Tips for Ornamenting Baroque and Classical Music
compiled by Lin Foulk

- Ornaments are like spices and should be tasteful: use too much and it is overpowering; too little and it is bland.
- It was common to add trills at major cadence points.
- Other common ways to ornament include filling in large intervals; adding trills, turns, and grace notes; and altering the notated rhythm.
- Trills in the Baroque and Classical eras typically start on the upper note.
- The meaning of ornamentation symbols is and was often difficult to determine among the many possible interpretations which ones were acceptable (see list below). Don’t be intimidated by this—use (and interpret) ornaments that sound good to your musical ear.

A Select List of Baroque and Classical Interpretation Resources

Original Resources
- Caccini—Le nuove musiche (1601-02) this is a collection of songs. The introduction, which includes interpretation notes, is included in Strunk’s Source Readings.
- D’Anglebert—Pieces de clavecin (1689) his ornament chart was copied by Bach and is on pg. 133 in Cyr.
- Muffat (1690 & 1695)
- Couperin—Pieces de clavecin (1722) he indicated all ornaments and wanted nothing added or subtracted by he performer. See Cyr for table of ornaments.
- Rameau—Code de musique pratique (1760) and Pieces de clavecin (1741)
- Quantz—On Playing the Flute (1752)
- L. Mozart—A treatise on the fundamental principles of violin playing (1756) MT262 M93 1985
- Agricola—Introduction to the art of singing (1757) MT892 .T6713 1995
- Tartini—Treatise on ornaments in music (1771) MT80 .T2 1961
- Turk—School of clavier playing, or, Instructions in playing the clavier for teachers & students (1789) MT222 .T8513 1982
- Koch, Heinrich Christoph—Musikalisches Lexikon (1802)
- Hummel—Ausführlich theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-forte Spiel (1828/38) (no WMU)
- Spohr—Violin-Schule (1832)

Contemporary Resources
- Cyr—Performing Baroque Music
- Strunk—Source Readings
- Grove/Oxford “Ornamentation”