The Early Flute
A Practical Guide

Rachel Brown

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1 Historical sources

The limits and pretensions of claims to 'authentic' performance have been well and truly aired. It has been declared that 'even at their best and most successful – or especially at their best and most successful – historical reconstructionist performances are in no sense re-creations of the past. They are quintessentially modern performances, modernist performances in fact, the product of an aesthetic wholly of our own era, no less time-bound than the performance styles they would supplant.'[1] Of course we can never know exactly how past performances sounded; they may have been quite different from what we imagine. Indeed, some of the earliest recordings, or for that matter certain later ones, whilst they may be fascinating, are not necessarily worth emulating. The very notion of trying to copy someone else's performance exactly is surely a fruitless and undesirable task; apart from the sheer impossibility, the result would never convey the vital, personal character of the interpretation with conviction. Nevertheless, much can be learnt from documentary evidence. Whilst we cannot recreate the circumstances, tastes and experiences of musicians of the past, we may respect their musical traditions and fashions. At no other time has such a wide spectrum of music been appreciated, so it makes sense to contrast different styles as much as possible in a historically informed way.

A stylistically aware approach, whether on old or modern instruments, will consider the performance practice appropriate to the time and place. This may seem restrictive at first, particularly in eighteenth-century music, but actually offers enormous freedom once certain guidelines have been assimilated. For instance, the radical differences in ornamentation practices in early eighteenth-century France, Italy and Germany might appear to limit an interpretation; yet within the confines of each style two versions of the same piece may be scarcely recognisable. Such diversity can create a wide range of expression in different repertoires if one strives to understand what was considered 'good taste' at any given time. Much information is to be found in historical

treatises by leading players, in contemporary reports of their performances, and in the prefaces to publications by composers themselves, as well as in numerous modern scholarly works.

The music itself is the best starting point: careful study of the music in the form the composer intended, backed up by thorough knowledge of his other works and those of his predecessors and contemporaries, is often the surest guide to interpretation. Modern editorial markings, however, can so easily obscure the composer's intentions. Unhelpful editions of baroque music are readily recognisable: if a copy of a baroque sonata designates 'piano accompaniment', if the left hand of its keyboard part has no figured bass, if there is no separate bass part for a cellist or viol player, and if there are metronome marks and an abundance of articulation and dynamic markings with no indication as to which are editorial, one might suspect that the editor's mode of thinking is out of step with the current preference for informed choice. The Peters edition of Handel's A minor sonata op. 1 no. 4 (see figure 1.1) was first published in 1880, long before such considerations were thought important.

There are exceptions to these generalisations of course; although basso continuo accompanying forces usually comprised a harpsichord with cello or viola da gamba reinforcing the bass line there were many alternative options. The fortepiano, though invented around 1710, was not in general use until much later in the century, yet Frederick the Great was an early collector of pianos and his sister played the lute, which suggests a greater variety of instrumentation at least amongst the musicians of their courts. La Barre, in the *Avertissement* to his *Pièces pour la Flûte traversière* (1703), stated his preference for the flute to be accompanied by gamba and theorbo.

The continuo team would often have read from one copy, but for performance purposes today a separate bass part for each player is advisable. Ideally all players, including the flautist, should perform from a score. This is particularly relevant in slow movements where a full understanding of the harmony is a prerequisite to ornamentation, yet practically no modern editions provide this. Baroque composers almost always notated solo sonatas in score format; below the instrumental part appeared only a bass line with a shorthand system of figures (figured bass) from which harmony was improvised. Although modern editions provide a keyboard realisation, it is still essential that the figures are included, for even if an accompanist has little comprehension of figured bass, its presence will help in making adjustments when necessary,

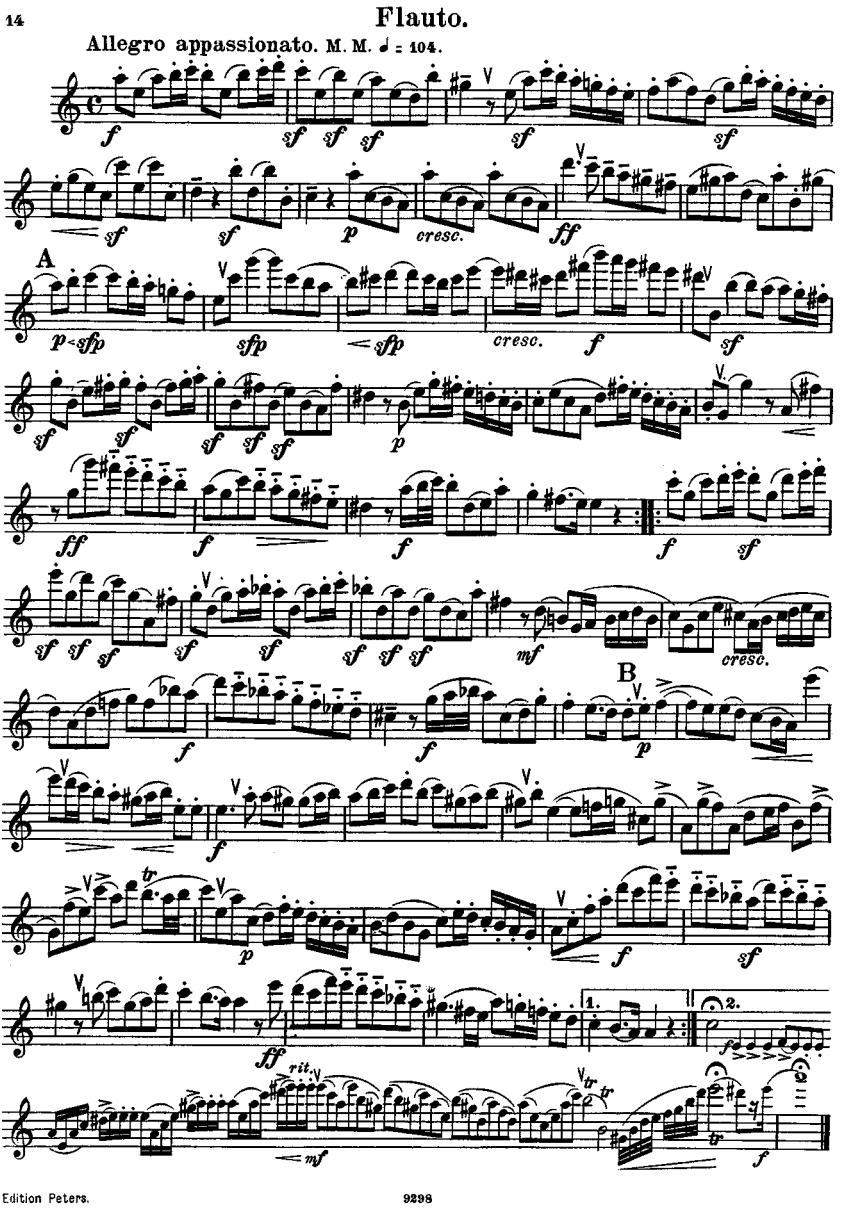

Figure 1.1 Handel, Sonata in A minor op. 1 no. 4, fourth movement, Allegro, Peters edition (1880), with cadenza by Maximillian Schwedler

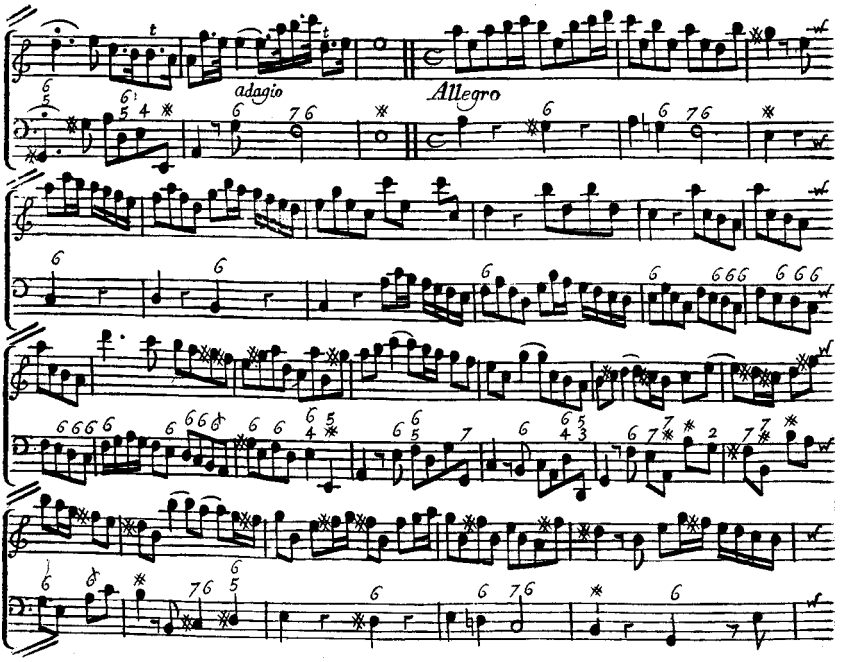

Figure 1.2 Handel, Sonata in A minor op. 1 no. 4, fourth movement, Allegro, facsimile

and a rudimentary knowledge of the figures will enable dynamic distinction between ordinary, consonant and expressive, dissonant chords (see chapter 4, pp. 79–81). Pieces with obbligato harpsichord, i.e. a melodic part for the right hand, will not necessarily have a figured bass line or require a string bass accompaniment.

The metronome was invented in 1815; therefore, metronome markings in music composed prior to this date are obviously editorial.[2] It is not uncommon for Baroque music to contain few if any dynamic and articulation marks (see figure 1.2). However, some composers frequently notated slurs; by adhering precisely to their patterns one can absorb their style, enabling one to make one's own decisions elsewhere. Some modern editions most unhelpfully give the original markings only in the keyboard score. It is far better to have a part which is true to the composer's intentions, without editorial suggestions, so that one is free to make one's own informed decisions.

Modern 'Urtext' editions literally present the 'original text'. However, beware: two Urtexts may be derived from differing primary sources, such as parts, a score, autographs, copies and a first or subsequent editions: for example, one manuscript source of the G minor sonata attributed to both J. S. and C. P. E. Bach incorporates an extra bar in the last movement.[3] Urtext editions occasionally adopt a rather too literal interpretation of inconsistent slurs, for which crowded space, page turns or carelessness rather than genuine intentional inconsistency may well be responsible.

A modern edition with scholarly advice is most helpful when it differentiates clearly between the composer's and any editorial markings. However, there really is no substitute for consulting the original, either in the composer's or a trusted copyist's hand or in an edition supervised by the composer. Frans Vester's catalogue *Flute Music of the 18th Century*, despite containing errors, and the International Inventory of Musical Sources, known by the abbreviation of its French title, RISM, are invaluable mines of information on repertoire and location of sources predating 1800. The *New Grove Dictionary* (1980) lists addresses of libraries.

Facsimile editions are increasingly available nowadays, providing insights into original material. However, these are not without their problems: some are barely legible and may be difficult to work from when only parts (lacking bar numbers) exist without a score. Others are perfectly clear, a few are very beautiful to look at, and familiarity with the conventions of notation will overcome any initial confusion. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 taken from the Allemande of Hotteterre's Suite in E minor, op. 2 no. 4, illustrate the vast technological improvements that resulted when printing from type was replaced by engraving[4] (1708 and 1715 editions respectively) as well as a number of typical notational practices differing from ours today.

The so-called French violin clef was commonly used in this repertoire; the bottom line = g′.[5] The key signature of G major shows two F♯s: f♯′ and f♯″.[6] Accidentals functioned completely differently: they applied only to immediately reiterated notes, see ex. 4.3a (even notes repeated over a bar line). Sharp signs (looking more like modern double sharps) appear twice in bar 2, restating the accidental; where a note recurs later in the bar without an accidental, one may assume it is cancelled.[7] A sharp sign in a flat key may indicate a natural, that is, a note raised by one semitone. Similarly, within a sharp key, a flat may

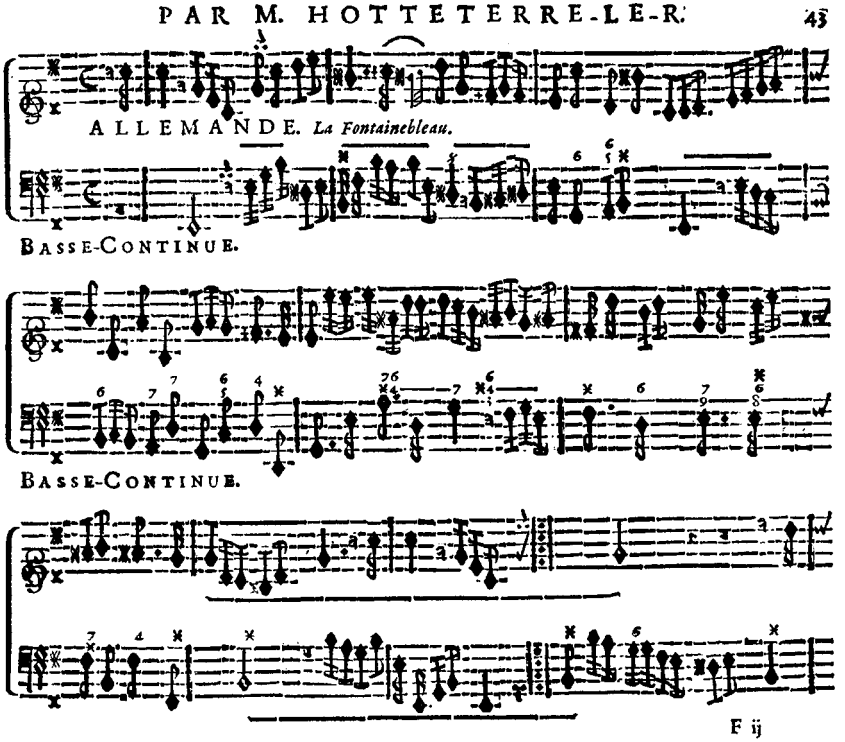

Figure 1.3 Hotteterre, Suite in E minor, *Premier Livre* op. 2 no. 4, 1708 edition

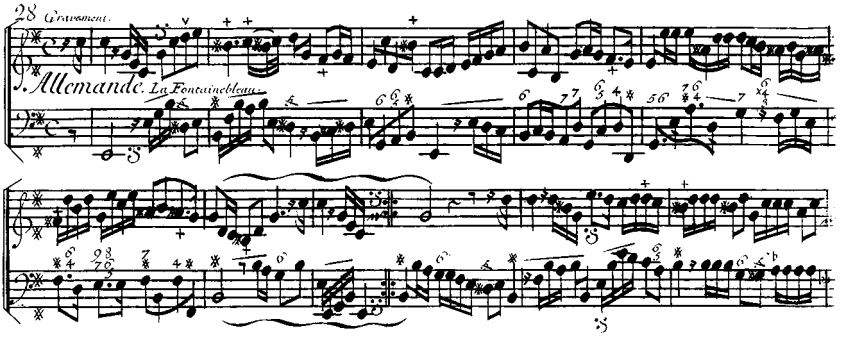

Figure 1.4 Hotteterre, Suite in E minor, *Premier Livre* op. 2 no. 4, 1715 edition

signify a natural when lowering a sharp by a semitone. Notes are beamed separately, resembling vocal music. Rests are notated quite conventionally, but are often rather small, and tucked away near other notes, looking confusingly like accidentals. The custos at the end of a line signals advance warning of the next note. Common signs include long curly lines (resembling long slurs) indicating first and second time bars, and deceptive *dal segno* marks signalling the return to a rondeau theme or a final *petite reprise*. Movement titles are often written below the opening. Incomplete bars spread across the end of one line and the beginning of the next.

Treatises and tutors

Collectively, treatises give copious guidelines on matters of technique and style, but they are not always as prescriptive as one might wish, and even where clear rules are laid down, one must be wary as to how to apply them. The ideas of one writer may testify to his experience in his own sphere. They may reflect his contemporaries' opinions and may even have been practised for some time, and thus be applicable to earlier music. They may have reached a wide public and have been influential internationally. Yet even close associates sometimes had quite different ideas; Quantz and C. P. E. Bach, for example, who worked alongside one another for twenty-six years and produced substantial treatises within a year of each other, fundamentally disagreed on certain points concerning ornamentation, note values and continuo bass playing.

It is also possible for a writer to have changed his mind later in life. Quantz, for instance, who had a reputation for dogmatic immutability, nevertheless supplemented his information on double tonguing in a rather more advanced and subtle form in his *Solfeggi* notebook.[8] His idiosyncratic fingering chart for the two-keyed flute contrasts in important details with another of his charts prepared for Frederick the Great only one year after the publication of his *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*.[9] Even within the *Versuch*, unequivocal statements are occasionally qualified or virtually retracted later.[10]

Rules may easily be misinterpreted and reading sources in translation, of necessity, entails accepting information second hand, so checking the translation against the original may help to clarify certain points. Modern editions

are not always as faithful as they would seem; Reilly's translation of Quantz's *Versuch, On Playing the Flute*, completely misrepresents the crucial picture of the flute's embouchure hole (see fig. 3.1a). Admittedly a footnote confesses it is 'slightly reduced in size', but it fails to explain the inaccurate positioning and reverse direction of the lines which depict how much to cover the hole when playing in different registers! The exact dimensions of the hole would have been interesting for present-day makers of reproduction instruments. With an issue so critical, and arguably so contentious (given Reilly's impression of a very covered embouchure offset to the right), such misrepresentation is to be regretted.

Important tutors by Hugot and Wunderlich, Berbiguier, Fürstenau, and Tulou are as yet not available in English translation, and even some facsimile editions are, unfortunately, now out of print. The few translations that are available, such as Ardal Powell's very readable and highly informative translations of *Ausführlicher und gründlicher Unterricht die Flöte zu spielen* (as *The Virtuoso Flute-Player*) and *Über die Flöten mit mehrern Klappen* (as *The Keyed Flute*) by Tromlitz, and John Robert Bailey's excellent dissertation study of Schwedler, are therefore extremely valuable.

Many eighteenth-century treatises digress into deprecatory accounts of contemporary practices, yet these set the treatise in context and reveal alternative views. Quantz is one of the more dogmatic authors; Hotteterre is far more open-minded, contrasting alternative views with his own and encouraging the reader to choose whichever fingering or tonguing works best. Certain writers are very interesting for their knowledge and interpretation of other treatises: in particular, Türk comments on C. P. E. Bach, Leopold Mozart and Agricola, while Tromlitz, having thoroughly tested Quantz's ideas, endorses, modifies or rejects them. In general the eighteenth-century treatises deal with technical and musical matters, whilst the nineteenth-century tutors plot more methodical progress. A list of interesting treatises and methods appears in Appendix A (see pp. 147–9). Janice Dockendorff Boland's *Method for the One-Keyed Flute* is as yet the only modern systematic tutor for the traverso.

Hotteterre's *Principes de la flûte traversière, ou flûte d'Allemagne* . . . , which appeared in 1707, was the first treatise written for the one-keyed flute. Though concise, it deals with the favoured articulation *tu ru* in some depth and sheds light on the ubiquitous ornaments considered 'absolutely necessary

for perfection of playing' (among which he counted *flattement*, vibrato). Supplementary advice may be found in the preface to the second edition of his *Premier Livre de Pièces* op. 2, as well as in methods for other wind instruments by Loulié and Freillon-Poncein which had appeared in 1680 and 1700 respectively. Bacilly's *Commentary on the Art of Proper Singing* (1668), though somewhat earlier, provides copious examples of the precise interpretation of ornaments and the French style of diminutions in a field where notation was often vague. Hotteterre's *L'Art de Préluder* (1719) gives advice on modulation in the art of improvisation and an invaluable account of *notes inégales* with examples taken from compositions by Lully, Clérambault, Bernier, Marais and Corelli.

Hotteterre's *Principes*, in English translation, formed the basis of Prelleur's *The Modern Musick-Master*. Prelleur added some simple arrangements of popular operatic arias. Corrette's *Méthode Raisonnée* (c. 1735) is notable for its easy beginners' pieces illustrating every fingering, its notation of *flattements* and its description of *inégalité*. Influenced by the growing assimilation of French and Italian styles, Corrette rejects the *tu ru* articulation and different fingerings for enharmonic notes. He gives instructions on adapting violin repertoire for the flute, and is one of the few to mention the piccolo.

Two comprehensive works, the *Versuch* . . . (1752) by Quantz and the *Unterricht* (1791) by Tromlitz, give very specific, though often different, advice on tone, fingering, articulation and ornamentation. Quantz also supplies vital information on many stylistic matters such as intonation, performance, delivery, notation, tempi, string playing and figured bass accompaniment. Flautists should not overlook the chapters designated for accompanists since they contain much supplementary general material. Quantz's ornamented Adagio demands special attention, with its minute, subtle, details of nuance and coded references to alternative ornaments. It is written out in full in Betty Bang Mather's book *Free Ornamentation in Woodwind Music* and is discussed here in chapter 4. Two notebooks believed to be Quantz's, published today as *Solfeggi* and *Caprices*, provide insights into his interpretation of actual pieces, and very useful study material at both beginner and advanced levels.[11]

Tromlitz is in many aspects even more thorough than Quantz and his musical examples reflect the classical style of the next generation. He provides note-by-note guidance on intonation in every scale. His exhaustive discussion of articulation is quite unparalleled and his thrice-ornamented Adagio points

towards the florid coloratura so popular in the nineteenth century. Equally progressive was his concept of a 'metallic', even sound throughout the whole compass. His later book *Über die Flöten mit mehrern Klappen* describes a keyed system that warrants far more attention than it has received to date. His remarks on the proper care of the instrument are founded on his invaluable experience as a maker.

Between the publications of these two monumental works a number of shorter treatises of interest appeared. Mahaut's *Nouvelle Méthode pour apprendre en peu de temps à jouer de la Flûte Traversière* (1759) is particularly useful for its annotated regular and alternative fingerings and its simple beginners' pieces. He signals a more modern preference for combinations of tonguing and slurring, rather than the pairing of *tu* and *ru*. Delusse's *L'Art de la Flûte Traversière* (c. 1760) is remarkable in many respects; his progressive studies complement Quantz's beginners' pieces, his ornaments are discussed in terms of their *Affekt*, his three types of vibrato anticipate much later practices, and his tongued and aspirated breath articulation and emphasized syncopations are unusual, but his double tonguing (*loul*), chest vibrato and use of harmonics had already appeared in Bordet's *Méthode Raisonnée* (1755). Delusse's caprices, for use as cadenzas, are long and extremely virtuosic, and his final bizarre *Air à la Grècque*, replete with a fingering chart for quarter-tones, reflects the prevalent passion for all things oriental. Obviously influenced by Geminiani in many respects, Delusse imitates violinistic traits such as arpeggiated chords. The inclusion of a hand-written description of the English keyed flute of Tacet and Florio suggests an earlier knowledge of keyed flutes in France than has often been assumed.

In the last thirty years of the eighteenth century numerous new methods were published in England, to cater for the thriving amateur market. The flute was then undergoing a fundamental change with the gradual addition of keys, and these tutors reflected the mixed reception of these innovations. Those listed in Appendix A are interesting for their diversity. Gunn's *The Art of Playing the German-Flute on New Principles* (c. 1793) announces a 'New or Staccato Tonguing' – '*teddy*' or '*tiddy*' – and copious examples in the art of variation, all directly or indirectly derived from Quantz. Miller, in *The New Flute Instructor* (1799), claimed to be the first to explain the close shake (*flattement*) coupled with a swell. Incidentally, he also claimed to be one of the last surviving performers to have worked with Handel. Gunn's

analytical approach to sonority and his exposition on phrasing, expression and rhetoric mark him out as an intelligent, sensitive musician. Wragg, in *The Flute Preceptor* (c. 1792), confirmed the still extant tradition of improvising preludes before playing any piece.

C. P. E. Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753/1762) is an invaluable guide to his major flute works. No study of *galant* and classical music would be complete without reference to Leopold Mozart's *Violinschule* (1756) and Daniel Gottlob Türk's *Klavierschule* (1789), which contain far more musical advice than is to be found in most flute tutors.

In France, the transition to the nineteenth century and the late arrival of keyed flutes was marked by two important treatises: Devienne's *Nouvelle Méthode Théorique et Pratique pour la Flûte* (1794) and Hugot and Wunderlich's *Méthode de Flûte* (1804). Devienne acknowledged the use of keys but never used them himself, while Hugot and Wunderlich fully embraced the use of four keys and gave systematic exercises for acquiring fluency. Both methods favoured mellow tone colours, denouncing hard sounds, and both rejected double tonguing. Another contemporary tutor, Peraut, concurred, though on the grounds that two tongue strokes could not possibly occur simultaneously! His *Méthode pour Flûte* (c. 1800–3) suggested interesting ascending glissandi. Another contemporary tutor, the *Nouvelle Méthode* (containing useful material for beginner musicians) by Vanderhagen (c. 1790), is exceptional in suggesting main-note trills. With the exception of Hugot, all these French tutors contain numerous preludes, shedding light on the practice of perambulatory improvisations, some of which were considered suitable as cadenzas.

Major writers in the first half of the nineteenth century include Berbiguier, Nicholson, Drouët, Fürstenau, Soussmann and Tulou, all of whom provided invaluable study material in pursuit of virtuosity on the simple-system keyed flute. All are worth referring to for their illuminating range of opinions on vibrato(s), gliding, *notes sensibles*, and a myriad of alternative fingerings. Berbiguier's *Nouvelle Méthode* (1818) extends the upper register to d$'''''$, but his extension of the foot joint down to a was something of a rarity. Nicholson's *Complete Preceptor for the German Flute* (1816) and *A School for the Flute* (1836) are exceptional for his idiosyncratic ornamentation and his remarks on his concept of sound and the embouchure required to produce it. Drouët's *Method of Flute Playing* (1830) gives examples of highly florid colorature,

but as with the other embellishments he stipulates only occasional use. Both this method and Tulou's *Méthode de Flûte Progressive et Raisonnée*, op. 100 (1851) place working examples of their preferred fingerings in context, as does Fürstenau's *Die Kunst des Flötenspiels* (1844), though in a more complicated format. However, *Die Kunst* is truly dedicated to artistry, adding the final polish to an assumed high level of virtuosity. Fürstenau discusses many technical and stylistic matters with direct reference to his own compositions, an aspect that is lacking in most other tutors. He closely follows Spohr's *Violinschule* of 1832. Hummel's *Course of Instructions* for the piano (c. 1828) is a useful reference for ornaments (notably main-note trills) in his flute repertoire.

It is interesting to compare nineteenth-century tutors for the simple-system flute with those for the Boehm flute. One might expect a radical shift of values, new techniques and a progression of style, yet in many instances there is a remarkable continuity; differences appear more on a national basis than on account of the new flute.

Following Tulou (1851), the French Boehm flute tutors by Camus (1870), Gattermann (c. 1865), Duverges (c. 1870) and Altès (1880) established their method of tonguing further forward in the mouth, on the edge of the lips, a practice preferred by many today. The same tutors are conspicuous by their omission of the subject of vibrato. In England Radcliff adapted Nicholson's *School for the Flute* to his own system. Carte's 1845 *A Complete Course of Instructions for the Boehm Flute* (which would be very useful for modern flautists learning the open G♯ method) continued the English traditions of double tonguing (*toodoo*, derived from Drouët's *territory*), *gliding* and both finger and chest vibrato, though his 1878 edition is rather more guarded about their use.

Rockstro's epic *Treatise on the Construction, the History and the Practice of the Flute* makes no mention of vibrato at all. Surprisingly, it is the German, Schwedler, the last opponent of the Boehm flute, writing at the very end of the nineteenth century, who gives us the nearest account of vibrato used 'for an essential ennobling and strengthening of the flute sound', that is to say, for heightened expression generally rather than as an ornament applied to isolated notes.[12] Much of the study material used by Boehm flute players, then as indeed now, was written for the simple-system flute; Barge, who in fact preferred the simple system, invited modern players to use his method, *Praktische Flötenschule* (1880), merely substituting a Boehm fingering chart

from elsewhere. Duverges alone condemned the continued use of the old methods as 'driving the pupil on the highway of mediocrity'.[13]

Secondary sources

John Solum's *The Early Flute* provides a concise introduction to instruments, treatises and stylistic issues of the eighteenth century. Betty Bang Mather's pioneering work *The Interpretation of French Music from 1675 to 1775*, her works co-written with David Lasocki, *Free Ornamentation in Woodwind Music 1700–1775*, *The Art of Preluding* and *The Classical Woodwind Cadenza*, and *Fluting and Dancing*, dedicated to her, continue to be a source of inspiration. Numerous periodical magazines such as *Traverso*,[14] *Tibia*[15] and from time to time the journals of the British Flute Society (*Pan*) and of flute societies in America (NFA), France (*La Traversière*), Germany (*Flöte Aktuell*) and Italy (*Syrinx*), *Early Music*, and journals of The Galpin Society and the American Musical Instrument Society all contain articles by distinguished scholars and performers. W. N. James's *A Word or Two on the Flute* (1836) provides a personal account of several outstanding players of his day. Leonardo de Lorenzo's *My Complete Story of the Flute* (1951) gives a great deal of anecdotal evidence, much of it unsubstantiated but fascinating nonetheless!

Frederick Neumann's works *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music, Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart, Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* are thoroughly researched, if highly opinionated, documentaries of source material which have sparked off intense debate on a number of stylistic issues. Clive Brown's *Performance Practice in Classical Music 1750–1850* is an invaluable reference work for this later period. Peter Le Huray's *Authenticity in Performance* is interesting and informative. Richard Hudson's *Stolen Time* traces the history of *tempo rubato*. Stephen Hefling's *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music* gives a balanced survey of *notes inégales* and overdotting. The parent volume in the present series, *The Historical Performance of Music: An Introduction*, is useful for general reference.