Etienne Loulié

“On Vocal Ornaments”

from

Elements ou Principes de Musique

(1696)

Translated by

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According to the article in *Grove Music Online*, Etienne Loulié (1654-1702) was trained as a chorister in the famous Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, the chapel of the royal court. Michel Brenet in his history of the institution mentions Loulié two times, specifically that he was discharged as a chorister on September 20, 1673, receiving a parting gratuity of 150 livres, a substantial amount at the time. Brenet considered him important enough to provide a brief biography, from which the *Grove* article has drawn some of its information.\(^1\) The musical education of choristers, beyond training in musical notation, singing, and liturgy, could vary widely, mostly dependent upon the aptitude and energy of the individual student. Loulié’s talent as a chorister might be indicated by the diversity of his later abilities and interests, which included not only voice and several instruments but also an interest in music theory, pedagogy, and musical inventions. He wrote not only on matters of pedagogy and performance, but also a treatise on a new approach to tuning the keyboard and invented a metronome-like device.\(^2\) The treatise from which this extract is drawn is a combination of music fundamentals, more advanced music theory, and performance practice. Loulié in the opening proclaims that it is in three parts: the first for the child, the second for older individuals, and the third for those capable of more advanced thought about music.

The section on vocal ornaments (*agrément*) is one of the more succinct and clear accounts in the literature of the time. The illustrations are also, with very few exceptions, clear and intelligible in relation to the verbal descriptions. His definition of terms is admirable. The only exception to this might be his use of the critical word *chant*, which he defines as a succession of two or several pitches. Neither Brossard’s nor Rousseau’s dictionary gives any help in understanding this rather ultimately abstract usage. It appears that Loulié sought a definition broad enough, at the cost of vagueness, to be of universal application for his needs. The result is that there is no really good translation in English. I have chosen “melody” as the least bad.

The reader who is interested in the subject of French baroque vocal ornamentation will also wish to consult the translations of Monteclair and Bacilly in this same series, especially the Appendix IV in the latter.

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\(^2\) A description and drawing of the device is given at the end of *Eléments*. 
Ornaments of Song

[66] Melody is a succession of two or several pitches.

An ornament of melody is one, or two, or several little pitches, that one mingles among the designated pitches in order to render the melody more pleasant.

The little pitch is a weaker pitch, that is to say less loud or of less duration, than the other pitches.

The little pitches are indicated by notes of a smaller size than the other notes, or by a symbol particular and special for each ornament.

The little note is a note smaller in character than the other notes.

The little note is always bound to a principal note. This binding is indicated by or .

The little note is named by the name of the principal note to which it is bound.

It has the pitch of the degree where it is placed.

It sometimes takes its value from the principal note that precedes it, sometimes from the principal note that follows it.

The little note ought to proceed quickly. [67]

In the first example above, the little note is bound with the Re, consequently it is named by the name of Re, which name Re is not repeated on the note Re that follows.

It must have the pitch of Mi because it is on the degree of Mi.

It is taken from the value of the preceding note, which is Fa.
In the second example the little note takes its value from the following note, which is Re. In the third example the little note is named from the name of Fa by naming Fa on the principal note and simply “a” on the little note. It has the pitch of Mi and takes its value from the preceding note.³

There are nine ornaments of song, namely:

The coulé, chute, port de voix, accent, tremblement, martellement, balancement, tour de gozier, and flatté.

There is still the coulade, both ascending and descending, passages, and diminution, which have no particular characters at all but are indicated simply as small notes.

It is necessary to remark that most call the tremblement a cadence, but it is necessary to distinguish the one from the other. The difference will be made understood in speaking of the tremblement.

[68] Coulé

The coulé is an inflection of the voice from a small or weak pitch or from one of brief duration, to a pitch lower and stronger. The coulé is designated thus:

³Loulié does not explain why the first takes its time from the preceding note and the second from the following note when in both cases the ornament is bound to the following note. The first would seem to be a passing note and the second an appoggiatura. Perhaps the performer’s task is to determine which is appropriate. The situation is further complicated by the third example, in which the ornament is bound to and takes its time from the preceding note.
Chute

The chute is an inflection of the voice from a strong or principal pitch to a small lower pitch.

The chute is designated by: $\sigma$

[69] Port de Voix

The port de voix is an elevation of the voice from a pitch of small duration or weak to a principal pitch that is a degree higher. The port de voix is designated: $\Pi$

Accent

The accent is an elevation of the voice from a strong pitch to a small weak pitch that is one degree higher. The accent is designated thus: \[\text{accent symbol}\]
The tremblement is a coulé repeated two or more times from a little pitch to a principal pitch of a degree lower. The tremblement is designated thus: +

When the voice delays perceptibly on the little note of the tremblement's first coulé, it is called to prepare [to lean on] the tremblement.

The prepared tremblement is designated thus:

The pitch on which the voice delays before trilling is called the preparation of the tremblement and it ought to be named the same name as the note on which the tremblement is made, which name serves for the preparation and the trilled note.
The preparation of the tremblement ought to be longer or shorter in proportion to the duration of the note on which the tremblement is made.

The tremblement ought to begin at the time in which the note trilled begins unless it is indicated otherwise.4

When the voice does not delay perceptibly on the first note of the first coulé, the tremblement is called an unprepared tremblement, or without preparation, and it is designated simply with a little cross thus: +

The coulés of the tremblement must not be supported either by the breath or by shaking,5 but must be smooth, so far as possible as if it were only one pitch.

The coulés of the tremblement ought not be made in the throat or in the chest.

They ought to be made faster or slower in proportion to the speed or slowness of the melody.

Tremblements ought to be longer or shorter in proportion to the length of the note trilled.

One customarily gives to the tremblement the name of cadence, but there is nonetheless a difference.

The cadence is the conclusion of a melody, for melodies are in regard to the song what sentences and other parts are in regard to discourse. The end of the melodies or pieces of which a song is composed ought to correspond in one place to a period, in another to a comma, in another to a question mark, etc., according to the different manner in which the melodies end. The end or conclusion of each piece is called the cadence, of which there are many kinds, but here is not the place to discuss it. Because the tremblement appears in the majority of cadences, one gives the name of cadence to the tremblement. In order to prove that the [72] cadence and tremblement are not the same thing, it suffices to show that there are conclusions of melodies without tremblement and tremblements without conclusions of melody.

4 This appears to mean that the trill should not be delayed beyond the inception of the pitch.
5 The word here is chevrotement, and seems clearly derived from chèvre (goat). The so-called “goat trill” was considered very disagreeable by this time.
Martellement

The martellement is two little pitches, quite quick, in the manner of a chute, with one degree lower than the other, which precedes the note on which the martellement is designated. The martellement is indicated thus: V

Balancement

The balancement is two or several little gentle and slow aspirations that are made in a note without altering the pitch. The balancement is indicated thus.
Flatté

The flatté or flattement is a tremblement of a single or two coulés followed by a chute:

\[ \text{Coulade} \]

Tour de Gozier

The tour de gozier is a displacement of the first pitch of the final coulé of a tremblement, which one places a third lower [i.e., than the preparation].\(^6\) The tour de gozier is indicated thus:

\[ \text{Coulade} \]

\[ \text{Tour de Gozier} \]

Coulade

The coulade is two or several little pitches or little notes conjoined stepwise, that is to say which follow successively, that one places between two distant pitches [i.e., an interval] in order to pass from one to the other with greater elegance.

The coulade has no particular character, it is indicated by little notes.

\(^6\) Loulié appears to limit the application of the tour de gozier to the function of turned termination of the trill.
Passages are several small pitches that one inserts between simple ornaments.

These passages are commonly called doubles.

I have put some of them here on a single interval in order to give an idea of them.

One could vary the above interval in many other ways.
One ought to understand that not only all other intervals, both ascending and descending, but further melodies of three, four, and several notes can be varied in an infinity of ways.

There are so many things to say about the manner of singing that if I were to undertake to speak about all, it would be necessary to exceed the bounds of my design that I prescribed for myself of giving here only principles. I leave them, then, to those who want to undertake to make of them a special treatise, and I say only a word about diminution of melody.

[76] Diminution

Diminution, which is a kind of ornament of melody, is several rhythmically measured notes in place of one.