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STEPHANIE D. VIAL

*THE ART OF MUSICAL PHRASING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: PUNCTUATING THE CLASSICAL 'PERIOD'*

Rochester: University of Rochester Press; Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008  
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There is a tension in this impressive book between two kinds of musicology. In large stretches, Stephanie D. Vial's exploration of the practices and notation of punctuation in eighteenth-century music combines an elegantly collected set of historical texts with the evaluation of their application to real problems in musical performance. But by considering what we used to call 'purely musical' problems in wider philosophical and cultural contexts, the author also raises a number of important and fascinating questions of relevance to more than just performers with an interest in historical approaches. As I worked my way through this work, I found myself asking if the two approaches can coexist happily between the covers of one book.

Vial's exploration of musical punctuation, which she defines widely to include rests, articulations, phrasings and those myriad suggestions about inflection and timing, unnotated yet implied, found so often in eighteenth-century music, is first and foremost 'performing practice' (or 'performance practice') research. This kind of musicology is fraught with the danger of descending into the kind of scholastic argument-mongering favoured, for instance, by the late Frederick Neumann and his many hapless opponents. Neumann depended on the academic's ability to cow unruly performers – his main intended audience – into submission with 'logical' argument and relentless citation of authority. As a postgraduate student at Cornell, an institution Vial had attended a few years earlier, I can remember the sinking feeling I felt when I was invited to summarize to an undergraduate conducting class Neumann's perfectly argued contention, supported by hundreds of pounds (or so it seemed) of contemporary treatises, that the practice of 'double-dotting' was completely unknown in the eighteenth century. Does that mean, my audience asked, that they are 'not allowed' to double dot? Apparently, we are not. In contrast, Vial, whose citation of authority is extraordinarily broad, wears her erudition lightly, grinds no axes and avoids this 'authority trap' – Richard Taruskin called it the 'Papa Doc' syndrome – almost all of the time.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first ('Establishing an Historical Perspective') she examines the various premises at the heart of her project: that there is a viable analogy between musical and non-musical punctuation, and that this analogy had a signal role to play in eighteenth-century thinking about performance and composition. In a second part ('The Art of Interpreting Rests') she devotes three chapters to teasing out the meaning of written and unwritten points of repose and silence, illuminating a wide-ranging series of music examples – including more than a few familiar works by composers like Bach and Mozart – with reading after reading from the (not just) eighteenth-century literature on musical punctuation. The opportunity Vial affords us to reread – and rehear – familiar music in the light of these writings is one of the pleasures of this book, and is a testament to what must have been years of careful collection and disciplined collation of documentary evidence.

Vial concludes with a closer look at two 'Case Studies in Musical Performance'. The first is a treatment of Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg's essay on the punctuation of recitative from his *Kritische Briefe über die Tonkunst* (1759–1764), which up until now has not been available in English; Vial provides a complete translation in an appendix. The second examines Johann Mattheson's slightly earlier 'punctuation' of a minuet from his *Kern melodischer Wissenschaft* of 1737. This final section of the book is not as strong as the first two. Vial discusses Marpurg's and Mattheson's writings in the context of a chorus of widely diverse thinkers, mostly German, from Muffat to Riepel to Koch. These writers seem too much here to be singing



from the same page, when in fact the gulf dividing, for instance, the South German, Roman Catholic and earlier Riepel from the North German, Protestant and much later Koch is immense. Given the growing recent secondary literature (mostly in German) on music-writing in the eighteenth century (see, for instance, the outstanding articles on Mattheson and Marpurg in the new *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*), it seems to me that a more differentiated approach could be possible: who can say how well Muffat and Forkel would have been able to dance a minuet together? Vial's partly Neumanesque approach, in which treatises are pressed into service as wallpaper for a stream of suggestions about performance – Papa Doc raises his ugly head – makes this line of criticism inevitable. Finally, her discussion of writings about musical punctuation should surely be read together with a growing body of writings by scholars like Danuta Mirka, who has just published an important book on theories of rhythm in the eighteenth century, *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart: Chamber Music for Strings, 1787–1791* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

*The Art of Musical Phrasing* is more than just a book about performance practice. Vial also paints in broad strokes, particularly in the early sections of the book. Her examination, for instance, of the role of the expansion of print in changing general attitudes to punctuation (38–40), and the eighteenth-century public's fascination with command of punctuation as a marker of cultivation – a prerequisite for social mobility – is especially intriguing. Better still, the educated eighteenth-century woman's perspective on punctuation, posture and conversation makes a thought-provoking appearance (55–56).

Unfortunately, this strand is not sustained throughout the book. I would have wished to read more passages like this:

But is it not possible that the theory [that regards] the eighteenth century (the golden age of conversation) as the one age in which women's communicative style prevailed, could also be true for music? Women as models, dedicatees, consumers, students, performers, teachers and composers of eighteenth-century music were always present, even at the root of activities, helping to define what we have come to understand of the very rich, complex and wide-ranging elements of the 'classical style'. Conversational techniques seem to embody the musical language of the galant style, with its frequent and easy changes of affect and topics of discourse. In addition, the boundaries of this purportedly feminine style, like the diverse sphere of women's music-making activities itself, easily merges into more traditional masculine contexts. Witness the quintessentially galant minuet, deprecated as frivolous and feminine, yet at the same time touted as the perfect compositional model for the ways in which individual phrases could be combined, varied and manipulated into complex, symphony-length movements. (88)

The delicate web of connections Vial draws in this section of the book between the eighteenth century's lively interest in punctuation in general, musical punctuation specifically, the expansion of print media and the rise of the galant attitude, especially in the female-dominated world of the salon, is a real scholarly coup, even if the deficit of research into the world of the salon she laments in a footnote has since been substantially rectified by Wiebke Thormählen's PhD dissertation 'Art, Education and Entertainment: The String Quintet in Late Eighteenth-Century Vienna' (Cornell University, 2008). Nonetheless, this fascinating passage left me hopeful that Vial would return to this strand of her work – in which the intellectual stakes are so high – more often in the book. Alas, she does not.

Vial's book, then, is somewhat less than the sum of its parts. I'm not sure this is her fault. Her publisher, the University of Rochester Press (which has, incidentally, produced a book that is elegant, well indexed and easy to read) seems to have presumed two audiences. One – performance practice scholars and, more importantly, musicians – are presented with an encyclopedic compendium of information about the musical practices of punctuation. The other, more 'critical' academic public, is treated to but a taste, unfortunately, of how it would be possible to write powerfully about the central role of the practice of musical punctuation in eighteenth-century discourses of gender, identity formation and social power. While Stephanie Vial has written an important book about the practices of musical punctuation in the eighteenth



century, she owes us at least a second one, building on the promise of the first, about what these practices mean.

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## EDITIONS

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### WILLIAM CROFT, *COMPLETE CHAMBER MUSIC*

ED. H. DIACK JOHNSTONE

Musica Britannica 88

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The contents of this volume (hereafter MB 88) neatly capture the fashions in instrumental music in London during the period between the death of Purcell and the arrival of Handel. William Croft's admiration for both composers is a matter of record. In his noble setting of the burial service, which has been sung at almost every state funeral since 1722, Croft 'endeavoured . . . to imitate that great *Master* and celebrated *Composer* [Purcell], whose name will for ever stand high in the Rank of Those, who have laboured to improve the *English Style*' (in Croft, Preface to volume 1 of *Musica sacra* (London, 1724), 3–4); the fact that his setting incorporates Purcell's *Thou knowest Lord* (written for the funeral of Queen Mary) without any incongruity is testament to his success in this regard, as is the attribution to Purcell of Croft's C minor Ground for keyboard (ZD221) in some sources. There is also evidence that after hearing Handel's 'Utrecht' *Te Deum* in 1713 Croft revised his *Te Deum* in D major (1709), a work that was originally modelled on Purcell's 1694 setting. (A Musica Britannica volume of Croft's Canticles and Anthems with Orchestra is currently in preparation.)

Croft would have first encountered Purcell's music regularly as a chorister in the Chapel Royal under John Blow. He probably joined the choir in the mid-1680s and was dismissed only in April 1699 at the age of twenty. During the 1690s Croft was a pupil of Blow, and copies of music by Blow and Purcell dating from this time survive in Croft's hand. Evidence of this English inheritance, however, is almost entirely absent from Croft's first published compositions, the three 'Sonatas or Solos' for violin, which were advertised in October 1699. These thoroughly Italianate works predate the publication of Corelli's Op. 5 sonatas (1700), and while it is possible that manuscript copies of at least some of Corelli's pieces may have been circulating in England, a number of factors suggest that Croft found a model for his works that was much closer to home.

Croft's three violin sonatas were paired in publication with 'three for the Flute' by an unnamed 'Italian Mr' who can almost certainly be identified as Gottfried Finger, the Moravian viol player and composer who had been resident in London since about 1687. Although at first it might appear that Finger's recorder sonatas were included simply to make up the numbers, the pairing of works for violin and recorder in a single publication was in fact a format that had previously proved commercially successful. (John Walsh certainly believed that the Croft/Finger publication would sell well, issuing a rival to John Young's edition within weeks.) The first English publication to use this format was Finger's *VI Sonatas or Solo's, Three for a Violin & Three for a Flute with a Through Bass for ye Harpsychord* (1690). These sonatas were evidently the fruits of Finger's travels in Italy, and in the dedication he stated that 'the humour of them is principally Italian'. It appears that Finger's sonatas provided the model for Croft's 1699 publication, and also for Daniel Purcell's *Six Sonatas* of 1698. (The bass parts to Croft's three violin sonatas are also found (unattributed) in GB-Lbl Add. MS 31993 immediately after the three recorder sonatas from Finger's 1690 publication.) One device