentation in Couperin's harpsichord pieces, as in all his music, is an *expressive* one, a point easily overlooked if we think of it as a mere means of extending the evanescent tones of a plucked instrument. . . . To imagine that Couperin's rich ornamentation is there *primarily* to compensate for any deficiencies in tone is to miss the point, and in doing so to ignore as well the equally rich ornamentation found in almost all his music.[20]

A number of ornament tables by various composers help the performer sort through the myriad of ornaments found in French music. Chambonnières is the first to include a table of ornaments in a harpsichord publication (1670). The next prominent one is that of D'Anglebert in his *Pièces de clavecin* of 1689. Other important ornament tables can be found in the publications of Nicolas-AntoineLebègue (c.1631-1702; composer, organist, harpsichordist), Le Roux, Rameau, and François Couperin. In addition, ornaments are discussed by Monsieur St Lambert in his *Principles of the Harpsichord*. Though Rameau's (1724) table is closer in time to de Bury than Couperin's (1716), the symbols used by the latter more closely match those of de Bury, and thus the names of ornaments used by Couperin will be referenced. The most

[19] Albert Fuller, "Ornamentation," in preface to *Pieces for Harpsichord* by Gaspard Le Roux (New York: Alpeg Editions, 1959), XV.
[20] David Tunley, *Couperin* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1982), 76.

commonly used ornaments in the music of Bernard de Bury are the *tremblement* (trill), *pincé* (mordent), *port de voix* (appoggiatura), and *arpègement, en montant* (rising arpeggio).

The ornament tables clearly show the *tremblement* beginning on the upper auxiliary note. Both a *pincé simple* and *pincé double* are indicated in Couperin's table and are also used by de Bury. The *simple* occurs on a shorter note such as a quarter note, with only one alternation of notes (from the main note to the lower auxiliary and back to the main note), while the *double* is found on a longer note, such as a half note, and has multiple undulations. The *port de voix* of de Bury can be a simple appoggiatura upward or downward, and can be attached to a note that contains either a *tremblement*, *pincé simple* or *pincé double*. The *arpègement, en montant* is a marking used to indicate that a chord is arpeggiated, all the notes being held down.

Other ornaments used by Bernard de Bury include: *tierce coulée, en montant* (filling in a third; indicated with a slash between two notes); *doublé* (a turn, beginning with the upper auxiliary); *son coupé* (Rameau's name for staccato articulation; indicated with a small vertical slash above the note). Further, a trill-turn is found occasionally in de Bury's music. This ornament is indicated by a turn sign above a trill sign, and is often used by Couperin, even though it is not included in his ornament table. Frederick Neumann, in his *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music*, states, "In these places the turn follows rather than precedes the trill. The symbol is invariably followed by a stepwise rise to the next note."[21] Another trill variant used sparingly by de Bury, called *double cadence* and found in Rameau's ornament table, seems to be equivalent to Couperin's *tremblement fermé* or *tremblement ouvert*, neither

[21] Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 267.

of which is realized in his ornament table. The symbol itself is a trill sign with a slight upward curve at the end, and is equivalent to a regular trill with a termination consisting of the lower auxiliary returning to the written note. Aurally, the trill-turn and the *double cadence* would seem to be equivalent. Neumann suggests one possible difference, when speaking of the former: "It is probable that the symbol often implies a definite separation of the two ornaments through a brief rest point of the trill, provided there is time for it."[22]

One final ornament requires explanation: a small note which has the appearance of an appoggiatura. Robert Donington, in the article in the 1980 *New Grove* edition on ornaments, calls this a passing appoggiatura. Since it is a French ornament that indeed fills in a third, it will be referred to here as a *tierce de coulé*. According to Donnington:

> It was described by German authorities of the second half of the 18th century as an appoggiatura that flouts normal expectation by preceding the beat to which it is attached. They substantiated this view by showing it as slurred, not in the manner of a passing note to the note before, but in the manner of an appoggiatura to the note after. . . . Its use (especially French) is quite important. . . . [23]

Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773; German flautist, composer, writer on music, flute maker), in his treatise, *On Playing the Flute*, describes it as follows:

> There are two kinds of appoggiaturas. Some are tipped as accented notes, or notes on the downbeat, others as passing notes, or on the upbeat. The former may be called accented [*Anschlagende Vorschläge* (*Ports de voix frappants*)], the latter, passing appoggiaturas [*Durchgehends Vorschläge* (*Ports de voix passagers*)].[24]

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[22] Ibid., 268.
[23] Robert Donington, "Ornaments," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols., ed. by Stanley Sadie, vol. 13 (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), 836.
[24] Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, second edition, trans. and ed. by Edward R. Reilly (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), 93.

Quantz proceeds to give a clear example of a *tierce de coulé*. He further clarifies, "Were the little notes lengthened, and tipped in the time of the following principal notes, the melody would be completely altered . . . But this would be opposed to the French style of playing, to which these appoggiaturas owe their origin . . . "[25] At this point in the text, translator Edward R. Reilly comments in a footnote, "Judging from Quantz's insistence that the performance of passing appoggiaturas in the time of the preceding note is part of the French style of playing, he probably heard them performed in that manner, at least by flute players, during his visit to Paris in 1726 and 1727."[26] Neumann's book contains a discussion of this very topic on pp. 183-199. For example, "[Johann Friedrich] Agricola [1720-1774; German musicographer, composer, organist, singing master, conductor] too departs from the onbeat-only rule [for appoggiaturas] . . . First, he tells us that 'several famous performers' will play Vorschläge between descending thirds 'in the manner of the French in the time of the preceding note . . . ' (p. 68)"[27] Other evidence is presented from [Friedrich Wilhelm] Marpurg [1718-1795; German critic, journalist, theorist, composer, civil servant] and Leopold Mozart [1719-1787; composer, violinist, theorist; father of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart], though he notes that Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach (1714-1788; composer, keyboard player, theorist; son of Johann Sebastian Bach) is much opposed to this interpretation.

This *tierce de coulé* appears to have been so assumed by French composers that it is not including in ornament tables. It usually comes between "mi" and "do" of the harmony at the end of a phrase. In his 1989 harpsichord workshop at the University of Michigan on the music of

[25] Ibid., 94.
[26] Ibid., n. 3.
[27] Neumann, *Ornamentation*, 188.

Bach and Couperin, Edward Parmentier suggested that a *tierce de coulé* is needed to make a feminine ending for a cadence, such as those that are found in the French language (for example, *ten-dre*). This ornament seems to make the last note of a three-note cadential melodic figure from the third scale degree down to the tonic softer. It appears that the French felt it would make the "second syllable" in the music softer by demoting its importance, since it is the small note that will seem louder. This is accomplished by moving the weak musical "syllable" away from the beat by bringing it in "early".[28] Kenneth Gilbert, in his *Introduction* to Book I of *Pièces de clavecin* by François Couperin, concurs regarding what he calls *coulé de tierce mélodique*.[29] His hypothesis is that it should be used at "the ending of a phrase" . . . and when there is "a descending leap of a third from a strong to a weak beat (or portion of a beat)."[30] The only difference between the ideas of Parmentier and Gilbert is that in the latter's definition it is not required that the interval of a third end on the tonic note. He also says:

> Hesitancy among performers over the application of this ornament has been caused by the fact that it is practically never mentioned as such by instrumental composers in the various tables of ornaments, and that when it does occur, it is effectively disguised in the scores by being notated in the same manner as the totally different appoggiatura.[31]

RHYTHMIC ALTERATIONS

Notes inégales

[28] Edward Parmentier, personal notes from "Harpsichord Technique, Style and Pedagogy: J.S. Bach and François Couperin," harpsichord workshop at the University of Michigan, 1989.
[29] Kenneth Gilbert, "Performance," in introduction to *Pièces de clavecin premier livre*, by François Couperin (Paris: Heugel, 1972), XVIII.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

One trait common in French performance practice is that of *notes inégales (*"unequal notes"). In this convention, consecutive notes of equal value are played unequally. The custom is to pair notes by lengthening the first beyond its written value and shortening the second, producing a "long-short" sound in consecutive stepwise notes. The degree of inequality varies, depending on the tempo, the genre, and "good taste". Stephen E. Hefling, in his book *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music*, states, "The bulk of the evidence – nearly 60 tutors, plus a variety of other sources – indicates that inequality was virtually *de rigueur* in France from the time of Lully until the Revolution."[32] For example, Monsieur de St Lambert observes in *Principles of the Harpsichord* that:

> The equality of movement that we require in notes of the same value is not observed with eighth notes when there are several in a row. The practice is to make them alternately long and short, because this inequality gives them more grace. . . .
> . . . When one must make the eighth or quarter notes unequal, it is a matter of taste to decide if they should be more or less unequal. There are some pieces in which it is appropriate to make them very unequal and others in which they should be less so. Taste is the judge of this.[33]

Jacques(-Martin) Hotteterre (1673-1763; flute player, teacher, composer, treatise writer) speaks about this convention in his *Principles of the Flue, Recorder and Oboe* of 1707: "It is well to note that all eighth notes should not always be played equally, but that in some time signatures one long and one short should be used."[34] Further, François Couperin explains in his *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, "We write differently from the way we play. . . . For example, we

[32] Stephen E. Hefling, *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 37.
[33] Saint Lambert, *Principles*, 46.
[34] Jacques-Martin Hotteterre, *Principles of the Flute, Recorder and Oboe*, trans. and ed. by Paul Marshall Douglas (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1968), 37.

dot several eighth notes in succession moving by conjunct degrees; however, we write them in equal time values."[35] Even Quantz refers to *notes inégales* in his *On Playing the Flute*:

> The quickest notes in every piece of moderate tempo, or even in the Adagio, though they seem to have the same value, must be played a little unequally, so that the stressed notes of each figure, namely the first, third, fifth, and seventh, are held slightly longer than the passing, namely the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth, although this lengthening must not be as much as if the notes were dotted.[36]

OVERDOTTING

Overdotting is the practice of lengthening a dot and playing the subsequent short note(s) more rapidly. It is most associated with the French overture, which is played in a majestic style. George Gow Waterman and James R. Anthony describe this in *New Grove* as follows:

> A French overture is a festive musical introduction for an opera, ballet or suite. . . . It originated with the ballet overtures of Jean-Baptiste Lully in the 1650's and quickly became the sole pattern for French opera and ballet overtures. In its day it was much copied, borrowed and adapted. . . . The French overture is now regarded not only as a prominent Baroque form, but as an expression of the elegant tastes of 17th-century France, as an illustration of Lully's penetrating influence, and above all as the earliest important genre of prefatory music for the stage.[37]

Over the past forty years a controversy regarding overdotting erupted, as Frederick Neumann (1907-1994; American musicologist of German origin) attacked the theory of overdotting promoted for years by Arnold Dolmetsch (1858-1940; French-born British musician), Thurston Dart (1921-1971; English musicologist, performer, and teacher), and Robert Donington (1907-1990; English musicologist). Neumann believes that "the 'French overture

[35] François Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin*, ed. and trans. by Margery Halford (Sherman Oaks, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 49.
[36] Quantz, *Flute*, 123.
[37] George Gow Waterman and James R Anthony, "French Overture," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 9 June 2008), http://www.grovemusic.com.

style' is essentially a myth wrapped around a small nucleus of fact."[38] He insists that "for the period from Lully to Rameau, the so-called French style is essentially a legend, and its first formulation by Dolmetsch is an invention which has been wrongly taken for a discovery."[39] Major responses have come from a number of musicologists. For example, Michael Collins (Professor of Music, North Texas State University) states, "My belief is that it is not necessary to generalize on isolated passages from treatises . . . but that an abundance of passages as well as internal evidence in scores point to a general practice of over-dotting in French music of the period and also in music composed outside France in the French style."[40] Quoting Johann Georg Sulzer (1720-1779; Swiss aesthetician, lexicographer) (one of fourteen contemporary musicians that are quoted) in his *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* published in 1775, Collins notes that the author of the article on *Ouvertuere* treats the subject historically, referring to the overtures in the last one hundred years: "The main notes are usually dotted, and in performance the dots are held longer than their value. After these main notes follow a greater or lesser number of small ones that must be played with the greatest speed . . ."[41]

Two other primary sources will be mentioned. Etienne Loulié (1654-1702; musician, theorist), in his *Elements ou principes de musique*, states the following: "When the dot occurs within the same beat as the eighth-note which precedes it, the eighth-note should be held a bit longer, while singing, and the sixteenth-note which follows should be passed through quickly –

[38] Frederick Neumann, *Essays in Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 98.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Michael Collins, "A Reconsideration of French Over-Dotting," *Music & Letters* 50, no. 1 (Jan., 1969): 111.
[41] Ibid., 120.

all within the same beat without moving the hand,"[42] and, "The dot of an unaccented dotted eighth-note should be conceived and practiced as it were a sixteenth-note."[43] Quantz, in his treatise, clearly states, "In dotted quavers, semiquavers, and demisemiquavers you depart from the general rule, because of the animation that these notes must express. It is particularly important to observe that the notes after the dots . . . must be played just as short as those [after the dots] . . . whether the tempo is slow or fast."[44]

RHYTHMIC ASSIMILATION

David Fuller sets forth the problem: "Clashes between binary and ternary rhythms in Baroque music are mostly of two kinds: even duplets against triplets and dotted figures against triplets or sextuplets,"[45] which Roland Jackson says require "decisions . . . as to . . . whether the two rhythms are left to stand as notated, or instead coordinated . . ."[46] Michael Collins set forth the position of assimilation in two *Journal of the American Musicological Society* articles: "The Performance of Sesquialtera and Hemiolia in the 16th Century" (1964) and "The Performance of Triplets in the 17th and 18th Centuries" (1966). A viewpoint that allows for some rhythmic assimilation, but which also believes rhythmic conflict is often intended by the composer, is set

[42] Ètienne Loulié, *Elements or Principles of Music*, trans. and ed. by Albert Cohen (Brooklyn: Institute for Mediaeval Music, 1965), 10.
[43] Ibid., 11.
[44] Quantz, *Flute*, 67.
[45] David Fuller, "The Performer as Composer," in *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, ed. by Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 132.
[46] Roland Jackson, *Performance Practice: A Dictionary-Guide for Musicians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 339.

forth by Frederick Neumann in "Conflicting Binary and Ternary Rhythms: From the Theory of Mensural Notation to the Music of J.S. Bach" (1989).

Both authors use primary sources and give convincing examples, indicating that there are no clear-cut answers to the problem. Furthermore, two major treatise writers of the eighteenth century, Johann Joachim Quantz and Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, give conflicting instructions. Quantz clearly states that in the context of "triplets in one part and dotted notes against them in the other part . . . you must not strike the short note after the dot with the third note of the triplet, but after it. Otherwise it will sound like six-eight or twelve-eight time . . ."[47] On the other hand, Bach writes, "With the advent of an increased use of triplets in common or 4/4 time, as well as in 2/4 and 3/4, many pieces have appeared which might be more conveniently written in 12/8, 9/8, or 6/8."[48] He then gives an example of a final triplet note being played simultaneously with the second note of a dotted eighth/sixteenth note configuration. Another important commentary comes from J.S. Bach's one-time student, Johann Friedrich Agricola. Neumann informs:

> In 1769, reviewing a clavier treatise by [Georg Simon] Löhlein [1725-1781; German theorist, composer] that advocated the synchronization of triplets with dotted notes, Agricola writes: "Such synchronization takes place only in extreme speed. Barring this, the note after the dot must be played not with, but after the last note of the triplet. Otherwise the difference between the binary measure, where such notes occur, and the 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, or 12/8 meter would be obliterated. This is what J.S. Bach taught all his students and this too is what Quantz teaches in his treatise. Surely no one will have reservations about the performing skill and artistic sensitivity of these two men."[49]

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[47] Quantz, *Flute*, 68.
[48] Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. by William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949), 160.
[49] Johann Friedrich Agricola, Review found in *Dokumente zum Nachwirken Johann Sebastian Bachs, 1750-1800*, from Supplement to *Neue Ausgabe Sämtlicher Werke* by Johann Sebastian Bach, vol. 3, ed. by Hans-Joachim Schulze (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1972), 206, no. 757, as quoted in

Neumann's conclusions seem logical:

> Dotted notes set against triplets are generally synchronized in a lively tempo; they tend to be differentiated in a slow tempo. In a moderate tempo much depends on whether a dotted-note pattern partakes of a characteristic binary theme or has other musical claims to independence.
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> When two even binary notes are set against a triplet, there is reason to synchronize when the binary notes are only harmonic fillers; when they have polyphonic independence, notably when they are of motivic importance, they should be differentiated by rhythmic clash. . . .
>
> . . . Generally, literalness is desirable when the resultant rhythmic clash sounds purposeful in clarifying thematic, rhythmic, or contrapuntal relationships; it is not desirable when it does none of these things and sounds like unintentional imprecision.[50]

His final paragraph summarizes:

> There is no magic formula for solving all the problems we encounter. There are instances that clearly call for rhythmic independence; there are others that clearly call for synchronization; and there are others yet where, after careful study of the context, either option seems to make sense. In such ambivalent cases it usually does not matter very much which alternative we select.[51]

Frederick Neumann, "Conflicting Binary and Ternary Rhythms: From the Theory of Mensural Notation to the Music of J.S. Bach," in *New Essays on Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 45.

[50] Frederick Neumann, "Conflicting Binary and Ternary Rhythms: From the Theory of Mensural Notation to the Music of J.S. Bach," in *New Essays on Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 60.

[51] Ibid., 61.