Notas sobre a interpretação de um Larghetto de Handel

Laura Rónai

https://doi.org/10.1590/SciELOPreprints.15369

Submetido em: 2026-03-10
Postado em: 2026-03-10 (versão 1)
(AAAA-MM-DD)

eISSN 2317-6377

PER MUSI

Notes on the interpretation of a *Larghetto* by Handel

Notas sobre a interpretação de um *Larghetto* de Handel

Laura Rónai[1]

[1] Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Instituto Villa-Lobos, Rio de Janeiro, RJ,Brasil. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0083-5791

ABSTRACT: This text presents the English translation of the article entitled *Notas sobre a interpretação de um Larghetto de Handel* ["Notes on the interpretation of a *Larghetto* by Handel"], written by Laura Rónai and originally published in Per Musi, Belo Horizonte, vol. 42, 2025. The original article is available in open access under DOI: https://doi.org/10.35699/2317-6377.2025.50959, eISSN 2317-6377. It discusses interpretative aspects of Baroque music through the lens of Historically Oriented Performance, using as a case study the *Larghetto* from the *Sonata in E minor for flute and basso continuo, HWV 379*, by George Frideric Handel. The translation was carried out by the author herself, a professor at the Villa-Lobos Institute of the Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), with the aim of expanding the international readership of the work and making it accessible to musicians, researchers, and performers who do not read Portuguese. The English version remains faithful to the content, structure, and academic tone of the original text, while incorporating minor stylistic adjustments to accommodate the rhetorical conventions of English-language scholarly writing. By opting for a self-translation, the author ensures the preservation of her intended meaning and the alignment between musical concepts and their expression. The translation also seeks to foster international dialogue on Baroque performance practices and to support musicians interested in historical ornamentation and stylistic awareness.

KEYWORDS: Baroque music; Ornamentation; Handel; Historically Oriented Performance; Flute.

RESUMO: Este texto apresenta a tradução para o inglês do artigo intitulado *Notas sobre a interpretação de um Larghetto de Handel,* de autoria de Laura Rónai, originalmente publicado na revista Per Musi, Belo Horizonte, v. 42, 2025, e disponível em acesso aberto com o DOI: https://doi.org/10.35699/2317-6377.2025.50959, eISSN 2317-6377. O artigo discute aspectos interpretativos da música barroca com base nos princípios da performance historicamente orientada, tomando como exemplo prático o *Larghetto* da *Sonata em mi menor para flauta e baixo contínuo*, HWV 379, de Georg Friedrich Handel. A tradução foi realizada pela própria autora, professora do Instituto Villa-Lobos da Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), com o objetivo de ampliar o alcance internacional do texto e torná-lo acessível a músicos, pesquisadores e intérpretes que não leem português. A versão em inglês mantém rigorosamente o conteúdo do original, respeitando sua estrutura argumentativa, vocabulário técnico-musical e tom acadêmico, com pequenas adaptações estilísticas pontuais para atender às convenções discursivas da língua inglesa. A escolha de realizar uma tradução autoral permitiu preservar a intenção comunicativa do texto original e assegurar a coerência entre linguagem e conteúdo. A tradução também visa fomentar o diálogo internacional sobre práticas interpretativas barrocas e contribuir para a formação de músicos interessados em ornamentação e estilística histórica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Música barroca; Ornamentação; Handel; Interpretação Historicamente Orientada; Flauta.

1. INTRODUCTION

For a long time in the 20th Century, it was believed that the performance of any piece should strictly respect what the composer had determined and that in the score all the composer's decisions were clearly revealed to the eyes of the world. It was the study of baroque music in 1950s, mainly the work of the pioneers who dedicated themselves to what we came to call "Historically Oriented Performance" that revealed that obedience to the score was only the first step towards an interpretation that delved deeper into the understanding the spirit of the times. Nowadays, the concept of being faithful to the essence, and not to the letter (and the conviction about the need to add ornaments to the original score) is already common currency. As Mary Cyr explains:

> In today's music, the roles of performer and composer are usually separate: composers write what they expect performers to play, and performers do not depart significantly from the written text. In baroque music, however, the performer and composer shared a more equal role in the compositional process, and two performances of the same piece could therefore be vastly different […] a score used by the composer may be lacking in many details that one would consider crucial in modern performances. (Cyr 1992, 123)

These are the kinds of details—such as dynamics, tempo inflections, and ornamentation—that a skilled performer is expected to supply, thus filling in the gaps left by the composer. But the subjective ability to know how and to what extent one should intervene in the notes written on the page is a true art—or at least an additional discipline to be learned—going beyond the mere mastery of instrumental technique. Unlike the earlier approach, in which only the written notes were played without much thought to the interpretive subtleties not explicitly indicated, historically oriented performance practice requires a refined sensitivity to the stylistic nuances of the time and to the performance expectations that were implicit, though rarely spelled out, in baroque scores.

If, at the beginning of the 20th century, most musicians dismissed the music of the Baroque as uninteresting and unsophisticated—because it was always heard in an incomplete form and through very poor literal performances—, with the recovery of interpretative practices it began to be more appreciated, although it was still relegated to a small group of specialists. It was understood that many of the baroque scores that have come down to us were like mannequins that needed to be dressed in exuberant costumes, sketches that required completion by the performer. They lacked precise indications of dynamics, ornamentation, tempo inflections... but that did not mean they could do without these elements, which in later centuries would be clearly suggested by composers. Their performance required the active collaboration of the modern partner, but the extent of this collaboration was (and still is) a mystery. In 1990, in his chapter in the book *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, David Fuller comments:

> Forty Years[1] ago Bukofzer wrote of a baroque 'code of performance' that had to be "known and observed in order that a faithful and undistorted rendition of the music be accomplished". No doubt some musicians still search for that code – a Rosetta stone or an "Enigma" machine to translate baroque ciphers into the notes that would fill out those sketches as their author imagined them. [...] it is easy to dream this way about music at

[1] In other words, by current accounts, 74 years ago!

> three centuries' remove, but draw near and the rules collapse in disorderly reality. We can get an inkling of how it really was by observing ourselves and our own music-making. (Fuller 1990, 117)

Indeed, all music of the past requires a degree of familiarity with its codes and its rules of good taste. Different types of *tempi* bring different challenges for the performer. Dance movements such as minuets, *bourrées*, and gigues demand an understanding of the original dance that inspired the piece, as this offers the best clues for choosing tempo and appropriate inflections. And while fast movements call for agile technique, slow movements require above all a refined interpretative capacity—a sensitivity to perceive the appropriate *affekt* (Despondent? Contemplative? Nostalgic? Desperate?) and to ornament in accordance with this implicit character.

After all, it is in the slow movements—those in which the composer/performer partnership is most complex—that one of the most common challenges in Baroque performance resides. A myriad of questions confronts the performer: what tempo should be chosen? How many tempo inflections are appropriate? How much dynamic nuance is acceptable? On the other hand, when not indicated by the composer, how should one choose articulations? What are the criteria for making decisions about ornamentation?

Becoming familiar with the style of the period, reading treatises and books about this repertoire, playing with musicians experienced in historically oriented performance, and using period instruments, all of these help answer some of these questions. The use of period instruments, for example, not only offers technical insights into performance but also provides a direct connection to the sound world and methods of sound production that composers of the time had in mind when creating their works. To cite just one example: the volume balance between modern instruments is quite different from that of Baroque ones. In a piece combining recorder and flute, for instance, the modern flute will tend to overpower the recorder—whereas with original instruments, the reverse is true.

Nevertheless, many of these challenges can be addressed more effectively through careful analysis of the piece, particularly its harmonic structure. For even if the composer does not explicitly notate ornamentation, tempo fluctuations, or dynamic shading, the score itself contains subtle clues that, when read attentively, can serve as a guide for the performer.

2. Handel and Telemann

Following David Fuller's suggestion to observe our own performance practice, this text aims to address these questions through a musical example. We have chosen the slow movement[2] of a flute sonata by Georg Frideric Handel (1685–1759), which we analyze harmonically, annotate with tempo and dynamic inflections, and ornament in writing. Throughout the article, we intend to justify our interpretive choices, grounded in this analysis.

[2] As Edward Reilly explains, in a footnote of his translation of Quantz' treatise, "*Just as 'the Allegro' refers to any type of quick movement or piece, 'the Adagio' refers to any kind of slow movement or piece*". (Quantz 1966, 162)

To ornament this movement by Handel, we drew inspiration from the slow movements of the *Methodical Sonatas* (TWV 41) by Georg Philipp Telemann (1681–1767), a German composer who, like Handel, wrote music that blended the Italian style with French influences.

Georg Frideric Handel and Georg Philipp Telemann were contemporaries who maintained a relationship of mutual respect. Although their careers followed different paths—Handel spent much of his life in London, while Telemann worked mainly in Germany—the two shared a common training and similar aesthetic interests. There is evidence that they corresponded, and Telemann, who was only four years older, sincerely admired his colleague, going so far as to call him the greatest living composer. Both are outstanding representatives of the late Baroque and masters of the so-called *mixed style*, a fusion of Italian, French, and German traditions that shaped much of European music of the time. Within this context, comparing their flute sonatas is entirely justified. This is a genre that both composers cultivated with dedication, embedded in both public and private musical practices, often intended for refined amateurs and professional musicians alike.

Their sonatas for flute and continuo reveal many affinities, though they naturally also show subtle differences in stylistic approach. Handel tends to follow models closer to the Italian tradition, with singable melodies, clear harmonic articulation, and striking affective contrasts. His writing often recalls the vocal expressiveness of opera and displays a preference for well-defined structures. Telemann, while also strongly influenced by the Italian style, shows a more varied language, including French and popular elements, and even occasional influences from less dominant national traditions of the time, such as Polish music. His sonatas explore greater formal freedom, offer more idiomatic writing for the flute, and frequently incorporate dance rhythms and bold harmonic choices. Still, in the slow movements, it is generally the Italian *cantabile* style that prevails.

Another aspect that brings these two composers closer is their shared appreciation for the traverso, an instrument that rose to prominence in the first half of the 18th century, gradually replacing the recorder as the main vehicle for chamber music. Handel and Telemann were important figures in this process of transition, and their sonatas reflect not only the expansion of the repertoire for the instrument but also the different ways of exploring its expressiveness.

Using Telemann's *Methodical Sonatas* as a model for ornamentation in a Handel sonata makes a great deal of sense for several interrelated reasons. First, Telemann was known for his clear, practical, and pedagogical writing—especially in the *Methodical Sonatas*, which were explicitly designed as a reference for performers regarding execution and ornamentation. These sonatas offer detailed and systematic examples of ornamentation within the stylistic context of the early 18th century, representing the German Baroque idiom.

Moreover, although Handel and Telemann had individual styles, as stated before, they belonged to the same musical and historical tradition, sharing many stylistic conventions and performance practices of the late Baroque. Ornamentation that suits Telemann’s sonatas—with its balance of melodic clarity and rhetorical expressiveness—tends to work very well in Handel’s music, which likewise values affective contrast and vocal fluidity.

Finally, the pedagogical nature of the *Methodical Sonatas* helps performers not only understand which ornaments to use but also how to execute them musically and elegantly. This is especially valuable in Handel’s works, which often require delicacy and sensitivity in ornamentation in order to avoid excess and

preserve the integrity of the melodic line. Thus, using Telemann's *Methodical Sonatas* as a reference for ornamentation in a Handel sonata fosters an informed, historically grounded, and stylistically coherent approach—one that enhances both the performer's technique and the expressive quality of the work.

Each national style requires a specific kind of knowledge when it comes to ornamentation decisions. While Italian musicians favored more linear, florid, and improvised ornamentation, the French relied on small, precisely defined embellishments, often indicated by the composer. These differences were quite pronounced and reflected the character of the two cultures: the Italian being more lyrical and closer to vocal style, and the French more rhetorical and akin to speech. As Johann Joachim Quantz (1697–1773) states in his treatise:

> With good instruction the French manner of embellishing the Adagio may be learned without understanding Harmony. For the Italian manner, on the other hand, knowledge of Harmony is indispensable, or, as is the mode with most singers, you must keep a master constantly at hand from whom you can learn variations for each Adagio; and if you do this you will remain a student all your life, and will never become a master yourself. (Quantz 1752, 163)

Thus, by understanding the harmonic structure and following the excellent instructions of the finest masters, we hope to have achieved, in our version of Handel's *Larghetto*, an ornamentation that is both tasteful and appropriate, in line with the guidelines of Quantz and Telemann.

Telemann was one of the most prolific and influential composers of the Baroque period. In addition to his numerous works for various instrumental and vocal ensembles—including suites, cantatas, and operas—he made significant contributions to chamber music, particularly through his sonatas. *The Methodical Sonatas* (*Methodische Sonaten*), first published in 1728 and 1732, rank among his most important works in terms of ornamentation and Baroque performance style. They were conceived not only as musical compositions intended to entertain, but primarily as pedagogical tools aimed at teaching musicians the art of ornamentation, which was an essential aspect of Baroque interpretation.

Both Telemann and Handel were thoroughly acquainted with the Italian, French, and German styles of their time, and these influences are woven throughout their compositions. Handel's flute sonatas, such as those in his *Opus 1*, share many characteristics with Telemann's sonatas, including formal structure, melodic emphasis, and harmonic clarity. This makes the ornamentation techniques detailed by Telemann in his *Methodical Sonatas* readily applicable to Handel's sonatas. Telemann's ornate style can shed light on how musicians of the period might have approached ornamentation in Handel's works, which often left more interpretive freedom than Telemann's, especially in the instrumental sonatas.

The *Methodical Sonatas* are not merely musical **compositions;** they are also instructional guides. Telemann provided a simple melodic line alongside an ornamented version of the same line, clearly demonstrating how ornamentation could be practically applied. He included examples of trills, mordents, *appoggiaturas*, *gruppettos*, and other common forms of embellishment, allowing musicians to understand not only how but why certain ornaments should be used. This detailed approach provides a strong pedagogical foundation, which is extremely valuable when ornamenting Handel's sonatas—especially since these works were often intended for amateurs and less experienced musicians, who could greatly benefit from clear examples of ornamentation to enhance their interpretations.

3. Flexibility and Individual Interpretation

An important point is that Telemann's compositional style—especially in the *Methodical Sonatas*—encourages creativity and individual expression in ornamentation. Although Telemann provides extensive examples, he also leaves room for performers to add their personal touch, which was, after all, a fundamental aspect of Baroque performance practice: performers frequently used their own ornaments and improvisations. Therefore, it is important to remember that the ornaments written in the score are suggestions from the composer, but it is not mandatory to use them in full—or even partially. While it may be valuable to include some of his suggestions, it is equally essential to understand that embellishment was essentially a matter of personal style and creativity.

Handel's flute sonatas, likewise, can benefit from this flexible approach. While some of these sonatas include ornamentation suggestions, they are often minimal, leaving performers to embellish the melodic lines on their own. We should not interpret the minimal notation of ornaments as a restriction on what may be done; rather, it allows performers to build on the composer's suggestions and their own knowledge of the period's musical language. Using Telemann's ornamentation techniques can provide a solid foundation, while still allowing performers to adapt and modify the embellishments to suit their personal style or the specific circumstances of a performance.

As an example, one can consider the acoustics of the performance venue. Spaces with very resonant acoustics invite simpler, more flowing ornamentation with fewer notes, to avoid compromising clarity. Drier spaces not only allow but sometimes require more elaborate ornamentation, which serves to connect musical phrases and fill in the sonic gaps created by the lack of reverberation.

Musical expression is another crucial factor. Ornaments are added to the melodic line to enhance musical expressiveness and add a touch of virtuosity. In a movement that portrays sleep, for example (a common theme, especially in French music), excessive ornamentation goes completely against the spirit of the piece, which calls for calmness and stillness. In a movement meant to symbolize the fury of storms (another favorite theme in 18th-century instrumental music), the addition of graceful *appoggiaturas* or trills can weaken the message the performer aims to convey. On the other hand, if the piece evokes birdsong, short *appoggiaturas* would certainly be welcome.

The context of each performance must also be taken into account. In a more formal concert setting, or on an occasion when the performer wishes to demonstrate their skill in ornamentation, one might choose to play all the suggested ornaments. In a more casual setting, one might select only those that match the performer's taste or highlight the character of the piece.

If an ornament seems out of place or overly complicated, it may be best to simplify it—or even omit it entirely. And finally, there is the matter of each performer's technical skill. Before overloading a work with elaborate ornaments, it is important to ensure that they can be executed cleanly and naturally. If certain ornaments are beyond the performer's current technical abilities, it is better to focus on those that can be played well. It is also crucial for the performer to clearly understand what is structure and what is ornament, and to project this understanding in performance, for example by using subtle inflection or dynamic shading. In short, while incorporating suggested ornaments can be a highly effective practice, it is essential to balance historical accuracy with musicality, technical command, and personal expression.

In the modern context—where many musicians strive to approach Baroque music in a historically oriented way—Telemann's *Methodical Sonatas* serve as a practical resource for understanding how ornamentation might be applied, particularly in slow movements without a specific symbolic meaning. They are frequently used as a starting point by musicians wishing to apply authentic ornamentation practices to works by other composers of the same period and style, offering a model that is both historically faithful and widely applicable. Thus, taking Telemann's *Methodical Sonatas* as a guideline for ornamenting Handel's flute sonatas makes sense due to their historical relevance, stylistic similarity, instructional nature, and interpretive flexibility. They offer a reliable insight into how ornamentation was practiced in the Baroque period—in Germany, England, and even in Italy—and provide parameters that are perfectly applicable to Handel's music, helping today's performers to recreate the expressive richness and ornamented style that characterized the music of that time and region.

4. Structure and Purpose of the Methodical Sonatas

The *Methodical Sonatas* consist of twelve sonatas divided into two volumes, each containing six sonatas in different keys. They were written for melodic instruments, such as the violin or flute, accompanied by basso continuo. What makes this collection particularly valuable from both a historical and pedagogical perspective is Telemann's innovative approach to ornamentation. Its most distinctive feature is that each sonata includes two versions of the slow movement: a simple version without ornamentation, and a second version, richly ornamented by Telemann himself.

This contrast between the ornamented and unornamented versions allows the performer to directly compare the two and understand how ornamentation can transform the expressiveness and character of a musical piece. Telemann demonstrates how even a simple adagio, with a basic melody, can be enriched through the use of ornaments such as trills, mordents, appoggiaturas, fast scales, and arpeggiated passages.

There is some debate about whether this ornamentation should be taken in its entirety. To the modern ear—especially after reading many authors who warn against excessive ornamentation and appeal to the performer's sense of good taste (one of the most frequently evoked qualities in the Baroque)—this ornamentation may seem excessive, certainly more florid and abundant than most contemporary musicians would dare to propose. However, it is worth remembering that the Baroque was an era of excess, and that the surviving examples of written-out ornamentation are far more lavishly embellished than we might imagine. "Much" is, after all, a relative concept. Aside from a few exceptional cases (which we've mentioned earlier), it is more than likely that the ornamentation found in the *Methodical Sonatas* is a faithful reflection of common practice in the period.

Ornamentation in the Baroque era was not merely decorative; it played a vital role in the emotional expression of the music. Composers of the time expected performers to add ornaments using their own judgment and skill. In fact, this freedom was so standard that composers who chose to write out ornaments—to prevent their works from being distorted by unskilled performers—were harshly criticized. This was the case with Johann Sebastian Bach, for example. In his memoirs, Charles Burney noted:

> [Handel's] themes being almost always natural and pleasing. Sebastian Bach, on the contrary, like Michelangelo in painting, disdained facility so much, that his genius never stooped to the easy and graceful. I have never seen a fugue by this learned and powerful

> author upon a motive that is natural and singable; or even on an easy and obvious passage that is not loaded with crude and difficult accompaniments. (Burney *apud* Wolff 1998, 372)

And Burney was not the only one to comment—quite negatively—on Bach's habit. Johann Adolf Scheibe, who had been a student of the composer, wrote in a 1737 article that his teacher practiced a

> turgid and confused style in which he darkens beauty by an excess of art. […] And his ornamentation is such that it not only takes away from his pieces the beauty of harmony but completely covers the melody throughout. And his difficulty, artificiality, somberness, onerous labor and effort are vainly employed, since they conflict with Nature." [Wolff 1998, 338][3]

Perhaps for this very reason, the diplomatic Telemann makes a point of explicitly stating the pedagogical nature of his work, clearly distinguishing between the original structure and the ornamented version. In this way, he had the opportunity to present his own embellished version while at the same time avoiding criticism from those who might accuse him of limiting the creativity of his performers. As Guilherme Herdade Linberger dos Anjos comments in his master's thesis, *"As Sonate Metodiche de Georg Philipp Telemann: um estudo sobre ornamentação e estilo no final do período barroco"*:

> Musical ornamentation was common practice in the late Baroque period, and it was customary for composers to write music in a way that allowed performers to improvise their own ornaments. However, we find in some treatises of the time a concern on the part of composers regarding unprepared performers, unable to ornament with 'good taste' and in a way that would not disrupt the written discourse of the composer. (Anjos 2014, 40)

The fact is that, by publishing elaborate and successful examples of how to ornament a melody, Telemann was essentially educating musicians on how to understand and apply the ornamental practices of his time—and this alone would have earned him a place in music history, even if he did not also have the merit of being the author of some of the Baroque's most important works. These ornamented examples provide a detailed view of the stylistic expectations of the time and offer the attentive performer a variety of techniques that can be used to enrich their interpretations.

Each of the twelve sonatas is composed of several movements, typically alternating between slow and fast tempi, following Baroque tradition. Telemann uses these movement settings to demonstrate how different types of ornamentation can be applied depending on the character and tempo of the piece. Typically, in each sonata there are two movements that could—or better yet, should—be ornamented. In the first, the composer provides his own suggestion. In the second, he leaves the task to the performer's creativity. In the slow movements, such as adagios and *larghettos*, the ornamentation suggested by the composer often includes extended passages of rapid notes, mordents, trills, *appoggiaturas*, and other ornamental figures that enhance the expressiveness of the music. These ornaments bring the melodic line to life, enriching the interpretation with expressive detail and helping to highlight the lyricism and emotional depth of the music, while respecting the calm tempo and underlying harmonic structure.

[3] I am grateful to Ruth Van Baak Griffioen for drawing my attention to these last two quotations in her magnificent lecture on J. S. Bach's cantata BWV 60.

5. Practical Examples of Ornamentation

To illustrate how the *Methodical Sonatas* can serve as models for ornamentation, let us consider some specific techniques that Telemann uses in his embellishments:

Passaggi: In the slow movements of the sonatas, Telemann frequently includes *passaggi*, which are passages of quick, usually scalar notes that connect the main notes of the melody. These not only create a smoother and more expressive effect, but also add complexity and virtuosity to the interpretation. For example, in the ornamented version of a tranquil movement, Telemann might transform a simple melodic line of eighth notes into a sequence of sixteenth notes or even thirty-second notes, demonstrating how a performer can embellish the music without altering its harmonic essence.

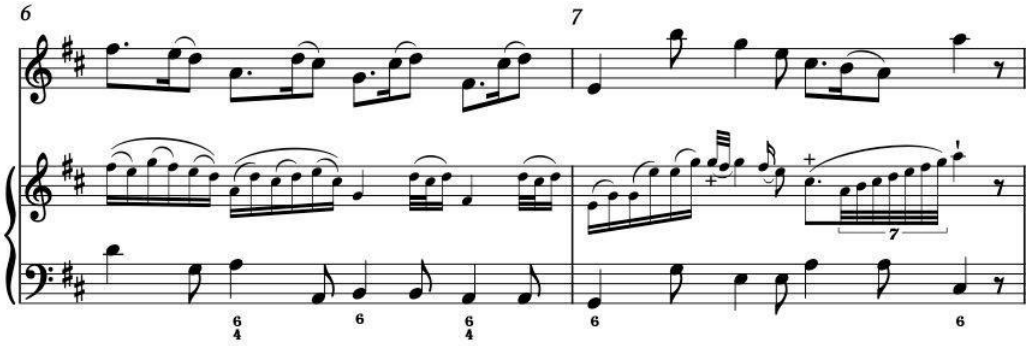


Figure 1—Telemann, *Methodical Sonata* in b minor (fac-simile), c.5-7

It should be noted that not every long note or large melodic leap must necessarily be ornamented. Depending on its placement within the phrase and the underlying basso continuo, a long note may remain sustained, and a wide leap may be left unornamented precisely to highlight the dramatic effect of the gesture.

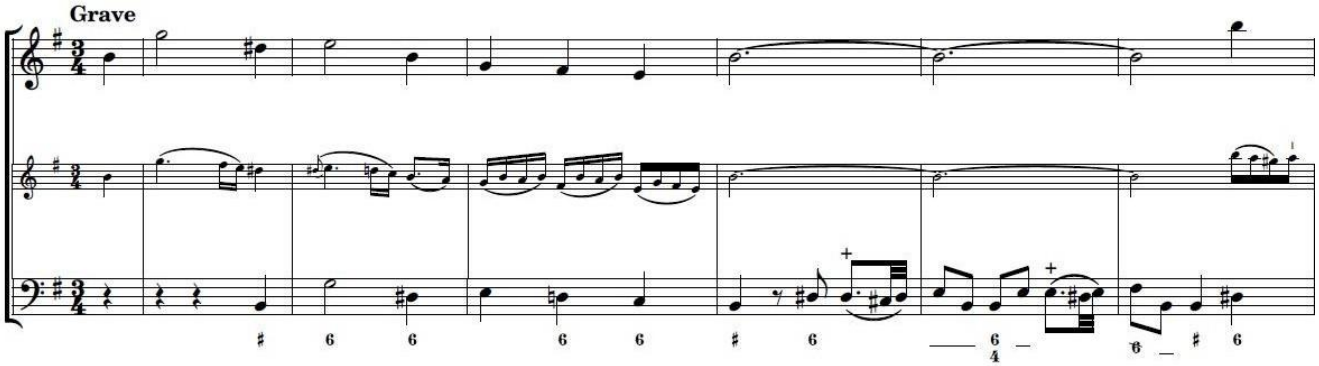
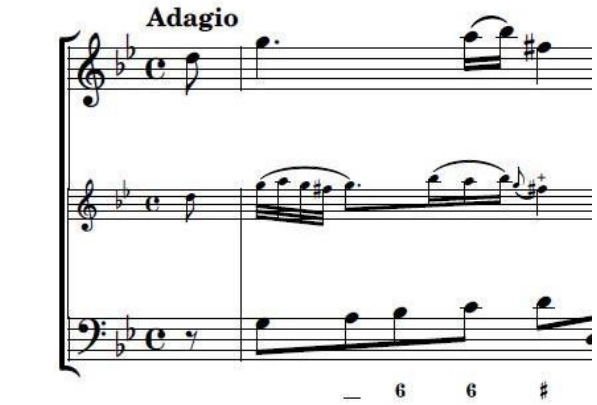


Figure 2 – Telemann, *Methodical Sonata* in e minor, c. 1-6

Trills and Mordents: These are classic Baroque ornaments that Telemann uses abundantly. In his ornamentation examples, he demonstrates how and where these ornaments can be applied to enhance the expressiveness and tension of a piece. Trills are often used on long notes or at the ends of phrases, while mordents are applied to shorter notes, adding texture and contrast.

Diminutions: Telemann uses diminutions to ornament the melodic line by dividing long notes into sequences of shorter ones. This type of ornamentation is especially effective in slow movements, where it helps to add variety and interest to a melodic line without altering its basic harmonic structure.



.

Figure 3 – Telemann, *Methodical Sonata* in g minor, c. 1

Ornamented Cadences: Another important aspect of Telemann's ornamentation is his treatment of ornamented cadences, where he demonstrates how they can be enriched with trills, *appoggiaturas*, and other ornamental figures. This is particularly significant in Baroque music, as harmonic resolution and ornamentation are often used to create tension and release.

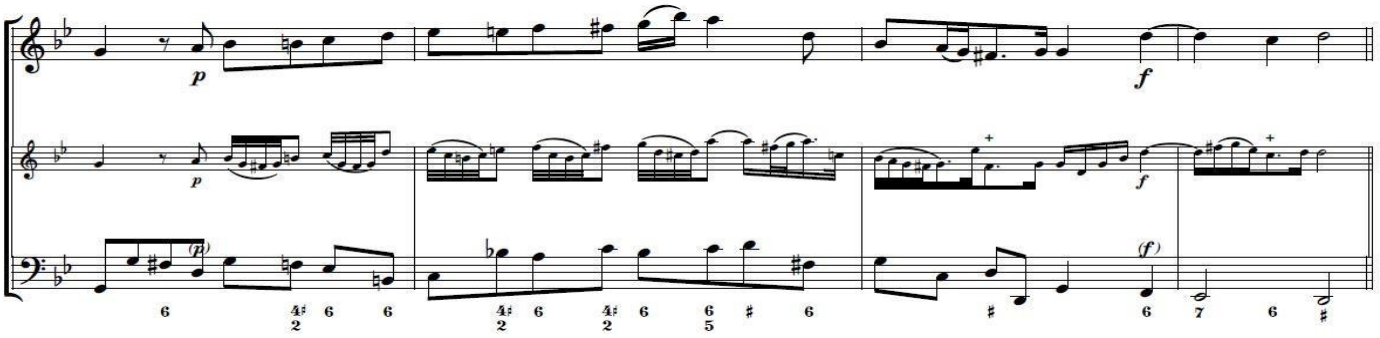


Figure 4 – Telemann, *Methodical Sonata* in g minor, c. 12-15

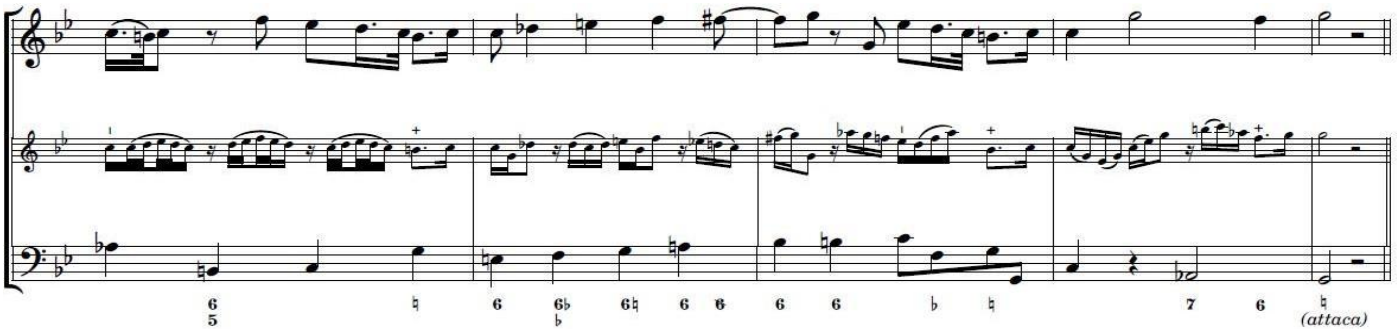


Figure 5 – Telemann, *Methodical Sonata* in c minor, c. 11-15

By providing detailed examples of how to ornament a melody, Telemann not only educates performers about the stylistic practices of his time, but also encourages them to explore their own ornamentation and improvisational skills in pieces of similar style.

The sonatas of George Frideric Handel lend themselves admirably to this kind of musical exercise. Written in an accessible and fluent language, they generally feature a slow inner movement with a rather uncomplicated melody, in which ornamentation is not merely optional, but indeed mandatory. Frederick Neumann explains:

> Also thoroughly Italian is Handel's method of writing adagios in unfinished form. They were not meant to be played as written: performers of the time were jealous of their privilege of adding florid embellishments to the basic melodic line. Thus Handel's – like Corelli's or other Italian masters' – often austere lines of an adagio do not mirror noble simplicity, but are a melodic skeleton to be fleshed out by the performer, who thus becomes a partner in the creative process". (Neumann 1989, 222)

Among the composer's works, the flute sonatas form a cohesive group of exceptional quality and demonstrate his familiarity with the latest stylistic developments of the time, presenting the instrument in its best light and exploring its different registers with skill and grace. The form used is generally that of the Italian sonata, as previously mentioned, typically in four movements (grave–fast–slow–fast). Melody takes precedence over other elements, which, according to Émile Damais, is one of the hallmarks of Handel's style. He remarks: "the particular timbre of the instrument is not at issue, it is the melody that matters... The melodic inspiration is, moreover, always persuasive, with a vocal character, a kind of natural perfection of contour, a calm and serene lyricism." (Damais 1970, 85)[4]

Undoubtedly, these characteristics make them especially suitable for free ornamentation and as exemplary models, not only for flutists but for anyone who plays a melodic instrument. Let us focus on the third movement, *Larghetto*, from the *Sonata in E minor for flute and basso continuo, Op. 1 No. 1, HWV 379*, composed around 1727–1728.[5] We recall here that the key of E minor, according to Johannes Mattheson (1681–1764), an author interested in the characteristic affekts of each key who sought to define them clearly, is appropriate for "deep, afflicted, and sad thoughts" but with hopes of consolation, perhaps somewhat resigned, but not joyful. (Mattheson 1713, 226). This movement by Handel fits very well within this definition!

6. Tempo

The *Larghetto* in question has a rich and varied harmonic vocabulary, with harmonic rhythm that frequently changes within each measure. There is not a single measure that contains only one harmony. This seems to indicate a fairly calm tempo, which is also confirmed by the original marking *Larghetto*. Furthermore, the *Larghetto* must be slow enough to create contrast with the preceding movement—not the more common Allegro in this type of sonata, but rather an *Andante*. This would seem like a good argument to advocate for a rather slow tempo. However, such a decision also illustrates the danger of relying on only one interpretative parameter, underestimating the complexity and richness of the elements at play.

---

[4] "*Le timbre particulier de l'instrument n'est pas en cause, c'est la nature de la mélodie qui compte et qui peut s'adapter aussi heureusement à tel ou tel instrument. L'inspiration mélodique est d'ailleurs toujours persuasive, de caractère vocal, d'une sorte de perfection naturelle de contours, d'un lyrisme calme et empreint de sérénité*."

[5] As a basis, we utilized the edition by Bärenreiter n. 4225.

Here we can see that not everything is as it appears at first glance. It happens that, although this is the only Handel sonata specifically designated for the transverse flute in manuscript—and we do not question its authenticity—this work was conceived as a sort of collage of movements from other works (this third movement, for example, begins the same way as the *Sonata in D major, HWV 378*, which is not part of this collection, and whose composition date is earlier). Thus, the juxtaposition of *Andante* and *Larghetto* may not have been entirely intentional. If it had been, perhaps we should indeed consider a rather slow tempo. But, on the other hand, the quadruple meter and the *Larghetto* marking indicate that we should avoid excessive slowness.

As Mary Cyr explains, Quantz classifies slow movements into two types: *pathetique* and *cantabile*, with the *Larghetto* falling into the latter category (Cyr 1992, 39). Regarding Handel's usual pulse, there is a very interesting comment by the aforementioned Émile Damais. He says:

> The movement is centered on the "ordinary tempo," that is, the physiological movement of the heartbeat. It is evident that there are faster or slower movements; however, this range of tempos never reaches the rapidity or slowness that music would come to experience in the following centuries. (Damais 1970, 66)[6]

It is also worth clarifying that some tempo indications are related to ornamentation. Very exuberant ornamentation will likely imply the choice of a calmer tempo. Of course, we are presuming that this *Larghetto* requires some kind of ornamentation. Nikolaus Harnoncourt confirms: "In Handel's music, for example, every musician has a certain desire to ornament by improvising, especially when it comes to a slow movement, given the simplicity of the melody. This suits a *Largo*..." (Harnoncourt 1982, 73)

A tempo of approximately ♪=52 bpm seems adequate here, but naturally, this would depend on the amount of ornamentation desired for this movement. The choice of the ideal tempo is, therefore, a decision that cannot be made in isolation; it must always take into account the intended ornamentation and the desired effect. We would not play it much slower, as this would cause the added ornamentation to stop sounding ornamental and start sounding structural. The ornamented passages should not sound deliberate or rigid, but rather fluent and maintaining a sense of improvisation. On the other hand, they should not give an impression of being rushed or overly energetic. Therefore, the tempo must consider these two apparently contradictory factors.

In the complete absence of any ornamentation (a choice perhaps too strange, in our view), it would then be desirable to adopt a slightly faster tempo. For the sake of exemplification, we decided on quite present, and perhaps somewhat exaggerated ornamentation. It should be kept in mind that, in the case of a public performance, only part of these embellishments could be played, and not necessarily all of them. Such a choice would naturally affect the tempo again. Finally, the chosen tempo (as well as the amount of ornamentation to be used) must also take into account the acoustics of the venue where the piece is performed. Very dry environments, with carpeted rooms and upholstered chairs, muffle the sound and

[6] "*Le mouvement a pour centre le "tempo ordinario", c'est-à-dire le movement physiologique des battements du pouls. Bien entendu, il y a des mouvements plus rapides ou plus lents; mais cette gamme de mouvements n'atteint jamais à la rapidité ou la lenteur que la musique connaîtra aux siècles suivants*".

therefore require a faster pulse. Environments with a lot of reverberation (such as churches, in general), on the contrary, require slower tempos so that the sound does not become muddled.

7. On the Harmonic Analysis

This *Larghetto* was written in free form, with a generous harmonic language, making extensive use of suspensions and modulations. It begins with approximately four bars in G major (according to Mattheson, G major presents "an image of tranquility and, in its transparency, can sink into insignificance […] in this key, the intimacy of loyalty, passionless love, contemplative calm, and a gentle mood are expressed; simple melancholy adorns it. Rural life is faithfully reflected in it and its character can often be called idyllic" (Mattheson 1713, 243)[7]. For Charpentier[8], G major is serious and magnificent, sweetly jubilant), followed by four more bars in D major, the key of the dominant.[9] This is a way for the composer to announce an assertive sonority and also serves as a cue to the performer: although we are in a slow movement, there is nothing melancholic or depressing here. Far from it, the prevailing mood is bright and determined.

From this point on, modulations occur practically every measure, which also points to a bold attitude — after all, harmonically speaking, staying in the home key denotes timidity, a desire for security and protection; conversely, venturing away from home signals a braver or at least more curious spirit, right? Thus, in performance, a touch of virtuosity in the ornamentation would not be out of place. Later, this modulatory rhythm slows down until we reach two measures in A minor and finally four measures in the sonata's main key, e minor. Practically speaking, this could translate into a more anguished interpretation in the central part of the movement (when we still do not know where we will end up harmonically, so to speak) and a closing with a somewhat mysterious, perhaps even slightly ambiguous character (since the beginning of the movement seemed to indicate G major as the final goal).

Regarding the chords, most are rather simple, with a notable exception. In measure 11, a perfect cadence in C major would be expected, but instead, through the addition of the A that resolves the suspension, we have a dissonant structure that could be considered a supertonic in G major. Since this substitution is based on notes common to both keys, the quick glimpse of G major sounds perfectly acceptable to our ears. And here again, the harmony indicates a musical procedure to the attentive performer: a slight delay on the note A to emphasize this beautiful effect.

In measure 20, the use of notes common to two keys has an even more mysterious result. The natural G in the bass catches us by surprise and helps create a feeling of freedom and improvisation consistent with the character of the last measures of the movement. In fact, the chord sequence from measures 19 to 20, borrowed from the key of A minor— the subdominant of the E minor key that ends the piece — establishes the darker "mood" of the ending, without actually modulating, besides serving as a connecting passage to

---

[7] "*G-dur stellt ein Bild der Beruhigung auf und kann in seiner Durschschauligkeit, wenn der Künstler das Einfache nicht zu behandeln weiss, bis zum Bedeutungslosen sinken. In diesen Tonart aber spricht sich die Innigkeit der Treue, der leidenschlaftlosen Liebe, die Ruhe der Betrachtung un eine sanfte Stimmung aus. {…] das ländliche Leben spegelt sich in ihr treulich ab, und mann kann ihren Charakter oft idyllisch nennen*".

[8] Marc-Antoine Charpentier, ca. 1682

[9] Mattheson described D major as the tonality of triumph, of festivities; sharp, bright, lively, stubborn, opinionated, amusing, warlike, stimulating, and strong-willed. It is suitable for making noise, for martial and joyful things. Good for trumpets and timpani, but when played on the flute it can be delicate.

the next movement. Here once again, the interpretation should follow the path opened by the harmony: the sound must have a dark and veiled timbre, and the natural F should be played only after the proper suspense has been established. It is a moment of strangeness, and it is important that this strangeness sounds intentional, and not like a mistake.

8. About cadences

Determining where the cadences occur and what type they are might seem like a futile harmonic exercise; however, we must remember that when talking about cadences, we are dealing with musical punctuation, and this will directly affect dynamics and phrasing in general. For wind instruments, the position and quality of cadences are an important factor in determining points for breathing.

The first cadence that appears is a suspended cadence to the dominant, not very strong, closely followed by a more stable, imperfect cadence. We still mark the suspended cadence in measure 3 because the flute phrase, with its clearly defined arch, seems to suggest a point of rest. In measure 5, the imperfect cadence is in parentheses since it is an elision and might go unnoticed. The decision regarding this cadence can change the ornamentation — if we want to emphasize the cadence and also the end of the previous phrase, we might choose not to play the triplets here, simply playing the F, breathing after it, and then resuming the rest of the *arpeggio*, clearly referencing the theme of the first phrase. Choosing to ornament with triplet groups from the first note of the measure draws attention to the elision.

In measure 6, following the same logic applied earlier, we would hear a suspended cadence. The conclusive cadence in measure 8 seems to outline the end of what could be called the first segment of this movement. According to this idea, one could ask the harpsichordist for a slight *ritardando* before the pivot chord that leads us back to G major.

The imperfect cadence in measure 9 is not stable enough and could easily be disregarded. Here again, the choice to breathe (or not) after the C will determine whether or not we hear a cadence at this point. In measure 11, once again, the cadence signals a breath. In measure 14, there is an important — perfect — cadence in B minor. This is followed by another perfect cadence, reinforced by the quick harmonic changes leading to it, which create a sort of harmonic accelerando emphasizing the sensation of tension releasing into relaxation. The *Larghetto* proper ends at this cadence. What follows is almost a last-minute thought, an echo preparing the listener for the next movement. As is fitting for such a transitional passage, it ends with an unstable cadence, the musical translation of the term suspense.

9. Tempo inflections

As we can already anticipate, the choice of tempo inflections is closely linked to harmonic analysis. Cadences mostly dictate the points of greatest agitation, where one might accelerate, or greater relaxation, where a ritardando would be appropriate.

In a movement that is quite slow and, moreover, rich in variety, excessive rhythmic fluctuations would not be desirable. *Ritardandi* are generally used to emphasize the importance of certain cadences and therefore usually do not occur before weak cadences. On the other hand, *accelerandi* are rare in Baroque music and usually indicate a change of mood within the same movement (or a special effect, such as the increasingly

excited warbling indicated textually — augmentés par des gradations imperceptibles —[10] in the score of Le Rossignol en amour by Couperin), which is not the case here.

The most obvious places for *ritardandi* are just before the two perfect cadences, at measures 13/14 and 18/19. A lengthening of time over measures 19, 20, and 21 would be justifiable, as this entire passage functions as a connection to the next movement and has an almost improvisatory character. In fact, this practice of lengthening the time before final cadences in slow movements that end with a half cadence was standard in the Baroque era. This practice helped create a feeling of conclusion and, at the same time, anticipation, gently leading the listener to the transition into the next movement.

10. Articulations and Dynamics

There are no articulation markings in the original manuscript, except for slurs used to prolong notes (as in measures 1 and 2). This is not surprising. As Lisa Read aptly observed in her thesis *Robert Cavally's Edition of G.F. Handel's Solo Flute Sonatas: An Evaluation and Historical Perspective*:

> Some Baroque composers, such as J. S. Bach, indicated many of the slurs they wanted; other composers, such as Handel, indicated very few. In the latter case, it is the responsibility of the performer to inflect the line with the appropriate articulation to make motives and patterns audible. Eighteenth-century treatises advise the performer about articulation only in a general fashion, saying that the liveliness of allegros is conveyed with detached notes, and the feeling of adagios by sustained slurred notes. Specific suggestions are limited, leaving the student with the seemingly formidable task of deciding the most advantageous way to perform the music. (Read 1994, 63)

In this case, due to the lyrical character of the movement, it would be advisable to choose a performance with a great deal of legato, literally connecting all the ornamental notes, and articulating very delicately where that is not possible—for example, in intervals too large to be connected elegantly (such as in measure 3). The notes that outline the melody should be articulated more emphatically, to help differentiate what is structural from what is purely ornamental. This distinction is crucial for ensuring that the interpretation of the movement preserves the balance between melodic fluidity and structural clarity—both essential elements of the Baroque aesthetic.

A soft beginning (perhaps *piano*) seems appropriate not only because of the delicate nature of the movement, but also because of the upward melodic arch outlined by the flute, and the fact that this arch begins in silence (with a quaver rest). A *crescendo* after that, as the harmony grows in tension and the melody rises, is almost inevitable. The relaxation of harmonic tension and the descent of the melody at the end of the phrase can be accompanied by a *diminuendo*. This would also be consistent with the cadence in measure 3, which is rather unstable. A slight *crescendo* toward measure 4 would emphasize the imperfect cadence that occurs there, the strongest point of repose so far. The next four measures would reflect the same dynamic pattern as a result of parallel reasoning.

As the harmonies become more complex and modulations occur, a pattern of *crescendo* leading into cadences, followed by *piano* or *pianissimo*, then building up again toward the next cadence, may be adopted.

[10] "increased by imperceptible gradations".

Sequential passages should begin gently and become gradually stronger as they approach more stable cadences.

The *piano* on the last note of measure 12 can be justified not only because we observe a slight change in pattern here, but also because we need to be quieter in measure 13, so that we can then become louder as we approach the perfect cadence in measure 14. From that point on, a *crescendo* up to the middle of measure 16, and then *piano* again, so that we have enough dynamic resources to reach *forte* at the perfect cadence that occurs in measure 19.

11. Ornamentation

As we stated at the beginning of this article, Handel composed this movement in the Italian style, which suggests the use of florid, melodic ornamentation, much like that employed by his compatriot Telemann in the slow movements of his *Methodical Sonatas* (written, as we have seen, with the explicit purpose of exemplifying the procedure of ornamenting slow movements). The melodic lines of Handel's sonata, similar to those in Telemann's aforementioned work—sparsely active, with disjunct but not aggressively wide intervals—support the idea that ornaments should be added both to fill the spaces between intervals greater than a third and to add fluency and motion to the musical gestures.

The very first notes, for example, which outline the G major *arpeggio*, could not be executed slurred on the Baroque flute, due to the instrument's limitations and also due to the established practice of not slurring arpeggiated notes unless expressly indicated by the composer for specific effects. However, playing this passage with any kind of strong articulation would betray the lyrical quality inherent in the music itself. Any ornamentation that "softens" the leaps is therefore not only acceptable, but highly desirable.

The ornamentation we propose consists essentially of passing notes (as in measure 1), *passaggi*, or scalar passages to fill in intervals larger than a third (also in measure 1), upper and lower neighbor notes (as in measure 2), *cambiatas* (as in measure 3), substitution of one chord tone for another (as in measure 13), mordents (measure 5), and trills (as in measure 3).

When sequences occur, the ornamentation tends to be more elaborate in the repetition of the pattern, as was customary at the time. Notes slurred from one beat to another or from one bar to the next were left unornamented, so that suspensions and the rhythmic character of the piece would not be obscured—and, so to speak, to leave the spotlight on the basso continuo. These longer notes may be adorned using *flattement*, a kind of finger vibrato, in accordance with the recommendations of surviving Baroque treatises.

When deciding how much ornamentation is appropriate to add to a slow movement, the flutist must also take into account the skill and stylistic approach of the accompanist. If the continuo is played in a discreet and sparse manner, with minimal ornamentation and restrained chord voicing, a more exuberant solo ornamentation is justifiable. But if the accompanist tends to favor rich chord textures and adds many embellishments to their part, the flutist might opt for a more restrained approach. It is important to assess the balance between the two instruments, not only in terms of sound volume but also textural density.

Finally, we must emphasize that all of these are personal choices, by no means mandatory. In any era, there is no single "correct" way to perform a musical work, and it is the diversity of artistic approaches that makes interpretation such a fascinating activity. In the case of Baroque music—during a time when the performer

was considered as important as, or even more important than, the composer—interpretive freedom was the ultimate goal of every good musician.

The charm of a movement such as the *Larghetto* we have attempted to dissect lies precisely in the wealth of different interpretive possibilities it offers, without ever losing its personality and unique characteristics. That, to a great extent, is the mark of the composer's talent and greatness: allowing the performer to shine while keeping the composer's voice alive.

After all, as J. J. Quantz once wrote: "The *Adagio* generally provides the least pleasure to those who are merely music lovers. However, a true musician can shine in the way they play the *Adagio*." (Quantz 1966, 162)

12. Final Considerations

The elaboration of an ornamented version of Handel's *Larghetto*, in light of Telemann's *Methodical Sonatas*, aims not only to offer a practical example of interpretation but also to encourage reflection on the creative role of the performer in Baroque music. By studying ornamentation as a living and flexible language, the musician becomes a reader-creator, respecting stylistic boundaries without renouncing personal expression.

The annotated edition, presented as an appendix, is the result of this reflective and practical approach. It is hoped that it will contribute to the interpretative repertoire for the flute, while also enriching the broader discussion on how to teach and practice ornamentation in Baroque music.

13. Data Availability Statement

The entire dataset generated or analyzed during this study is included in the published article.

14. References

Anjos, Guilherme Herdade Linberger dos. 2014. *As Sonate Metodiche de Georg Philipp Telemann: um estudo sobre ornamentação e estilo no final do período barroco*. Master's thesis. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, Escola de Comunicação e Artes, Departamento de Música.

Charpentier, Marc-Antoine. ca. 1682. Copy by Sebastien de Brossard (1700) *Règles de composition* (Facsimile). 2023. Paris: Atelier Philidor.

Collinet, Jean Baptiste. *Tonalities and Tuning Systems in Baroque Music*, https://medium.com/@jcollinet/tonalities-and-tuning-systems-in-baroque-music-d9b3297bd0ee accessed on June 2nd, 2024

Cyr, Mary. 1992. *Performing Baroque Music*, Portland: Amadeus Press.

Damais, Émile. 1970. *Haendel*, Paris: Classiques Hachette.

Fuller, David. 1990. "The Performer as Composer", in *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, Mayer Brown, Howard, Sadie, Stanley et allii. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Harnoncourt, Nikolaus. 1982. *O discurso dos Sons*, Portuguese translation by Marcelo Fagerlande, Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editora.

Jacob, Francis. *Tonalités et Affects d'après Charpentier, Mattheson, Rameau & Schubart*, https://francisjacoblesite.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/cc-tons-affect-des-tonalitecc81s1.pdf accessed on June 2nd, 2024

Lenneberg, Hans. 1958. "Johann Mattheson on Affect and Rhetoric in Music", in *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Nov), 193-236 Yale: Duke University Press

Mattheson, Johannes. 1713/2004. *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre*, (Fac-símile). Cap. II, Parte II "Tonalitäten". Laaber: Laaber Verlag.

Neumann, Frederick. 1989. *New Essays on Performance Practices*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.

Quantz, J. J. 1752/1966. *On Playing the Flute*, tradução de Edward Reilly, London: Faber and Faber.

Read, Lisa Karen. 1994 *Robert Cavally's Edition of G. F. Handel's Solo Flute Sonatas: An Evaluation and Historical Perspective*. 5813. LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses. https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5813, accessed on June 4th, 2024

Sadie, Stanley (editor). 1988. *Norton/Grove Encyclopedia of Music*, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Telemann, G. F. 1728/2016, editor Kostujak Wolfgang. *Methodical Sonatas for flute or violin and continuo*, Edição *Urtext* Munich: G. Henle Verlag.

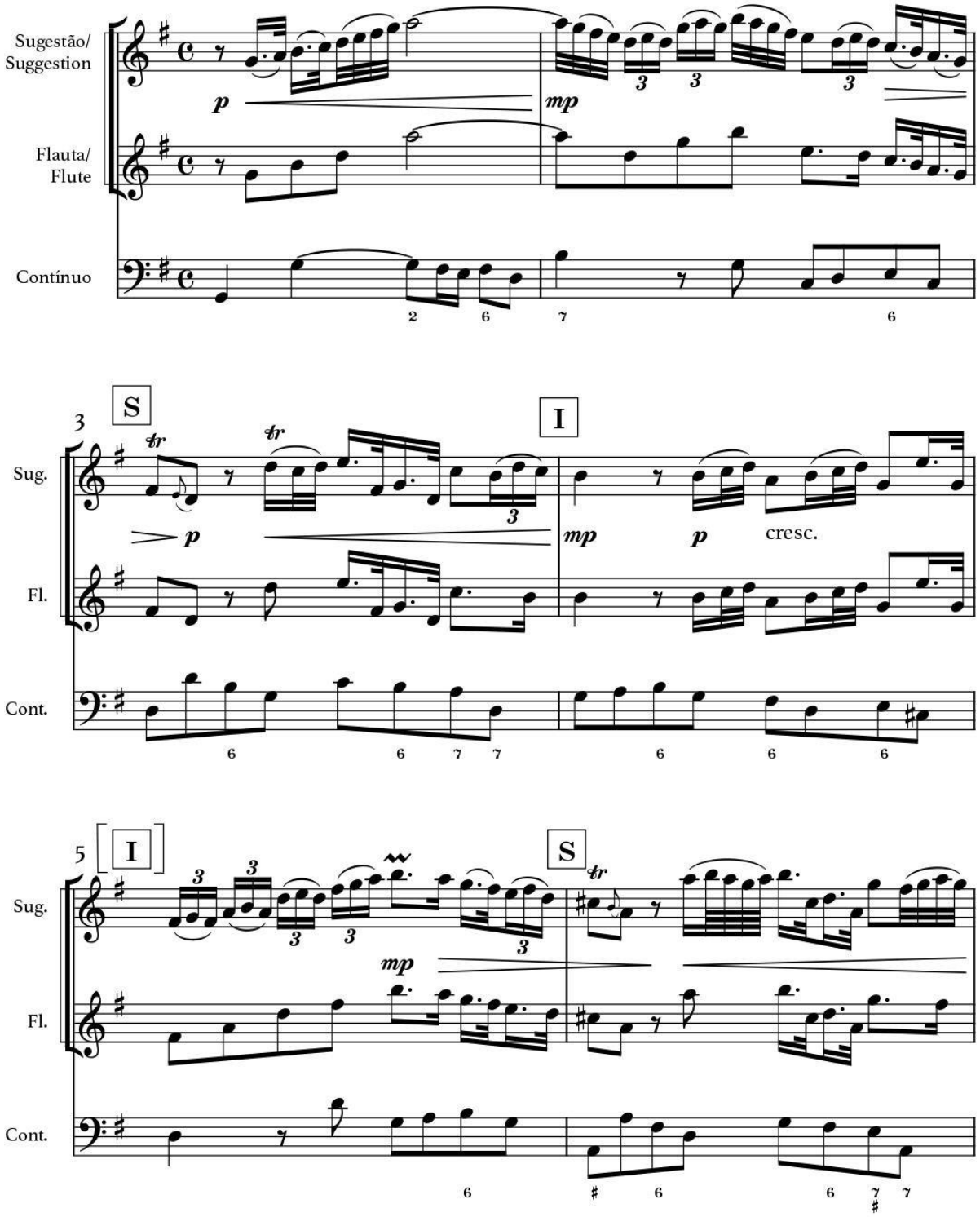
Wolff, Christoph; Mendel, Arthur; David, Hans T. 1999. *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*. New York: WW Norton & Company.

Sonata in Mi menor / Sonata in E minor HWV 379

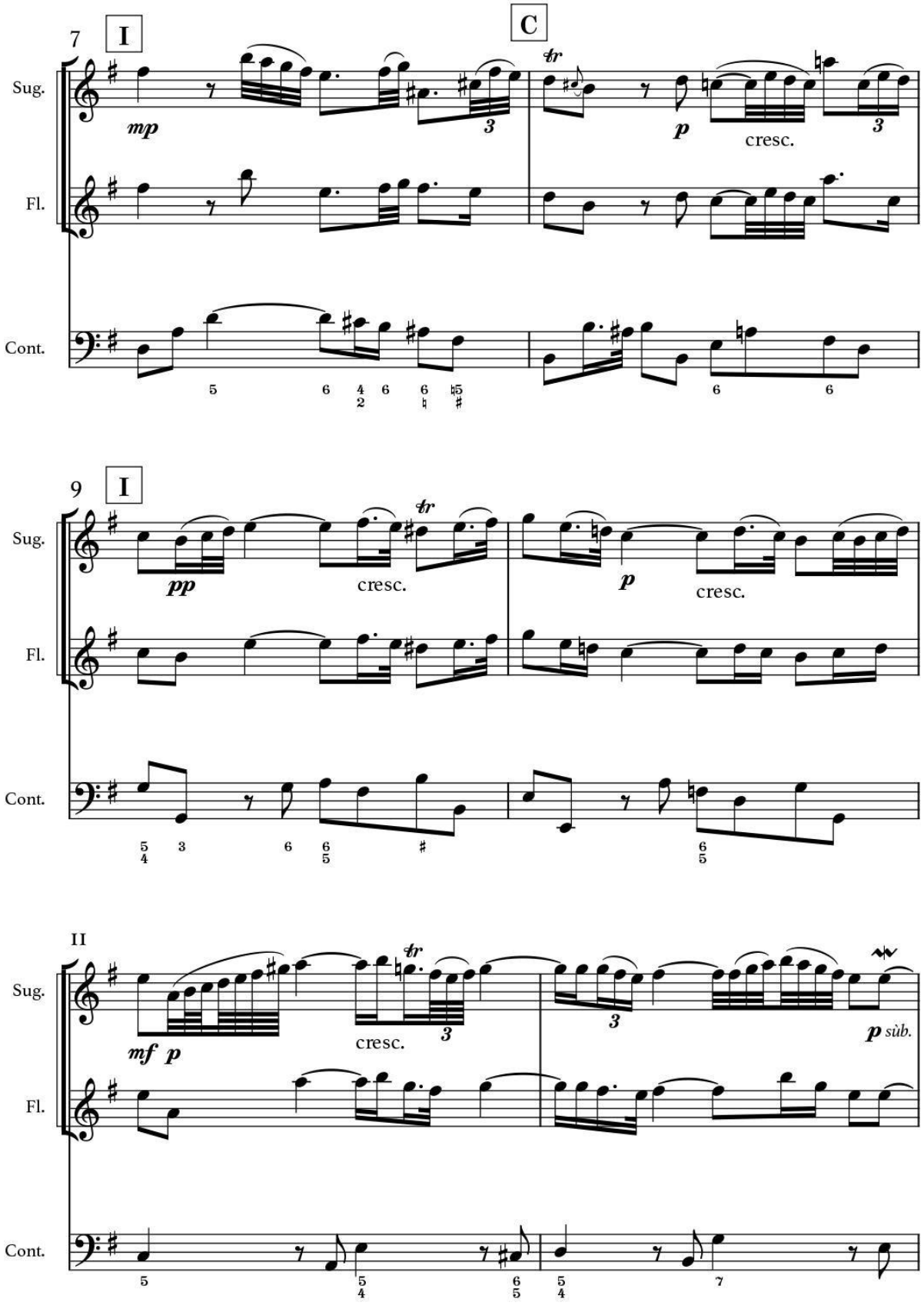
Ornamentação / Ornamentation
Laura Rónai

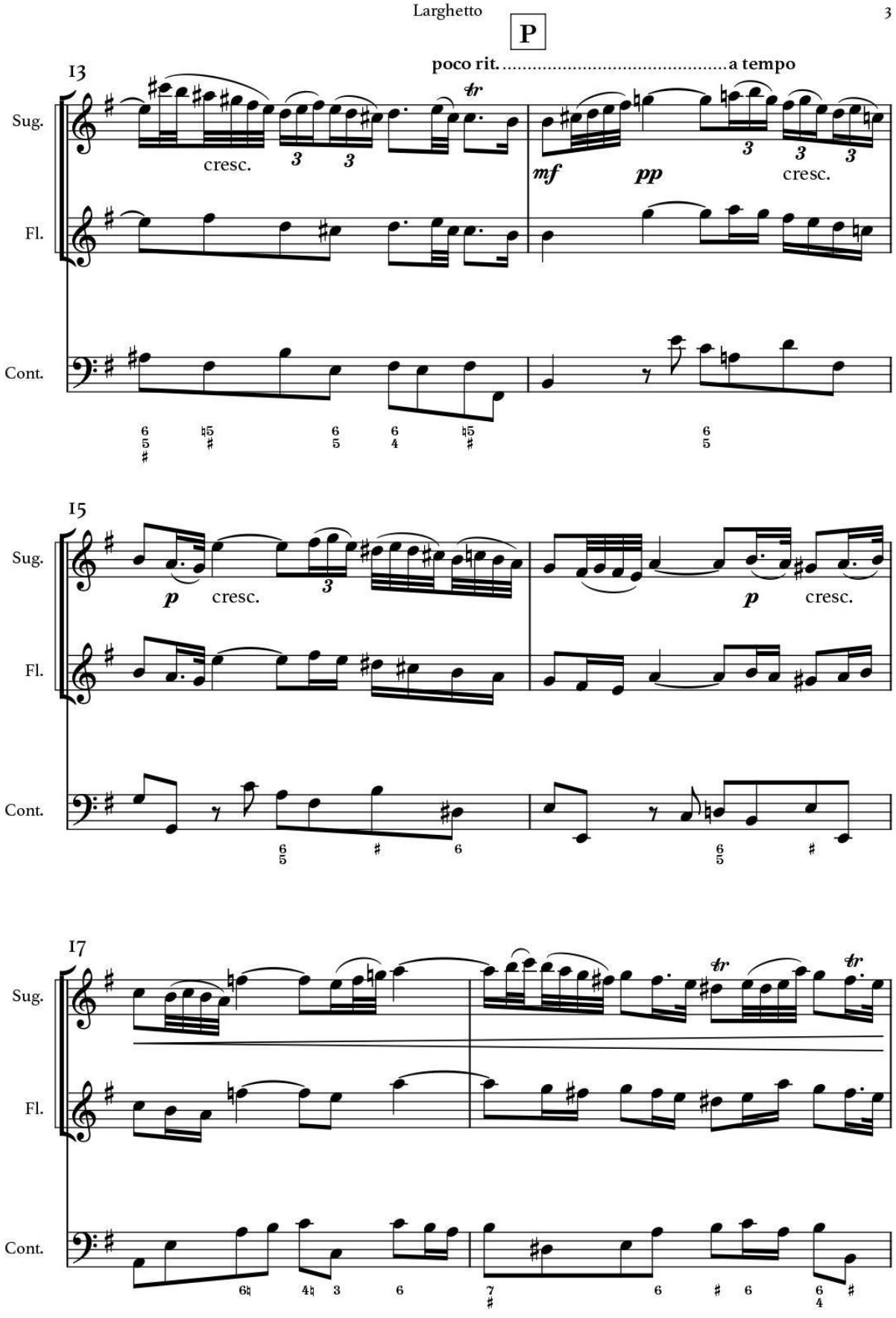
G. F. Handel

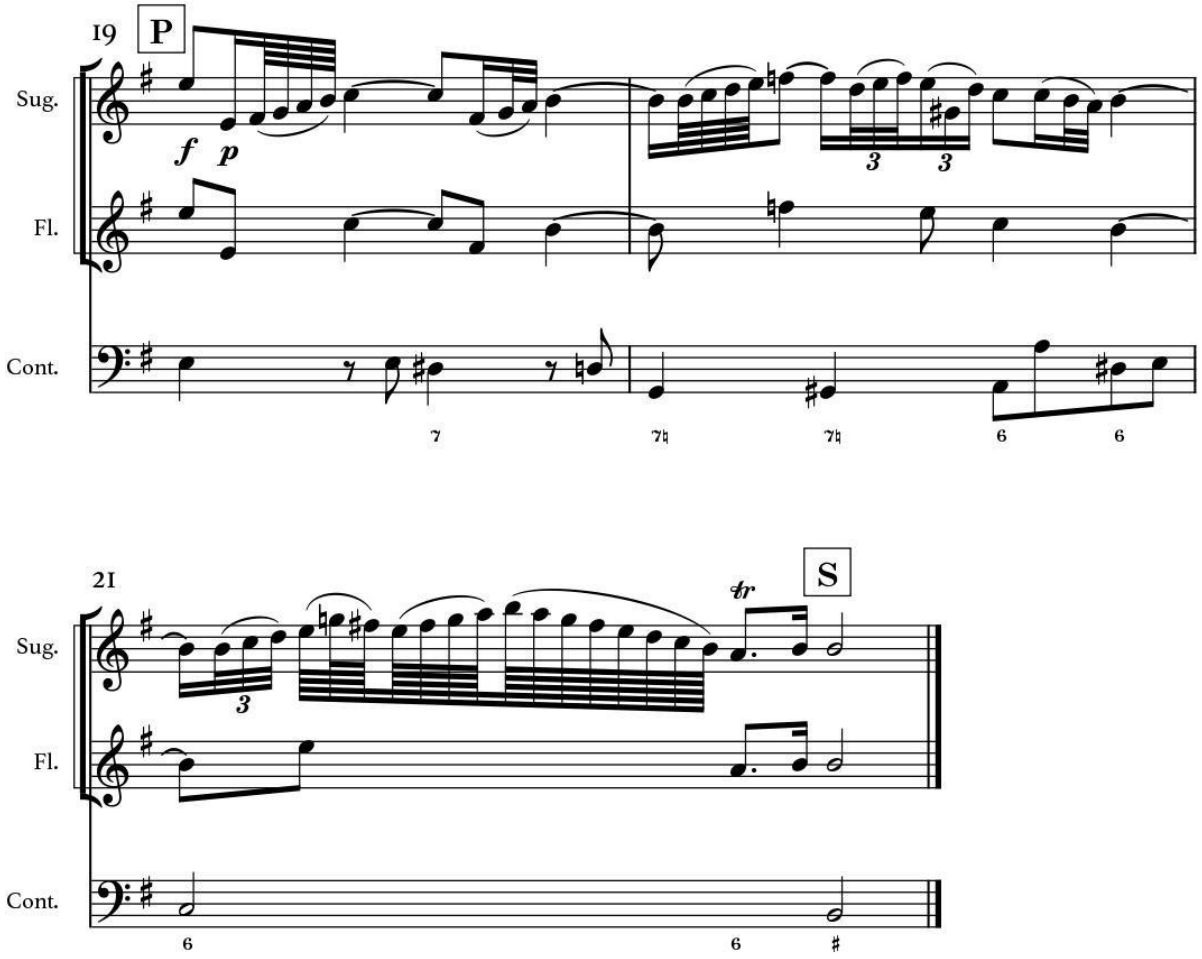
Larghetto



Larghetto







Declaração de conflito de interesse

Os autores declaram que não há conflito de interesse.

Declaração de disponibilidade de dados da pesquisa

The entire dataset generated or analyzed during this study is included in the published article.

Declaração de uso de IA

Não houve utilização de ferramentas de Inteligência Artificial.

Este preprint foi submetido sob as seguintes condições:

- Os autores declaram que os necessários Termos de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido de participantes ou pacientes na pesquisa foram obtidos e estão descritos no manuscrito, quando aplicável.
- Os autores declaram que a elaboração do manuscrito seguiu as normas éticas de comunicação científica.
- Os autores declaram que estão cientes que são os únicos responsáveis pelo conteúdo do preprint e que o depósito no SciELO Preprints não significa nenhum compromisso de parte do SciELO, exceto sua preservação e disseminação.
- Os autores declaram que os dados, aplicativos e outros conteúdos subjacentes ao manuscrito estão referenciados.
- O manuscrito depositado está no formato PDF.
- Os autores declaram que a pesquisa que deu origem ao manuscrito seguiu as boas práticas éticas e que as necessárias aprovações de comitês de ética de pesquisa, quando aplicável, estão descritas no manuscrito.
- Os autores declaram que uma vez que um manuscrito é postado no servidor SciELO Preprints, o mesmo só poderá ser retirado mediante pedido à Secretaria Editorial do SciELO Preprints, que afixará um aviso de retratação no seu lugar.
- Os autores concordam que o manuscrito aprovado será disponibilizado sob licença Creative Commons CC-BY.
- O autor submissor declara que as contribuições de todos os autores e declaração de conflito de interesses estão incluídas de maneira explícita e em seções específicas do manuscrito.
- Os autores declaram que o manuscrito não foi depositado e/ou disponibilizado previamente em outro servidor de preprints ou publicado em um periódico.
- Caso o manuscrito esteja em processo de avaliação ou sendo preparado para publicação mas ainda não publicado por um periódico, os autores declaram que receberam autorização do periódico para realizar este depósito.
- O autor submissor declara que todos os autores do manuscrito concordam com a submissão ao SciELO Preprints.