

Performance Practice Review

Volume 7
Number 2 *Fall*

Article 3

1994

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Recommended Citation

Jackson, Roland (1994) "Frederick Neumann: challenger of held opinion," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 7: No. 2, Article 3. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.199407.02.03
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol7/iss2/3>

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Frederick Neumann: Challenger of Held Opinion

Roland Jackson

When we look over the titles of Frederick Neumann's published works (see the attached list) we cannot but be impressed by the remarkable range of issues with which he dealt, and by the potential for change inherent in each of the items. Each deals with some question that he felt needed to be addressed, and each expressed his exception to some currently-held point of view. Throughout his career he was ever a strong advocate for change, and he never ceased to be in debate with his peers. But none would deny that he pursued his vision zealously and with a steadfast regard for what he believed to be true.

It was from Neumann's background as musician—most of his academic career, in fact, was realized as violinist and conductor—that his interest in performance practice was initially awakened. And herein lies the key to much of his scholarly activity, his eagerness to look at things from a performer's standpoint, and his wish to arrive ultimately at the most *musical* solution.

Neumann came to musicology relatively late in life. Indeed, only from his late fifties did he decide to devote himself wholeheartedly to scholarly activity. Nonetheless by the time of his death (early this year at age 86) he had amassed an impressive array of writings, including three expansive books (14, 25, 42 in the bibliography) and about forty articles (many of which were gathered into two volumes of collected essays, 19, 32). These many publications surveyed a wide range of performance issues, and were

culminated aptly by a final volume, *Performance Practices of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (42), a veritable *summa* of Neumann's scholarly thought, which happily he was able to complete and see published during the final year of his life.¹

Neumann belonged to that group of scholars who from about the mid-1960s sought to bring greater specificity into performance practice studies. For him (as for others) the means lay primarily in a more wide-reaching use of musical theory, enabling him to seek out just which theorists or theoretical writings were most germane to a given composer or musical work (see 7, 23). In this way new light was shed on various aspects of performance, and manners of execution that had once seemed appropriate were now suddenly cast in doubt. Neumann more than anyone taught early-music performers to re-examine their suppositions and to reconsider approaches that had once seemed secure.

Neumann's scholarly work was centered in 17th- and 18th-century performance, and primarily in three perennially disputed areas: ornamentation, inequality, and overdotting. In all three he proceeded from the conviction that earlier scholars had applied musical theory in too broad (i.e. unspecific) a manner.

Especially C.P.E. Bach's *dicta* ('on the beat,' 'from above'), or Couperin's earlier "downbeat doctrine," had in his view been taken too literally as a basis for ornamenting 18th-century composers, including J. S. Bach (see 4, 9). Neumann examined hundreds of treatises (as a groundwork especially for his two monumental volumes on ornamentation), and this led him to conclude that ornaments were too often treated as rigid stereotypes (this in deference especially to tables of ornaments). Neumann sought to show, to the contrary, that ornaments were likely to assume a variety of shapes, depending on the musical circumstances, and that they were intended to be called upon flexibly and spontaneously, and not (as in many modern performances) as fixed patterns perfunctorily attached onto a musical continuity.

As for inequality, Neumann's view was that recent scholars had too readily acquiesced to the notion of its adoption outside France. Since it was explained almost without exception by French theorists (late-17th to late-18th centuries), and scarcely at all elsewhere—even the eminent German theorist Mattheson made no mention of it—Neumann subscribed to the view that it

¹This book is reviewed by Albert Cohen in this issue on p. 116 and summarized in the 1993 bibliography on p. 271.

was an innately French manner of playing, one that differed essentially from earlier rubato-like patterns (Santa Maria or Caccini), as it did also from later dotted-note continuities (e.g. by Purcell or Handel), however much each of these may have resembled inequality.

Overdotting, which for Neumann needed to be sharply differentiated from inequality (i.e. 7:1, as opposed to 3:2 or 5:3, etc.), was likewise described only by a particular group of theorists, in this case representing northern Germany (Quantz, C.P.E. Bach, Türk, *et al.*) and only during the second half of the 18th century. Here Neumann remained convinced that the lack of earlier theoretical references precluded its extension back in time, i.e. into the era of Bach and Handel, let alone into that of Lully (11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 45).

Over the past decade, and especially after completing his volume on Mozart's ornaments (published in 1986), Neumann turned his attention to a number of smaller issues, usually in reaction to one or another currently-expressed opinion or doctrine. Many of the ideas initially probed in these writings were later incorporated into his final book (42). In some instances Neumann looked further into ornamentation. Recitative appoggiaturas, as in Mozart, were not in his view as fixed as Will Crutchfield would have it, due mainly to their close association with textual meanings (22, 38). One-note graces in Haydn were shown at times as having had to fall prior to the beat, in order to obtain the most musical result (21, 33, 34). And "melodic" ornamentation (as explained in 8), at times left unrealized by Vivaldi, required filling out, as for example in the slow movement of the Bassoon Concerto (27).

Neumann also struck out in other directions, as in his source-oriented consideration of Mozart's dots and strokes, where he attempted to show that these articulative markings must have sometimes (though not always) been distinguished by the composer (44). Elsewhere the issue of 2s against 3s in Bach and other baroque composers was addressed; for Neumann their distinctiveness (i.e. without assimilation) was often indispensable for the sake of preserving motivic clarity (29)—this in response to Michael Collins, among others. Other studies were intended as correctives to recently fashionable manners of performing, such as the straight, vibrato-less tone cultivated by some early music singers, which Neumann felt was contrary to theory, e.g. to M. Agricola or Praetorius (28, 40). And late-18th-century minuets were shown, in light of Koch and others, to have been more moderately paced than has been assumed by many modern conductors (39).

Neumann's questioning stance often brought him into confrontation with his colleagues, and he remained no stranger to controversy throughout his scholarly career. This continued up to the very end. Among his final writings was a fervid response to Stephen Hefling's 1993 volume, *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music* (45).² Here Neumann returned to issues, inequality and overdotting, that had preoccupied his thinking over the years, and he sought one last time to dispel what he considered to be the misconceptions surrounding these topics.

Neumann was a scholar of high purpose and deeply-held convictions. He taught us to look more carefully at the evidence and to rethink many issues. Whether other scholars agreed or disagreed with him, his writings have had (and will continue to have) an affect on how early music is performed. And this will undoubtedly be his most important legacy.

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² *Rhythmic Alteration in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Music*. Professor Hefling's book is twice reviewed in the present issue, by David Fuller on p. 120 and by Erich Schwandt on p. 146.

³ The author is grateful to Hall Bonlyn (University of Richmond) for several titles prior to 1988.

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