

CELLO

by David Starkweather

Trills and Grace Notes

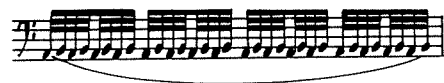
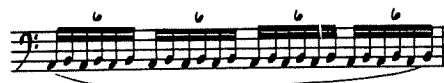
Practical Musicology

To many musicians, a trill is merely an alternation between two notes, and a grace note is simply a quick note inserted sometime before another note. To musicologists, they may be the subjects of lengthy dissertations. But for the performer who takes the time to interpret the composer's notation, and to analyze the physical actions required to produce a trill or grace note, these ornaments become vehicles for both placing a piece in its proper historical setting and for expressing musical feelings.

On a stringed instrument, the technique used to produce a trill does not require motion in two fingers, as on piano. The finger of the lower note is held down while the upper-note finger moves up and down. You can accomplish this solely through the muscle action of that individual finger, but this usually lacks speed and endurance. For a more successful technique, use a small amount of rotation in the wrist and forearm, combined with a lesser amount of finger muscle action. This shifts much of the muscle activity to larger muscles, which tire less quickly.

Variety through change of speed provides an important expressive element. The trill should not simply be a demonstration of a muscular action, such as doing the flutter kick in a swim stroke. It can remain at a constant speed, but refreshing variety results when a trill begins slowly and accelerates, or begins fast and slows. The latter is a nice effect just before the fugue starts in the Prelude of Bach's *Suite No. 5 in C Minor*. As with fast passages, trills demand an exaggerated intonation. A trill of a major second must be particularly large, or it sounds like a minor second trill. In order to develop evenness and

speed, trills should be practiced in measured rhythm at a variety of speeds, as in the example below. It also improves evenness to practice this accelerating pattern alternating long-short and short-long rhythms.

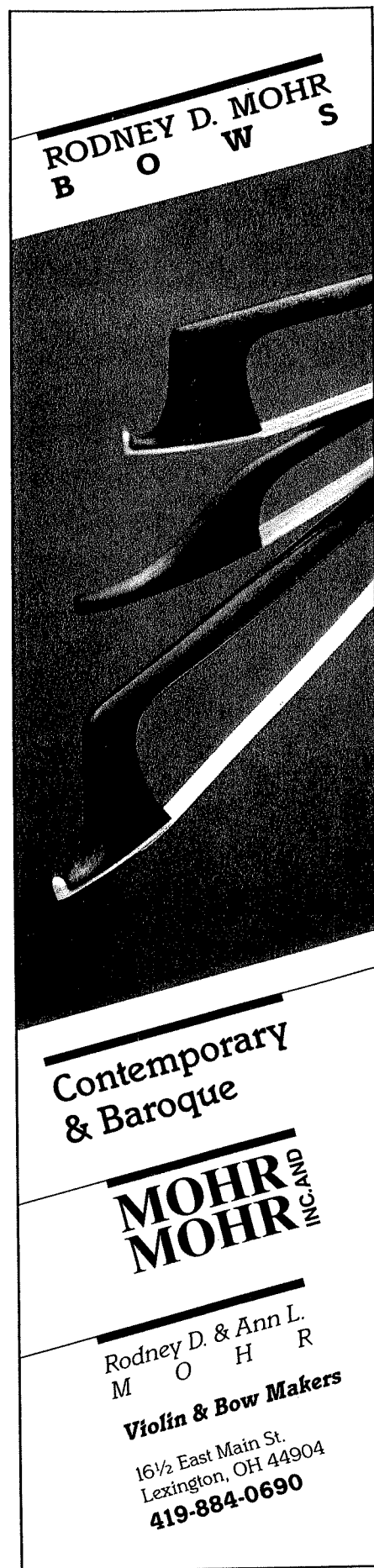


This type of exercise should be practiced with fingerings of 1-2, 1-3, 2-3, 2-4, and 3-4. The 2-4 trill is particularly useful, but is often avoided instead of developed. Etudes which emphasize 2-4 trills include Duport #18 and #19, Piatti Caprice #8, and Servais #5. The first three measures of the Piatti are given here:

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Practice should also not neglect double trills (simultaneous trills on two strings), useful in works from Dvorak to David Baker. Etudes which include double trills are Servais #5, Popper #13, Grützmacher #23 (*Allegretto scherzando*), and exercises in



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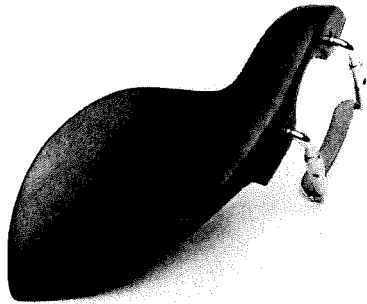
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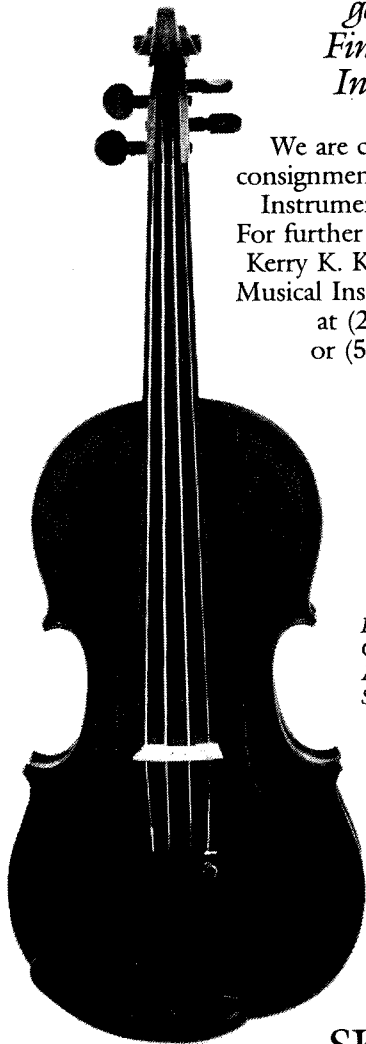
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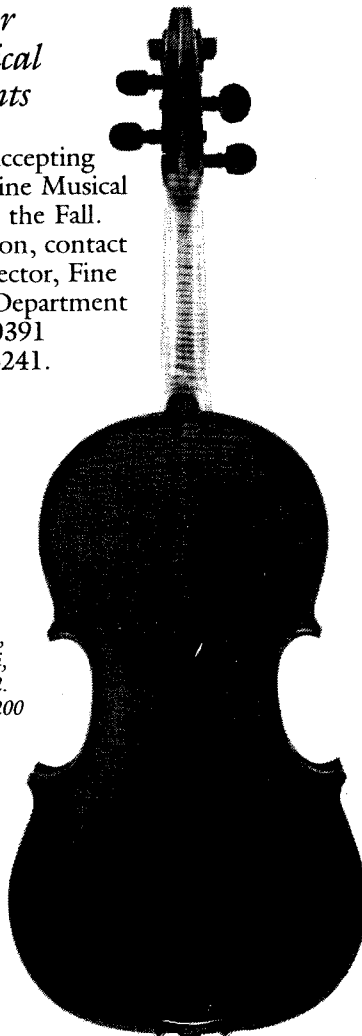


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the book *La tecnica del violoncello* by Aldo Pais.

Trills should generally be played between the written note and the next diatonic note higher, unless an accidental is included above the trill sign. The whole question of which note to begin a trill on, the upper or lower, has led to much scholarly discussion, and probably even more impassioned arguments. In Baroque music, trills usually begin on the upper note, and on the beat. Some say that all Baroque trills must start on the upper note, but recent scholarship indicates that there is actually a great deal more latitude. "A New Look at Bach's Ornamentation" by Frederick Neumann in *Essays in Performance Practice* describes four types of trills, including the "main note trill," which begins on the lower note, and the "anticipated trill," which occurs entirely before the note on which it is written. Neumann indicates that choices must be made on the basis of musical sense. A series of trills such as those found in the last movement of Bach's *Gamba Sonata No. 2 in D Major*, BWV 1028, is one case in which many performers choose to start on the main note for each trill.



In his book *The Interpretation of Early Music*, Robert Donington points to the gradual erosion of the upper-note start of trills as seen in treatises of the early 19th century. Donington gives evidence that a lower-note start for all trills was indicated by Hummel in 1828, Spohr in 1832, and Czerny in 1839. However, Clementi, in circa 1803 gives some exceptions to this rule, and Pollini in 1811, and the 1834 violin method of Rode, Kreutzer, and Baillot—written chiefly by Baillot—indicates an upper-note start with no exceptions.

Most modern performances of trills in the music of Beethoven begin on the written (lower) note, although this is no longer considered historical-

ly correct. On the other hand, there are numerous instances in which an upper-note start of a Beethoven trill seems inappropriate and awkward, particularly when it is approached stepwise from above, as shown in this example from the first movement of the *Sonata No. 3 in A Major*, Op. 69.



Post-Schubertian compositions of the Romantic era, as well as those of the 20th century, universally call for trills which begin on the written note. One unusual deviation is found in the last movement of Ravel's *Duo for Violin and Cello*, where the trill is played between the written note and the note below, given in parentheses.

Regarding the termination of trills, once again we find the Classical era to be the period of transition. For cadential trills (those leading to a resolution) the earlier practice of concluding the trill with a single note anticipating the resolution was entirely replaced

by the turned ending during the Classical period. Donington states that all standard trills in the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert should have a turned ending. In cases in which the trill is performed without a turned ending, the trill should conclude with the main (lower) note. On a dotted note (as in the example from Bach given above), it works well to stop trilling on the dot.

The beginning of the Adagio of Boccherini's well-known *Sonata in A Major*, written circa 1770, provides several interesting examples. The published version from Boccherini's time

was in treble clef to be read an octave lower. Here is the fourth measure, in its original notation:



In early editions such as this one, trills were commonly notated with a small cross. The version in tenor clef is from a publication edited by Alfredo Piatti (1822-1901). Piatti writes out the turned ending to the trill in the fourth measure; this trill should undoubtedly begin on the

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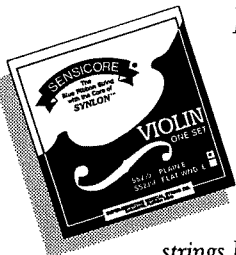
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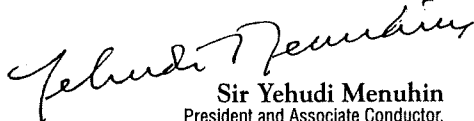
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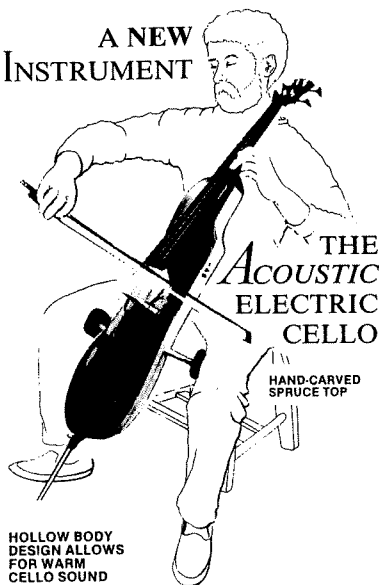


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upper note on the beat, and the two notes at the end (*nachshläge*) are played at the same speed as the trill itself.



In the edition by Emanuel Feuermann (1902–1942), the ending of this trill is notated with a single anticipatory A instead of the A-B turn. This was a common performance practice in the 18th century, although the turned ending gradually became standard.

Current performance practice of pre-Classical and Classical period grace notes, trills, and ornaments, such as in the works of Boccherini, Haydn, and Mozart, demonstrates that much is left up to the performer's interpretation of specific musical situations. For instance, recordings and performances of this Boccherini *Sonata* all place the grace note of measure 1 ahead of the beat, but it is a matter of interpretation as to the placement of other grace notes on the beat or ahead of the beat. The execution of the first trill differs from one interpretation to the next.



Boccherini and other 18th-century composers suffered notoriously at the hands of 19th- and early 20th-century editors. Even rhythms were altered, as can be seen in these examples of measure 3 of this *Sonata*.

Original:



Piatti edition:



While a good modern edition, such as the one edited by Aldo Pais and published by Zanibon, is faithful to the original, it still leaves room for a variety of interpretations.

As a rule, Baroque grace notes are intended to be placed on the beat,

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while grace notes of the Romantic period come ahead of the beat, taking away from the length of the previous note value. As with most rules regarding ornaments, this is really a gross simplification of the matter, as the placement and length of grace notes (*vorschlage*) in music written prior to the 19th century is dependent on the length of the following note, the tempo of the work, the meter, and the period and nationality of the composer. Possible renditions include pre-beat placement or on-beat placement of a short, equal division, or overlong rhythmic division of the following note.

Recordings and performances of Haydn's *Concerto in D Major* (1772) indicate different grace note placements shown in the example below, from the first violin part of measure 88 in the first movement.

Original notation:



Short, on beat:



Even division:



A short, on-the-beat interpretation may likewise be appropriate in an instance such as in measures 7-8 of the second movement.

Original:



Played:



In instances such as these, performers disagree over whether to use a short, on-beat appoggiatura style, or an equal division of the following note. This equal division style is favored by some performers in measures 23-25 of the last movement,

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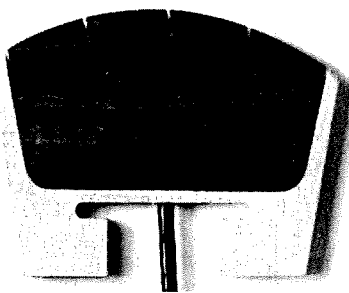
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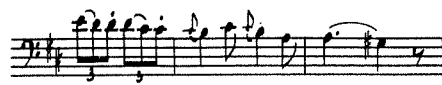
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this time in conflict with a short pre-beat style of execution.
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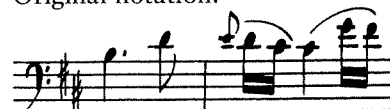


Possible interpretations:



Short pre-beat placement of the grace note is the obvious choice in a case such as measures 117–118 of the first movement in this Haydn Concerto. This is a result of the underlying harmonies; in some cases, a look at the harmony can answer questions about ornamentation.

Original notation:



Execution:



In the music of Beethoven and more recent composers, grace notes are generally performed before the beat, taking away from the value of the preceding note. Thus in this example from the first movement, measures 40–41 of the *Sonata in A Major*, Op. 69, the half note of measure 41 arrives on the down beat.




Musicological research into this facet of interpretation continues to develop, but a wide diversity of conclusions has resulted, reflecting the degree of confusion present in this area. It is ultimately up to the conscientious player to make informed and musical choices in the ornamentation of music from past centuries, while striving to retain some of the freedom inherent in the concept of ornamentation. *

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