Michel de Monteclair

Principes de Musique

(1736)

Remarks on Ornaments

Pages 77 to 90

Translated by

Sion M. Honea
Preface

I discovered Monteclair’s *Principes* in preparing the appendix on vocal ornamentation for the translation of the excerpt from Bacilly’s book also in this series. Having long ago foolhardily attempted a “catalog” of ornaments along with textual citations, I was struck by the quality of Monteclair’s remarks on ornaments. In the first place, he was, apparently uncharacteristically for his time, aware of the lack of but need for standardization in terminology and execution in the performance of ornamentation. His observation that the lack of such standardization results in confusion for all and negatively impacts teaching is both accurate and logical; had other authors heeded his advice the world of eighteenth-century performance practice might have been at least to some degree less chaotic and baffling today. To be sure, complete and universal uniformity is not possible because some ornaments, such as for lute and keyboard or instruments in general, do not readily transfer to each other or to voice and vice versa. Nonetheless, a high degree of standardization within the specific applied area would have been helpful, and Monteclair attempted to bring this to the voice.

A further complication with the study of ornamentation is the fact that some authors present verbal descriptions without musical illustration, or musical illustrations without verbal description. Descriptions are often obscure to the point of unintelligible, and illustrations can be presented *fait accompli* without representation of the unornamented original, or the reverse. When an author does present both description and illustration, either or both can still be less than clear. An author who is reasonably clear in description and reasonably clear in illustration is quite rare, which prescription Monteclair fulfills more than reasonably well. He is also admirably honest in stating the difficulty of his task, as he says for the tour de gosier and son glissé, that they are ornaments “difficult to execute and more difficult still to explain.”

On these accounts Monteclair has become one of my favorite pedagogues, along with Ganassi with his remarks on the difficulty of ambiguous language and how thirty years of experience can in book form be passed to the reader in a few hours, and Dauprat’s remark on the teacher’s responsibility to the student. It is very welcome to find an intelligent, competent, honest, and humble teacher.
On Ornaments

It does not suffice in order to sing French well to know music well, nor to have a voice. It is necessary further to have some taste, and spirit, and flexibility of voice, and some discernment in order to give to the words the expression that they require according to different characters.

There is not complete agreement concerning either the signs or the names of the ornaments that are practiced for the propriety and variety of French song.

For example, masters of the viol designate the tremblement by a reversed C, Ɔ, which they place after the note that must be trilled: ƞ Ɔ. Masters of music, on the contrary, mark the tremblement by a little cross, which they place before this note +ƞ. Organists designate the tremblement by the sign M, which they place above the note in order to mark that it must be trilled. Masters of the lute, theorbo, and guitar also make use of other signs in order to designate the tremblement.

There are some masters who claim, with reason, that it would be necessary to call a tremblement what one commonly calls a cadence, however much difference there is between the two. The cadence is an end or conclusion of a song, which makes in the music what the period “.” makes in language. Here are some cadences or conclusions in song, A, without a tremblement, as well as some tremblements, B, without cadences.

Before arriving at a cadence, C, one often makes a trill D. This it is that has caused the confusion and has given to the tremblement the name of cadence.

---

1 The French word I translate as “ornaments” is agréments. The terms for specific ornaments I retain in their French form both because some do not translate well into English and also because I realized that to translate them would only introduce further confusion of the type Monteclair describes here.

2 This is the word musique, and I am unclear what distinction Monteclair intends, unless he uses it as a general term, maybe for “composition”?

3 That is, the trill at a cadential point.
The Flatté is so named by the masters of the Viol, the players of the violons call it tremblement mineur. There are some masters of singing who call it battement. It is nearly the same as all the other ornaments to which one gives different signs and different names, from which it follows that the masters do not even agree with each other, and that such a scholar who has taken from one master doesn’t understand the language, and doesn’t recognize the manner of notating of another one.

Music being the same for the voice as for instruments, one ought to make use of the same terms and to agree unanimously on the most appropriate signs to represent the ornaments of song. In this I am going to follow the usage and opinion of good masters whom I have consulted, particularly M. Grenier, with the exception that I will call tremblement what he usually calls cadence. It is almost impossible through writing to teach the manner of forming the ornaments well, since the live voice of an experienced master with difficulty suffices for that; however, before going on to French music I am going to try to explain the least badly that seems possible to me.

There are eighteen principal ornaments in song. Namely: coulé, port de voix, chûte, accent, tremblement, pincé, flatté, balancement, tour de gosier, passage, diminution, coulade, trait, son filé, son enflé, son dminué, son glissé, sanglot.

The Coulé

The coulé is an ornament that sweetens the melody and that renders it smooth by means of the connection of sounds. It is performed on different occasions, particularly when the melody descends by a third. There is ordinarily no sign at all that indicates it, it is taste that determines the places where it is necessary to be made.
There are, however, some masters who designate it with a little note, A, which is bound with the stronger\textsuperscript{4} note to which it must flow, B, whose name it takes, or by a simple slur.

![Musical notation image]

When the words express anger, or when the song has a rapid movement, one doesn’t make a coulé on descending thirds.

![Musical notation image]

**The Port de Voix**

When the melody rises by conjunct steps from a weak note, D, to a strong note, E, in order to rest on the latter of the two notes, one often performs the port de voix, especially when the interval is only a half step. One does not mark it in all the places where it is necessary to be made. Taste and experience provide this understanding.

The port de voix is sometimes marked by a little false note, F, which is preparation for it, and which takes the name of the strong note, G, to which it is bound and on which it is necessary to raise the voice. One indicates it also by this sign, “V,” H. The port de voix, I, is the reversal of the coulé, K. I believe that this sign / would be more appropriate than the sign “V” for marking the port de voix.

---

\textsuperscript{4} Monteclair appears to use the terms weak and strong (foibé and forte) to indicate short and long, but sometimes they might also indicate degree of emphasis.
The Chûte

The chûte is an inflection of the voice that, after having prepared a pitch for some time, L, falls gently and as if by dying away on a degree lower, M, without stopping there. This ornament is marked by a little note, N.\(^5\)

The chûte provides an important ornament in plaintive songs.

The Accent

The accent is a gasp or sorrowful elevation of the voice that is performed more often in plaintive airs than in tender ones. It is never made in happy airs, nor in those that express anger. It is formed in the chest by a kind of sob at the extremity of a note of long duration or strong, O,\(^6\) by making heard a

---

\(^5\) N is apparently omitted from the example, or more likely it is misprinted as M.

\(^6\) The distinction between “longue durée” and “forte” perhaps implies a dynamic significance to the latter.
little of the degree immediately above the accented note, P. The accent is sometimes indicated by a little note or sign, '.

The Tremblement

Of all the ornaments that are performed in song, the tremblement, which the Italians call trillo, and which the French call by corruption, cadence, holds the first rank in that it is the most brilliant and it is encountered more often than the others. This is why one cannot apply oneself strenuously enough to forming it well, all the more because those who execute it poorly can never sing in a manner that is agreeable.

The tremblement is formed by the participation of two conjunct pitches that the throat makes heard successively like a kind of warbling, by means of flexible strokes or beats, light, distinct, and linked to each other. Several coulés in succession in some fashion form the tremblement.

The tremblement parfait is formed at the bottom of the throat without the chest making any impulse and without the coulés or beats being aided by breath or shaking.

The coulés or beats of the throat are more or less repeated and are beaten more or less quickly according as the note on which the tremblement is designated is longer or shorter, or according to the sense of the words.

---

7 The word is “gosier,” which modern dictionaries define simply as the throat, but Cotgrove’s 1611 dictionary says it is properly the head of the larynx.
The tremblement gently or slowly beaten is appropriate to langorous or plaintive songs.

The tremblement lively or lightly beaten is appropriate to serious, light, or happy songs. One must not restrain the voice within in beating the tremblement; on the contrary, one must release the voice in pushing the air outward.

One sometimes terminates the trill by means of a chûte, Q, and sometimes by a tour de gosier, R, which is what is called terminating the tremblement.

There are Four Kinds of Tremblement, Namely

The tremblement appuyé, which is designated thus—t

The tremblement subit, which is designated by--+

The tremblement feint, which is designated by--M

The tremblement double, which is designated by—{x under a slur}

The Tremblement Appuyé

One prepares the tremblement by preparing the voice on the degree immediately above the note that must be trilled.

This preparation is for a greater or lesser duration, according as the note where the tremblement is designated has a greater or lesser value, or according to the degree of the rapidity of the movement.
In order to form a tremblement perfectly, it is necessary to prepare well, beat well, and end well. One calls it a “polished” tremblement when its beats are equal and when they are made in the throat in a graceful effect.

The preparation of the tremblement is often marked by a note either long, A, or short, B, both of which make the same effect.

The tremblement haut and the tremblement bas are equally disagreeable.

The tremblement haut is the one whose beats are higher than their natural position.

The tremblement bas is the one whose beats settle and descend below the note trilled.

The tremblement whose beats are in thirds or fourths, etc., are vile.

The tremblement chevrotté is sometimes made from the chest and sometimes from the top of the throat. Its effaced and too rapid beats produce the effect of the bleating of a goat. This tremblement is insupportable.

---

8 I believe the illustration is confusing here and the small notes indicate the principle pitch of the trill and the large ones the accessory pitches. At the end the dotted eighth-note represents what was supposed to be the principal pitch.

9 A chevrette is a kid.

10 This appears to describe the infamous “goat trill,” or the pulsing on a single pitch. Praetorius knows it as a trillo and others as a tremolo.
The tremblement chevrotté, the one that is made by a shaking of the chin, and the one that is within the head indicates an indisposition nearly insurmountable.

One can beat the tremblement more slowly when coming near its end. In order to learn how to form the tremblement well, it is necessary in commencing them to prepare well and beat slowly, and to the degree the throat becomes flexible one practices to make the beats more and more lightly.

**The Tremblement Subit**

The tremblement subit is beaten immediately without a preparation, it is performed more often in recitative than in songs.

---

**Tremblement Feint**

One first prepares the tremblement feint as if one intended to form a tremblement parfait, but in place of beating for a long time, one gives after the preparation and at the end of the note only a little stroke of the throat, whose beat is almost imperceptible.

The tremblement feint is performed when the sense of the words is not finished, or when the melody has not yet arrived at its conclusion.
After having prepared the tremblement feint well, the voice sometimes makes heard the degree immediately above the note of the preparation. This degree will be designated at the point after by a little note, C.

This little note should be combined in some way with the stroke of the throat that terminates the tremblement feint, which these two pitches make heard as only a single one.

It happens sometimes that after having prepared the tremblement feint one trills a little on the note where this ornament is designated without, however, ending the tremblement. This is what is marked as M +.

**Tremblement Doublé**

One could designate the tremblement double by the following sign: $\dddot{\text{e}}$. The tremblement double, which is commonly called double cadence, embraces three conjunct degrees that will be designated here following by three little notes, namely: the upper degree, D, which is blended with the note trilled, E, after which the voice falls lightly onto another degree lower, F, and re-ascends thereafter quickly and by a tour de gosier on the note of the tremblement, G, in order to rest upon a long note, H.
The tremblement double is often encountered in tender songs, or it is found in many passages that are designated by little notes, as one can see it in the “Doubles” of Lambert, of Dambruis and other older composers.

**The Pincé**

The pincé has no symbol that designates it. It is often made upon arriving on a long note by a light beating of the throat.

In order to form it well, it is necessary to carry the voice on the degree of the long note, I, then it is necessary to descend to the neighboring degree, K, after which the voice re-ascends quickly onto the long note, L, in order to rest there. It is such that it will be better understood by little false notes.

The port de voix always accompanies the pincé.

**The Flatté**

---

11 This apparently refers to the “passage” ornament, see below.
12 The spelling appears sometimes as flatté and sometimes as flaté.
The flatté is a kind of balancement that the voice makes by several small gentle aspirations on a note of long duration, or on a note of repose without raising or lowering the pitch. This ornament produces the same effect as the vibration of a taut string that one plucks with a finger. Up to the present it has had no sign to designate it. One could mark it by an undulating sign $\infty$. If one would perform the flatté on all long notes, it would become insupportable because it would render the melody trembling and too uniform.

The Balancement

The balancement, what the Italians call the tremolo, produces the effect of the trembling of the organ.

In order to perform it well, it is necessary for the voice to make several little aspirations more marked and slower than the flatté.

The syllable that is encountered on the first of the notes so “balanced” serves for all the other notes that the sign $\infty\infty\infty$ embraces.

---

13 It seems almost certain that Monteclair is describing vibrato, and it is most interesting historically that he limits its use to an ornamental one, rejecting continuous vibrato.
Tour de Gosier

The tour de gosier is indicated by the sign T. The five notes that serve to form it are made on one single breath and they cover only three conjunct degrees.

In order to form it well one prepares the voice on the long note where the sign T is indicated, M, one rises then on the degree immediately above, N, and descends thereafter to the same degree of the long note, O, after which one descends to the neighboring degree below the preparation note, P, and in order to terminate one re-ascends to the preparation, Q, in order to repose there.

After remaining on the preparation note, it is necessary for the throat to make its turn by passing lightly from the first note to the fifth and by making a kind of very sudden trembling on the second little note, O. This ornament forms in the throat a warbling difficult to execute and more difficult still to explain. The tour de gosier is a kind of tremblement feint.

The Passage

The passage is made in several different ways, as one sees here below and still better in the songs that the old masters call “Doubles.”

It is indicated by some little false notes that serve to guide the voice on all the degrees that it covers.
Passages are arbitrary, each can make more or fewer of them, according to taste and disposition. They are performed less in vocal music than in instrumental, especially at present when the players of instruments, in order to imitate the Italian style, disfigure the nobility of the songs by often ridiculous variations.

The incomparable Lully, that superior talent whose works will always be esteemed by true connoisseurs, preferred melody, beautiful “modulation,” agreeable harmony, discrimination in expression, natural and, in sum, noble simplicity, to the ridicule of “doubles” and of irregular music, whose pretended merit consists only in deviations, obscure modulations, harshness of harmony—in uproar and confusion. All this false brilliance points out the barrenness of the composer, and nevertheless they don’t leave off improving them on the ears of the ignorant.

**Diminution**

Diminution is not arbitrary in that the notes that compose it are doubled or quadrupled and preserve their intrinsic value within the measure.

---

14 This probably refers to the technical sense of “disposition” the physical property that facilitates throat articulation.

15 Rousseau (1775) says that “modulation” is properly the means of establishing and treating mode, but in his day it has come to signify the means of conducting harmony and melody in several modes, which seems to be our sense of “modulation.” My guess is that Monteclair means the former, the construction of a good melody.
The Coulade

The coulade is indicated by several little false notes that succeed by conjunct degrees by ascending or descending and which can be made or take place without the process, the flow, or the beauty of the song being interrupted.

The Trait

The difference between the trait and the coulade consists only in that all the notes of the trait, A, are articulated, and those in the coulade, B, are linked.

The trait requires a stroke of the bow or of the tongue for wind instruments for each note, and the coulade produces all the notes on a single stroke of the bow or stroke of the tongue, or on one syllable.

The Son Filé
The son filé is performed on notes of long duration by continuing the voice without any variation. The voice ought to be, so to speak, as smooth as glass during the entire derivation of the note.

**The Son Enflé and Diminué**

In order to swell a pitch, it is necessary that it issues first from the chest and begins at a small fraction of the voice. One swells and strengthens it gradually by pushing and extending the voice until it arrives at its greatest fullness. It is necessary to avoid beginning the swelling of the pitch in the head voice or falsetto, because one could not pass from this voice to full voice without it appearing like a section or separation.

There is no sign that designates the son enflé and son diminué. This is what obliged M. de Planes, an Italian, to ask me how it might be done so as to mark the ornament in some places in his sonatas. I advised him to make use of a line that would increase in measure as it is understood for the son enflé and would decrease, on the contrary, for the son diminué.

He has successfully made use of this innovation, and as it comes from me, I make use of it here below.

![](image)

**Son Glissé**

It is difficult to make understood in writing the thing that has been called son glissé, and almost as difficult to do it well with the living voice.

---

16 Literally 1/8.
I am going to use a comparison in order to attempt to make myself understood.

In order to take a step forward or back, one raises the foot in order to carry it to the place where it must come to rest.

In order to sound a conjunct interval, one carries the voice perceptibly onto the second element of the interval.

One can also make a step up to its termination by gliding the foot without raising it from the ground, as one does in dance. The son glissé makes the same effect in some fashion, since the voice must rise or fall without interruption by gliding from one degree to another neighboring one, and by passing gently through all the nearly indivisible parts that the half-step or step contains without that passing making perceptible any sections.\(^\text{17}\)

Players of the viol, for example, in place of “carrying” the finger on a close position to one where they already have a finger poised, they slide the finger gently along the string from one position to another in order to form this ornament.

Examples drawn from my *Cantate de Pan & Sirinx* and from the aria “Terminez mes Tourments,” from the opera *Iris*:

\(^\text{17}\) The portamento.
The Sanglot

It seems by the term of sanglot that this ornament ought only to be used in moans, nevertheless, one uses it in order to express several passions opposite to the others.

The sanglot is an enthusiasm that takes its origin in the depth of the chest and that is formed by a violent aspiration that is only heard externally as a mute gasp and choke.

The sanglot anticipates the full voice with which it is strictly bound, and then the voice is heard according to the value of the note or the force of the passion. It ends nearly always in an accent, or by a chute.

The sanglot is employed in the most vivid pain, in the greatest sadness, in plaints, in tender songs, in anger, in contentment, and even in joy.

It is almost always performed on the first syllable of the word “helas!” and on the exclamations “ah!” “eh!” “ôl!”
Appendix

It may be of some help to the reader to have an abbreviated description of what might be called the four types of “accessory” notes that Monteclair mentions. Monteclair does not explain from which note the accessories take their duration, but the illustrations imply: coulé and port de voix from the following; the chûte and accent from the preceding.

Coulé—The coulé note descends to its main pitch, to which it is linked, from any step or interval above.

Port de Voix—The port de voix is used in a line that rises by step, with the port de voix on the same pitch as the preceding note but linked to the following one.

Chûte—The chute appears in descending lines and is on the same pitch as the following note but is linked to the preceding one.

Accent—The accent is a kind of upper neighbor to the main pitch, which it follows and to which it is linked.