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Arcangelo Corelli and Baroque Ornamentation  
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## Arcangelo Corelli and Baroque Ornamentation

Arcangelo Corelli's Trio Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 in B Minor is a wonderful example of ornamented music in the Baroque era. This piece was composed in 1689 in Modena, Italy and has been performed by many musicians since its inception and the stylistic differences between performances are intriguing. Adding ornamentation to violin soloistic pieces is a common trait between pieces composed during this time period. This paper will explore the styles of varying instrumentalists in usage of ornaments in different works from Arcangelo's Sonate da Chiesa to prove that certain ornamentation styles make a piece sound more baroque.

Corelli has created many different works and sonatas that use a variety of ornamentations to keep the pieces interesting. In his music, he favors the use of the violin for its virtuosic abilities and flexibility in playing contrasting sounds and movements. His music often has a specific ornamentation style that he would use in his pieces. In his Sonata Op.5, No. 4 there are a lot of trills and grace notes that "create a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort by avoiding shifting during each passage."<sup>1</sup> There are many similarities to this in his other works, including his Trio Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 in B Minor, Adagio.

Baroque music is full of ornamentation with all sorts of varying styles left open to interpret by the playing musician. "It is very important to realize that in Baroque music, rhythm is one of the performer's tools of musical expression."<sup>2</sup> The speed at which ornaments are played can directly affect the sound that is given off. The tempo of the piece is also a large factor that affects the style in which ornaments are performed. Executing a more clear and smooth trill or grace note may be more difficult to convey at faster tempos, unless performed by more professional musicians. A good question in the article from Neal Zaslaw says, "But what could it possibly mean that these are

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<sup>1</sup> Neal Zaslaw, "Ornaments for Corelli's Violin Sonatas, op. 5," *Early Music* vol. 24, no. 1 (Feb, 1996): 102.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Lynn, "Baroque ornamentation An introduction to notes inégales," *American Recorder Society, Inc* vol. 63, iss. 1 (2022): 31.

Corelli's ornaments 'as he played them', given that we believe that he would not have played them the same way in varying acoustics and for differing occasions?"<sup>3</sup> A lot of the ornaments during the baroque period may not have been notated on a score, a lot of them may have been left up to the performer to figure out. Zaslav also indicates that, "Common sense suggests, therefore, that any ornaments Corelli sent to Amsterdam to be published would have been minimal, all-purpose examples that could work for many types of violinists in a variety of venues."<sup>4</sup> Corelli seemed to only include necessary ornaments in his music for printing to give the main idea of what he desired to have played in his music.

When playing music composed by Corelli, the musicians will add embellishments like trills or grace notes at the end of phrases or certain cadences. Trills are one of the most common ornaments composers use or have performed in their pieces. In Corelli's Trio Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 in B Minor, Adagio there are many trills that occur at the end of phrases and lines throughout the movement. The trills are most commonly placed on Ti for the motions of Ti to Do in the piece, there are also some that occur in other places such as the high notes of a phrase. This seems to be the most common placement of trills that Corelli prefers to have played in his different violin sonatas. Now, much of this is up to the performer to add or remove from the piece they are playing, it is all interpretive and up to the performer's stylistic choices.

An additional reason that certain ornamentation was solely left up to the performer was to accommodate those that weren't familiar with his stylistic choices and preferences in regarding ornamentation. Nicholas Cook said that, "Outside Italy, however, the tradition of free ornamentation on which Corelli's short-hand notation relied was less securely established. Presumably it was for this reason – and more generally to accommodate amateurs."<sup>5</sup> Corelli didn't always include all the ornamentation on his scores in order to help make the score easier for less experienced players to read.

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<sup>3</sup> Zaslav, "Ornaments for Corelli's Violin Sonatas, op. 5," 109.

<sup>4</sup> Zaslav, 109.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Cook, "At the Borders of Musical Identity: Schenker, Corelli and the Graces," *Music Analysis* vol. 18, no. 2 (Jul, 1999): 179.

Italian style of baroque ornamentation also tended to be different in certain ways to other styles such as a French style of playing so this was done to make up for all these variations of style.

Corelli's pieces contain a great deal of grace note-like phrases that make for a nice, gentle, and interesting mood throughout his sonatas. The grace note placements don't follow as simple of a pattern as the trills do. The grace notes tend to occur at the end of really small phrase shapes and sometimes in the middle of a line where it feels appropriate. These often are played after a longer note has been held and another violin will come in and play the same or an echoing note with the grace note following it. In referring to Corelli's Sonata No. 5, Peter Walls states, "All violinists reserve the graces for the repeat and play the movement virtually straight the first time through. This pattern is followed through with the binary movements of part 2. In a way this establishes a totally different relationship between the basic line and the graced version."<sup>6</sup> Sometimes a piece will have repeats and the first time the passage is played, it will be rather normal and just sticking to what is written. Often when the repeat appears, the musicians will play that passage with more grace notes and embellishments than the first one contained. This is another method used by many performers when playing a piece by Corelli, or many other Baroque pieces for that matter.

Another type of ornament used largely in Corelli's Trio Sonata is turns, also known as *gruppettos*. A lot of phrases in this piece are repeating or echoed with these embellishing turns which keep the piece feeling interesting and doesn't feel too repetitive using these tricks. Embellishments like these "complement the nature of the original movement: a movement that lacks structural articulation is given formal clarification through the imposition of surface repetition, while a movement that is already clearly articulate is enriched through variation and motivic inter-relation."<sup>7</sup> Although the piece that is the primary focus of this paper is not formatted like this and

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Walls, "Performing Corelli's violin sonatas, op. 5," *Early Music* vol. 24, no. 1 (Feb, 1996): 133+.

<sup>7</sup> Cook, "At the Borders of Musical Identity: Schenker, Corelli and the Graces," 187.

actually just contains different movements that aren't repeated articulated versions, this type of practice is used very often in music during this time period and others to follow. Corelli seems to use turns, or embellishments similar to turns, quite often in his sonatas. The use of these types of ornaments is common in Baroque music, and specifically Italian Baroque styles, and helps shape this genre to how we define it today.

There are two recordings of Corelli's Trio Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 in B Minor, Adagio that will be analyzed and compared to show the effectiveness of ornamentation styles included in a performance. The link for one of the recordings that will be discussed is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHoqEH7so9s>

This was performed and/or contributed to by Rémy Baudet, Sayuri Yamagata, Albert Brüggén, David van Ooijen & Pieter-Jan Belder. The entire piece including all the different movements of this Trio Sonata are in this recording, but the Adagio movement goes until 2:33 in the video which is what the focus of this comparison is. For the purposes of this paper, this recording will be referred to as recording 1. Here is the link for the second recording which will be referred to as recording 2:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OA6Rp7faog>

This was performed and/or contributed to by Romuald Tecco, Leslie Shank, Joshua Koestenbaum, and Layton James.

These two recordings have a lot of similarities and a lot of differences throughout the performance of each in terms of how articulation, ornaments, and notes are executed. Recording 1 has a much slower tempo and more drawn out pace on the length notes are being held than recording 2 does. In recording 1, the different ornaments are more prominent and are delicately executed in a softer and longer fashion. The placement of some of these ornaments such as the trills and grace notes do tend to occur in the same places relatively in the music for each recording. "It is hard to avoid the conclusion that violinists have been learning from each other over the last decade or so, becoming more and more fluent in the art of gracing Corelli."<sup>8</sup> It is clear that a lot of the ornamentation styles that are included in music today tend to be

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<sup>8</sup> Walls, "Performing Corelli's violin sonatas, op. 5," 133+.

executed in very similar fashions due to the fact that many musicians will mimic and learn from each other.

Below is a copy of an edition of Corelli's Trio Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 in B Minor, Adagio. This score does not contain really any markings for articulations or ornamentation preferences, except for the few dynamic markings toward the end of the movement:

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## SONATA IV.

*Largo.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Violone,  
e Organo.

# 7 5 #      6      6      6 7 6 #

7 5 3      6      6      6 7 #      6 7

9 6 5 3 6    9 8 5 3 9 8 5 3    5 6 6 5 4 3    # 6 6

# 4 7 (6) 7    6 4 7 5 4 # 4    7 4 5 # 4    7 5 3

Augener's Edition #442



they tend to be played slower by players that are more experienced and understanding of Baroque music. Classical music is the time period when music like this tends to become more speedy and flashy. The movement of this piece is labeled Adagio, which means slower tempo, so in terms of tempo, recording 1 seems to probably be the closest to how Corelli would have preferred the pace of his piece to be performed at.

Throughout the piece in both recordings, it is commonly occurring that on the dotted eighth notes where cadences take place, a trill or grace note will be played. Dotted rhythms seem to be the center of when ornamentations will occur in Corelli's Sonata such as at the end of measure 1 and measure 4. The places these ornaments are implemented don't seem to be random but have a logic that is commonly seen throughout Italian Baroque styles of music. In the article by Nicholas Cook, he discusses some changes to a version of one of Corelli's sonatas made by Geminiani which said, "Geminiani translates Corelli's essentially symmetrical design into an ongoing, developmental progression towards the conclusion of the sonata as a whole, giving it a rhetorical and climactic quality that is quite foreign to the original conception."<sup>10</sup> Some composers didn't originally intend for as much ornamentation to be used in their pieces as seen in certain renditions in our modern day. Articulations and ornamentation only, however, only seem to complement a piece in a positive way even if some techniques were not originally conceived by the composer.

Corelli did intend for the art of ornamentation to be included in his Sonatas even if he did not directly write a lot of them into his scores himself. "Having room to move is, of course, vital in slow movements where melodic lines are given life by florid improvisatory ornamentation."<sup>11</sup> The Sonata Op. 3, No. 4 is a slower movement from his *Sonate da Chiesa* works and follows this guideline of using ornamentation for slower passages to keep things flowing and interesting. This was a desired practice during the Baroque period that many performers would incorporate. In discussing the included ornamentations in one of Corelli's Sonatas by a man named Roger North, there were

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<sup>10</sup> Cook, "At the Borders of Musical Identity: Schenker, Corelli and the Graces," 187.

<sup>11</sup> Walls, "Performing Corelli's violin sonatas, op. 5," 133+.

some people unsure of whether or not the ornamentations that were used were actually accurate and authentic. “How are we to regard the graces purportedly by Corelli published by Estienne Roger in 1710 (and pirated by Walsh a short time afterwards)? Roger's repeated assurances of their authenticity are the surest indication that many of his contemporaries were sceptical about the origin of the graces.”<sup>12</sup> The origin of ornamentation being used in Corelli's works was authentic to the Baroque period and was researched and understood clearly by these professional musicians and composers. This solidifies the fact that the ornaments used in these recordings were accurate to the Baroque period and followed the style Corelli used in his works.

The ornaments that we see commonly occur in both of the recordings of Corelli's Sonata help the piece fit its time period and sound like a 'Baroque style'. Baroque music, and specifically Italian Sonatas, have an elegant sound that occurs with the use of ornaments decorating the phrases of the piece they are played in. Using embellishments like trills and graces on cadences and during certain rhythmic patterns is a common practice during this time period that was used in the recordings of Corelli's piece. The score didn't have the ornaments written in but these were all implied and improvised by performing musicians who understand how Baroque music needs to function. Corelli intended for his piece to have these ornaments played but only left them out of most written scores to accommodate for amateur musicians that only would play the basic structure of the piece. Playing the Sonata at a slower pace is also most likely what Corelli intended since the common style for Baroque ornamentation was to have it be heard clearly. The ornaments like trills were supposed to be longer and the turns that occur in certain phrases of the movement are executed more plainly and distinctly to add a certain desirable sound quality. Baroque ornamentation included in pieces played in our modern day is most commonly left up to the arranger of the piece and the musician playing the piece to improvise and interpret off the given score. As shown, music made in the Baroque Era such as Corelli's Violin Sonata was intended to have a certain style of ornamentation which helped define the period the music was created.

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<sup>12</sup> Walls, 133+.

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Recording 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHoqEH7so9s>

Recording 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OA6Rp7faog>

Score: [https://vmirror.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/2/2a/IMSLP24687-PMLP04986-Corelli\\_-\\_Op.\\_3.pdf](https://vmirror.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/2/2a/IMSLP24687-PMLP04986-Corelli_-_Op._3.pdf)