

The Counterpoint Club

A Chamber Music Podcast

Opus 2, Episode 3: Performing from the HIP

A Guide to Historically Informed Performance (HIP)

Throughout the past 300-400 years, Western art music has undergone major change. Composers have increasingly become more and more detailed in their written instructions for the performers, and thus the margin for variety in interpretation by the performer has become more and more narrow.

Since music from any period outside our own will always contain some amount of unmarked “common practice” elements, it’s important to do the research, and really understand as much as we can about the piece, outside the notes on the page.

To illustrate this point, we’ve attached an annotated score of an excerpt from the beginning of Corelli’s Trio Sonata in G Major, Op. 2, No. 12. For the sake of this exercise, Brandon used an encyclopedia (a well-cited Wikipedia article will suffice), and an Italian-English Dictionary (Google Translate is okay, though he recommends checking with an authoritative dictionary to ensure greater accuracy, as Google Translate is not always correct, and cannot give the student multiple definitions or nuances of meaning).

Some of the resources that professional HIP performers use when researching a piece of music from another era include original, unedited scores (urtext), and treatises from the time period when the piece was written. For example, Giuseppe Tartini’s *Treatise on Ornamentation*, or Johann Joachim Quantz’s treatise, *On Playing the Flute*, provide valuable insight into the general performance practices of the time, which, when combined with other opinions and treatises of the era, can be used to piece together fresh interpretations of old music.

Below is a key for the annotations:

Definitions:

1. *Ciacona (Chaconne)*: A Spanish triple meter, moderate tempo dance, originating in Latin America, with a slight stress on the second beat of each measure. The rhythmic figure of a dotted quarter plus eighth is a hallmark of this dance music.
2. *Largo*: Italian word meaning literally, “wide.” This is an indicator of both tempo AND character. This marking gives us a hint that Corelli wants us to play with broad, connected strokes. Nowadays, we tend to think of this tempo marking as meaning simply “slow,” but it’s important to remember that this is a modern conception with literally centuries



of baggage behind it. It's also important to remember that the Chaconne was originally a moderate tempo dance, so one could play a very compelling rendition of this opening at a slightly faster tempo. Now for a brief disclaimer - when it comes to tempo, there is rarely one "right" answer, but it's important to take all these factors into account when deciding on something as basic as how fast you want to take the piece!

3. *Allegro*: Italian word meaning "cheerful." In music, it has come to be associated with a brisk tempo. In baroque music, it also gives us a cue that the articulation should be lighter and crisper.

Other Annotations:

**Ground Bass (mm. 1-5)*: these were extremely popular chord progressions, much like the 12-bar blues, or "Rhythm" changes, in Jazz. This opening is a perfect example of the popular "Chaconne" Ground Bass, which you can find throughout baroque musical literature.

***Chaconne Rhythm (mm. 1, 3-8, 16)*: almost every chaconne throughout this period contains the rhythm of a quarter, dotted quarter, and eighth. This second beat should have a slight emphasis, according to dance treatises of the day.

†*Trill (m. 4)*: Trills vary widely depending on region and specific era. Because this Trio Sonata is mainstream baroque music from Italy, there's a pretty broad consensus that this trill would be approached from above.

††*Trill (m. 12)*: Because this trill is approached from the same note, I would play this starting from the same note. However, sometimes there is no way to be absolutely sure how people would have played it, and perhaps there was even variation in interpretation during Corelli's time.

Miscellaneous Markings:

'*or breath mark*: this dance puts an emphasis on the second beat of each measure and each phrase actually ends on the downbeat. Because of this some players prefer to make a slight breath after the first beat, to help support the natural phrasing of the Ground Bass.

Tenuto mark (mm. 1, 3-8, 16): this is an easy way to indicate that a note should be stressed.

"*Light*" *articulation mark (mm. 5, 9)*: those little crescent moons are another way to indicate short articulations without the traditional staccato "stop" that many people are taught in modern violin playing. Think of it as the opposite of a tenuto mark.

Tenuto plus dot (mm. 17-20): This marking means that the stroke should be long, light quick, with a crisp articulation on the front end of the stroke, but an open release at the end of the stroke, allowing the instrument to ring.



SONATA XII.

Ciaccona. (Define)

Largo. (Define)

Violino I.

Violino II.

Violone,
e Cembalo.

Handwritten annotations in the first system:
 - Blue asterisk (*) next to "Violone, e Cembalo."
 - Blue bracket around the first measure of the bass line.
 - Red "xxx tr" above the first measure of the Violino I staff.
 - Red "xx" above the first measure of the bass line.

Handwritten annotations in the second system:
 - Red slurs and accents over notes in the Violino I and Violino II staves.
 - Red question marks above notes in the Violino II and Violone/Cembalo staves.

Allegro. (Define)

Handwritten annotations in the third system:
 - Red slurs and accents over notes in the Violino I and Violino II staves.

Handwritten annotations in the fourth system:
 - Red vertical line and the word "END" in red at the end of the first measure.