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A comparative study of the use of ornamentation in two works by J.S. Bach in a South African context

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ABSTRACT

Substantial scholarly research has been devoted to the stylistic performance of the keyboard works of J.S. Bach. Scholars have given considerable attention to certain problems dealing with ornamentation and they have improved the textual accuracy of Baroque music editions. Despite these achievements, one could ask as to what degree Baroque ornamentation and improvisation is still a current practice in South Africa.

This research project concentrates on the ornamentation by Johann Sebastian Bach within a general context of contemporary South African performance and Baroque improvisation. This dissertation, additionally, focuses specifically on interviews with contemporary South African Baroque music performers in order to explore their own interpretation and execution of the ornamentation signs as opposed to written out ornamentation. For this purpose, two pieces by J.S. Bach were selected for analysis. This work also applies examples and guidelines of how to approach the ornamentation in the two chosen Baroque pieces in particular. Recordings of these two pieces were also part of this study to determine the techniques and interpretation used by the performers.

From this study and interviews, it is clear that there are a diversity of opinions and personal approaches; however, there is also mutual understanding around Baroque ornamentation and improvisation. There are, possibly, several major areas of Baroque ornamentation in which the South African student can receive more assistance and teaching in schools. According to the views of the interviewees, I have determined that they are mostly concerned about Baroque ornamentation that does not form part of the foundation teaching for students in secondary level school education. It is the writer's belief that more exposure to Baroque ornamentation and improvisation techniques can assist students to discover the ways in which they can perform keyboard pieces by J.S. Bach more effectively.