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## MOZART'S TRILLS

PAUL BADURA-SKODA

Clearly there is widespread confusion regarding the proper execution of Mozart's trills. Some performers start them invariably with the upper note and others with the main note, while still others use a combination of ways. Widespread disagreement also exists about the length, the speed and the ending of Mozart's trills. Apparently this confusion is caused – at least in part – by ignorance or misinformation. The purpose of the present study is to clarify some of the open questions and to answer them in such a way that the demands of historical truth and good musicianship are satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

One of the main reasons for the prevailing confusion is that Mozart's ubiquitous trill sign takes on different meanings according to the context. Confusing indeed! Yet the notion that one ornamental symbol may assume different meanings, and, vice versa, that different symbols can mean the same thing, is an undeniable historical fact of eighteenth-century music.<sup>2</sup> Many modern performers are misled by the nineteenth-century tradition, still prevailing today, in which most ornaments were codified in an unambiguous way. Thus many may be surprised to learn that Mozart's trill sign (*tr*) can assume at least five different meanings:

- (1) long trill with start on the upper note,
- (2) long trill with start on the main note,

<sup>1</sup> Ever since the first publication in 1957 of our book (Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda, *Mozart-Interpretation* (Vienna, 1957), translated by Leo Black as *Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard* (London, 1961; repr. New York, 1986)), I have upheld the axiom that good musicianship (based on a sense for melody, rhythm and harmony) and historical knowledge are not irreconcilable. After all, the great masters were known and loved for their outstanding musicianship, not their idiosyncrasies.

<sup>2</sup> I have dealt with this question in my article 'On ornamentation in Haydn', *Piano Quarterly* 135 (Fall, 1986), pp. 38–48.

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Excerpt

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(3) short trill (*Pralltriller* or *Schneller*) with start on the main note,<sup>3</sup>

(4) short upper appoggiatura,

(5) turn (*gruppetto*) starting invariably on the upper note.

Even more meanings than the five listed here may have been given the *tr* sign (e.g. inverted turn).

A convenient proof for the ambiguity of the trill symbol can be found in the unpublished piano tutor by Mozart's contemporary Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736–1809).<sup>4</sup> According to Albrechtsberger, the short shake (*der kurze Triller*) is 'always played without a closing turn' (*wird allezeit ohne Nachschlag gemacht*; see ex. 1). On the other hand, the long trill (*der lange [Triller]*, as in ex. 2),

Example 1 J. G. Albrechtsberger, *der kurze Triller*Example 2 J. G. Albrechtsberger, *der lange Triller*


is 'always to be played with a closing turn, whether the two notes are written or not' (*wird alzeit mit dem Nachschlag [gemacht], die zwei Noten mögen hernach geschrieben seyn oder nicht*). The mordent (turn, *gruppetto*) starts on the main note (see ex. 3).<sup>5</sup> Albrechtsberger also mentions a fourth ornament (*der Tremolant*,

<sup>3</sup> Some readers might wonder why I forgot to mention the short trill (*Pralltriller*) beginning on the upper auxiliary. To my regret, however, I could find no evidence for it (see below) which might in any way apply to Mozart.

<sup>4</sup> Manuscript in the Archiv der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, Signatur VII 14372: *Fundamento per il Clavicembalo di Giorgio Albrechtsberger, Maestro di Capella in Wien*. It was probably written earlier than Albrechtsberger's *Anfangsgründe zur Klavierkunst* (1796) quoted on p. 110 of our book, *Interpreting Mozart*.

<sup>5</sup> In a later manuscript of 1796, however (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Signatur A 464, XIV 1952), Albrechtsberger makes a distinction between trills with closing turns and those without.

without a closing turn 

with a closing turn 

Example 3 J. G. Albrechtsberger, the mordent

(a) written



(b) performed



an anticipated main-note trill) with the same abbreviation, *tr* (this is not found in Mozart's works).

An example of Mozart's unwittingly demonstrating the identity of certain trills with turns occurs in the autograph of the first movement of the Sonata in B $\flat$  major for violin and piano K 454 (see ex. 4). Obviously the trill sign here

Example 4 Sonata in B $\flat$  for violin and piano K 454, first movement, bars 34–5



is a slip of the pen caused by old habits (in other, analogous, passages in this movement one finds only turn signs).


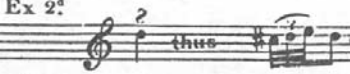
Of the many eighteenth-century treatises dealing with ornamentation, the most relevant for Mozart's ornaments is probably Clementi's *Pianoforte School* (London, 1801).<sup>6</sup> Born four years before Mozart, and an equally widely travelled cosmopolitan, Clementi can be regarded as a representative of their common Italianate musical culture. He met Mozart in Vienna on 24 December 1781, when both artists performed for the Emperor Joseph II and also improvised on two fortepianos.<sup>7</sup> Mozart's ill-humoured letter about Clementi did not prevent him from using the theme of the latter's Sonata in B $\flat$  major Op. 24 No. 2, played by Clementi on this occasion, in the overture to *Die Zauberflöte* (a borrowing of which Clementi was very proud in later years). Clementi's *Table of Ornaments*, partly reproduced here in facsimile as fig. 1.1, therefore gives us valuable clues to Mozart's practice with trills.


As in most contemporary treatises published north of Italy, the common form of the long trill started with the upper auxiliary note. We may well assume that, like Clementi, Mozart began normal trills with a quick upper-note start. Still, there must have been a number of exceptions to this rule. We shall examine the different possibilities according to the list in fig. 1.

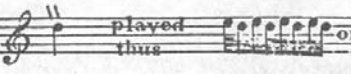

<sup>6</sup> Muzio Clementi, *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* (London, 1801); facsimile edition with an introduction by Sandra Rosenblum (New York, 1974).

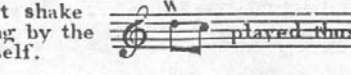
<sup>7</sup> See Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart: die Dokumente seines Lebens, gesammelt und erläutert* (Kassel and Leipzig, 1961), p. 176.


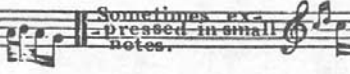
N.B. The **LOWEST** note of **EVERY** sort of turn is **MOSTLY** a semitone;

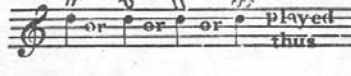
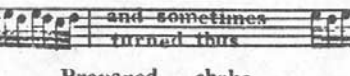
Ex: 1<sup>st</sup>  Ex 2<sup>d</sup> 

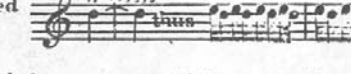
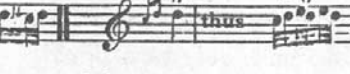
Ex: in double notes, 

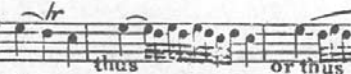
Shake.  Some Authors mark it thus 

Short shake beginning by the note itself. 

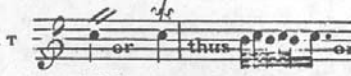
Transient or passing shakes  Sometimes expressed in small notes. 

Turned Shake.  and sometimes turned thus 

Continued shake.  Prepared shake 

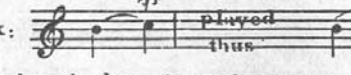
The shake **LEGATO** with the preceding note, explained: 

N.B. The **GENERAL** mark for the shake is this *tr* and composers trust **CHIEFLY** to the taste and judgment of the performer, whether it shall be long, short, transient, or turned.

The **BEAT** 

The **LENGTH** of the **BEAT** is determined, like that of the other graces, by the circumstances of the passage.

N.B. When the note preceding the beat is an interval of a **SECOND**, let the beat adopt it, whether it be a **semitone** or a **whole tone**:

Ex: 

But when the beat, is on the **FIRST** note of a passage; or, when it follows a note, whose interval is **GREATER** than a **SECOND**, it should be made with a **semitone**; as the following examples will show.

CLEMENTI

Figure 1.1 Ornament table from Muzio Clementi, *Introduction to the Art of Playing the Pianoforte* (London, 1801), p. 11


## LONG TRILLS BEGINNING ON THE UPPER AUXILIARY

## Ordinary cadential trills

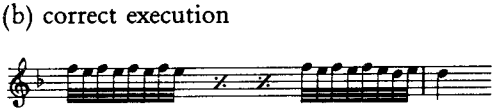
Trills like the one in ex. 5a should be played with a number of repercussions *ad libitum* (ex. 5b), but not as in ex. 5c.

Example 5 Concerto in D minor for piano K 466, first movement, bars 354–5

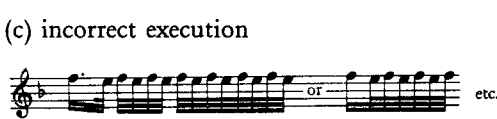
(a)



(b) correct execution



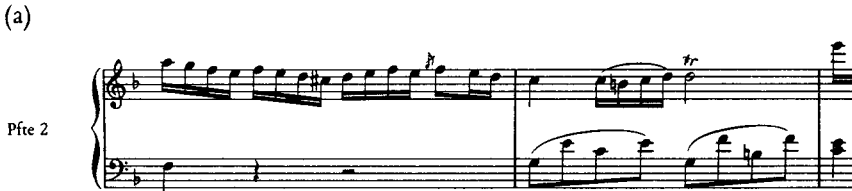
(c) incorrect execution




Trills preceded by the same note (but see also p. 16)

Example 6 Concerto in F for three pianos K 242, first movement, bars 112–13


(a)



(b) execution



Example 7 Concerto in Eb for piano K 482, first movement, bars 83–4



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Another authentic manner of executing such trills consists of playing the upper auxiliary note quickly and lightly before the beat (see ex. 8). This type of start, Example 8 Frederick Neumann's 'grace-note trill'



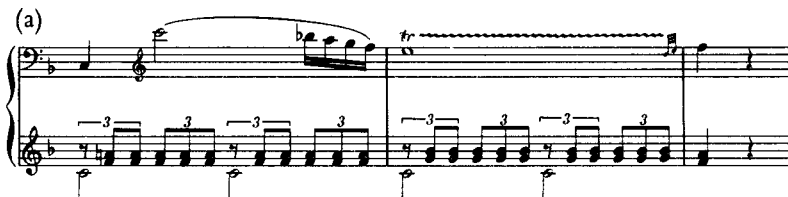
which Frederick Neumann aptly calls the 'grace-note trill',<sup>8</sup> had been described by J. J. Quantz in his treatise on playing the flute.<sup>9</sup> Quantz recommended the light execution of the appoggiatura at the beginning of phrases after rests. Leopold Mozart made the same recommendation in his violin tutor.<sup>10</sup> In fact, violinists of today perform most trills in this way. (An expedient way for pianists to create a brilliant start is to play the first two notes simultaneously and then to continue with either note, thus dispensing with the problem of whether to begin on the upper or the main note.)

### LONG TRILLS BEGINNING ON THE MAIN NOTE

Those shown in Clementi's table

A long trill should begin on the main note if the trill is preceded by the upper note in a legato context, as in ex. 9a. Probably only an unmusical person would play here a trill starting with the upper note (ex. 9b).

Example 9 Concerto in C for piano K 467, second movement, bars 33–4



(b) unmusical execution



<sup>8</sup> Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 104, 110, 115–16, 118, 129–34.

<sup>9</sup> Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Breslau, 1752, 1772, 1789); facsimile of the 3rd edn (Kassel, 1953), pp. 85–6.

<sup>10</sup> Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (Augsburg, 1756), p. 223: 'If however a passage starts with a trill, the appoggiatura is hardly heard, and is nothing else than a strong emphasis of the start.' ('Wenn aber eine Passage mit einem Triller anfängt: so wird der Vorschlag kaum gehört, und er ist in solchem Falle nichts denn ein starker Anstoß des Trillers.')

Incredible as it may seem, many pianists start the trill in ex. 10 on the upper note, d'', thus ignoring one of the basic rules of ornamentation explained as early as c. 1720 by the French *clavecinistes* in connection with the *tremblement lié* and the *tremblement appuyé*. There is no slur before the first trill in ex. 11;

Example 10 Sonata in C for piano K 330 (300h), first movement, bar 65 (also third movement, bar 60)



Example 11 Sonata in A minor for piano K 310, second movement, bars 6–7

(a)

(b) execution

however, since in both cases the note preceding the trill is an accented dissonance, the old rule applies: the practice was to link (by slurring) the dissonance to its resolution. In fact, *all* grace notes in the eighteenth century should be slurred to their following notes. This is one of the few basic rules where absolutely no exception was allowed. In this context we should remember that in Mozart after about K 180 a single grace note before a trill always means a *long* accented appoggiatura. (Very short appoggiaturas were in any case taken for granted.) But why not before K 180?

Strangely enough, in the symphonies of 1772 Mozart wrote various appoggiaturas before trills in certain contexts which could only mean that these trills were to start, not with a long appoggiatura, but with a short upper auxiliary. These trills appear extensively, for example, in the second movement of the Symphony in C major K 128 (see ex. 12). There are further examples in the Symphonies in G major K 129 (first movement, bars 80–1), F major K 130 (first movement, bar 30) and E $\flat$  major K 132 (first movement, bar 62). If we consider the examples from K 129 and K 130 (exx. 13 and 14), Mozart's notation makes clear not only that a very short start on the upper note was meant,

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Example 12 Symphony in C major K 128, second movement, opening

Andante grazioso

Example 13 Symphony in G major K 129, first movement, bars 80–1

Example 14 Symphony in F major K 130, first movement, bar 30

but also that the following trills were to be played in the same fashion. Why did Mozart decide in 1772 to indicate the upper-note start of the trill according to the practice composers would later adopt in the middle of the nineteenth century? Most probably because otherwise some musicians in Salzburg may have begun those trills with the main note. Thus the start on the main note must have been more common in Mozart's time than is generally acknowledged today. These examples, however, represent only an exception to the general rule that a small note before a trill in Mozart (and Haydn) means a long accented appoggiatura (see ex. 15).

Example 15 Sonata in E minor for violin and piano K 304, second movement, bar 3

(a) written

(b) played



A special problem obtains in the appoggiatura shown in ex. 16. In order to

Example 16 Concerto in E $\flat$  for piano K 271, second movement, bar 61



place the grace note f'' correctly, Mozart was obliged to alter the bass line from its shape in the preceding tutti: if he had retained the F in the bass in bar 61, forbidden parallel octaves between E $\flat$  and F would have resulted, as shown in ex. 17.

Example 17



The main-note start of trills *à la* Clementi is certainly what Mozart intended when he wrote prefixes of three notes, either small or large (see exx. 18–20).

Example 18 Sonata in B $\flat$  for piano K 333 (315c), third movement, bar 163

(a)



(b) execution



Example 19 Concerto in A for piano K 414 (368a), second movement, end of cadenza





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Example 20 Concerto in B $\flat$  for piano K 450, third movement, end of cadenza



These formulas are nothing but another notation of the baroque  and . To begin the trills on the upper note, as unfortunately often happens, is a mistake. Another type of formula where a main-note start is advisable is seen in exx. 21 and 22.

Example 21 Sonata in C minor for piano K 457, first movement, bars 174–5



Example 22 Sonata in C for piano K 330 (300h), first movement, opening



Not only in piano music, but also in orchestral works, there are many instances where a main-note start of a trill is desirable for harmonic and melodic reasons. Two examples (exx. 23 and 24) should suffice. Alas, nowadays nearly all orchestral

Example 23 'Linz' Symphony in C major K 425, first movement, bar 25