

Ido Abravaya

## A French overture revisited

Another look at the two versions of BWV831

THE early music movement and historically aware performance have become a major power in international music life. The diet of today's listener is very different from what it was some decades ago. This change is apparent not only in the repertory, but also in the way the music is performed. The recent expansion of historically aware performance could eventually lead to an integration, or fusion, of the so-called 'normal' and 'authentic' performance styles. Much is to be gained by this process; but something may also be lost: if historical performance is to become public domain it may lose some of its secret charm as *musica reservata* for the initiated.

This is perhaps one reason why many performers still adhere to the idiosyncrasies of a 'secret art' adopted by the early-music pioneers at the turn of the century. They have apparently taken too literally Couperin's dictum 'nous écrivons différemment de ce que nous exécutons',<sup>1</sup> and, leaving out the pinch of salt, perhaps missed a point. Many still tend to exaggerate certain devices, such as the accented appoggiatura, *notes inégales* and overdotting, often to the point of mannerism.

Overdotting, a term aptly coined by Erwin Bodky,<sup>2</sup> had already been advocated in 1915 by Dolmetsch, who had relied on Quantz as his principal source.<sup>3</sup> Along with other 'conventional alterations of rhythm',<sup>4</sup> it became a hallmark of authentic interpretation; at first a professional secret, nowadays a shibboleth or a badge marking an interpreter as 'one of our own'.

Arnold Dolmetsch, who was the first to rediscover overdotting in the now famous passage in Quantz,

regarded it as generally valid for 'old music' in general and applied it to the entire 17th- and 18th-century musical repertory, for all instances of dotted rhythm, in music that seemed old enough: French overtures and *entrée*-like movements, but also in dotted pieces that obviously contradicted the pomp of French overture (such as the E $\flat$  minor Prelude, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, book 1) (ex.1).

Other scholars, notably Thurston Dart and Robert Donington, followed Dolmetsch.<sup>5</sup> Dart's characterization of the dotted French style ('all parts should move together, jerkily')<sup>6</sup> was later used (by Frederick Neumann) as a mocking epithet to the whole practice—'the jerky style'.

In 1965 Frederick Neumann attacked the theory of overdotting. However, his series of articles on the 'delusion of overdotting', and some related topics<sup>7</sup> did not remain unanswered.<sup>8</sup> In the ensuing debate so many examples and counter-examples were brought forth that the reader, baffled by the multitude of detail, might be inclined to think that everyone is right. It was to be hoped that Stephen Hefling's recent exhaustive study, taking a more balanced view of the question, would manage to


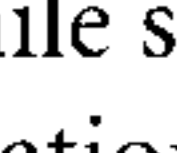
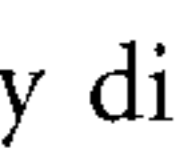
Ex.1 J. S. Bach, Prelude in E $\flat$  minor, *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, book 1, Dolmetsch's reading



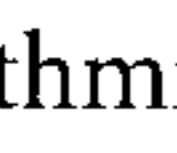
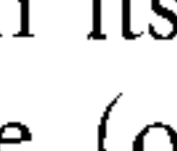
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establish a calmer tone in this long dispute.<sup>9</sup> Trying to 'provide an accurate and dispassionate account', Hefling comes to the conclusion that 'the data are by no means sufficiently consistent to suggest a general convention of overdotting in performance [...] Overdotting is not a delusion [...] But neither is the "French Overture style one of our best-attested conventions of baroque interpretation."' <sup>10</sup> However, Hefling also found himself drawn into the heated polemic, rebutting the sharp criticism of Neumann (by now deceased) against his book.<sup>11</sup>

Still, a performer dealing with one particular piece or a specific rhythmic figure cannot afford the musicologist's 'balanced view', having to make his or her own decisions one way or another. These questions are never objectively decided, as the whole debate is not an objective one. Here we come to realize on what slight scientific grounds any theory of performance practice necessarily rests, finally depending on the musical sensibility, taste and aesthetic convictions of each scholar or performer.

The kernel of dispute between Neumann and most other scholars was that, beside theoretical sources, arguments for an overdotting reading of a given musical passage mainly rely on musical texts, especially on notational variants of parallel sections in the same piece, or in its different versions (copies, editions etc.): for example, a rhythmic pattern such as  may appear elsewhere as  or . While such variants are usually regarded as different notations of the same rhythm, Neumann systematically dismissed reasoning by analogy, arguing that the composer<sup>12</sup> used the different notations intentionally, because he wanted to have it performed differently.<sup>13</sup>

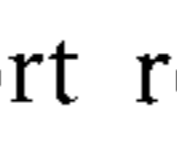
It seems, however, that the dispute had taken, at least in the lifetime of the late Frederick Neumann, a somewhat misleading scientific guise: there was a real contention, not about matters of the past, but directly concerning the present style of performing early music, its 'ancientness' or actual relevance.

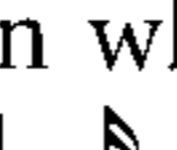
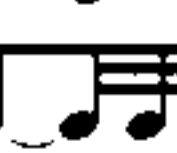

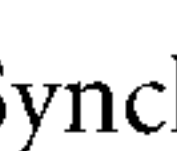
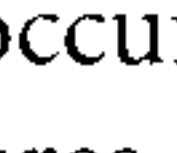
Arithmetically speaking, overdotting is simply defined as lingering on the dotted note in certain rhythmic figures (;  etc.) somewhat longer than its written value, at the expense of the short note (or note group) following the dot, without changing the pace. Musically, however, it is a more

complex phenomenon, involving three different aspects which may be considered separately:

- (a) *lengthening* of the dotted note;
- (b) *synchronizing* the simultaneous (or nearly concurrent) shorter notes after the dot; and
- (c) *uniforming*, as I call the unifying of the short note values horizontally, within a single voice part, a phrase, a section, or an entire piece.

### Lengthening

Lengthening the dotted note, resulting in *shortening* of the following upbeat, is the salient feature of the 'jerky style'. In order to emphasize this 'jerkiness', a sharp articulation is also often recommended in various sources (notably Quantz), marked by a short rest (). This sharpened inequality has been regarded by many as the most characteristic *manière* of the French overture. In this sense it can be easily abused, as it often was in Dolmetsch's readings.

The value of the dot can be read in some cases as variable, as shorthand notation for a double dot, not unlike the device of *imperfectio ad partem remotam* in white mensural notation,<sup>14</sup> where  stands for  or , and  is most often read as .

### Synchronizing

Synchronizing the short notes after the dot may occur in case of simultaneous different dotted figures (with different short-note values). Neumann rightly argues that synchronizing was not always intended; but since both over- and underdotting were in use, along with literal reading, it is often impossible to guess the composer's exact intention.

However, there is an entire category of pieces, such as the overture to Handel's *Partenope* (ex.2), where synchronization seems inevitable. Literal reading of the dotted crotchets in bars 1 and 2 (viola, violin II) would give rise to unprepared dissonances at the last quaver of each bar, hardly characteristic of the sensitive Baroque treatment of dissonance.<sup>15</sup> These rough sonorities disappear if all short notes after the dot are synchronized as semiquavers, raising no difficulty for orchestra players reading from the part.



Ex.2 Handel, overture to *Partenope*

Tutti

Oboe, Vn I  
Vn II  
Vla  
Bassi

Where ambiguity may arise—for example, where the dotted figures  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$  are shifted, as it were, by a crotchet syncope—Handel writes the notes literally, always lengthening the ‘dotted’ note by a tie and shortening the following one to a semiquaver, thus:  $\text{c} \text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  (Allegro, bars 24, 48). Moreover, undotted quavers in the Entrée and Allegro sections of this overture come always singly—never in groups or pairs—either after dotted crotchets, or else at the opening of motifs, after a quaver rest. Literal reading of these quavers would have here an arbitrary effect, disturbing the obviously necessary synchronization of short notes. Furthermore, in dotted-note combinations, the first *undotted* quaver after a rest ( $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ; Entrée, bars 4, 5 etc.) should be shortened to a semi-quaver, according to the rule given by Quantz (*Versuch*, XVII, ii, 16), corroborated by the need of synchronization (Allegro, bars 5, 12, 13 etc.). This rule is confirmed again, if we turn to the keyboard version of the *Partenope* overture, as published by John Walsh in the early 1750s. Nearly all the  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩}$  figures, when concurring with rhythms such as  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ , are written in such a way that the first quaver (after the rest) of the former figure is vertically aligned with

the second (semiquaver) note of the latter figure (ex.3).

This example is simple, both in its rhythm and consistent notation. However, the problem of synchronization becomes more difficult in case of dotted-note plus short-note figures ( $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ;  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ;  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  etc.), combined simultaneously with other simple or complex figures. The question then is which notes are to be synchronized with which, if at all (see ex.11 below).

Quantz’s rule that the note after the dot should be taken ‘most rapidly’ (*geschwind und präcipitant*) provides no answer for even the relatively simple combination of one simple and one complex dotted figure. The case of Bach’s French overtures is even more involved, as he often combines *undotted* rhythms ( $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ ) with various dotted figures (e.g.  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \text{♩}$  in Goldberg Variations, no. 16, and in BWV831). It is particularly these instances which demand a selective solution, not the either/or position of Dolmetsch or Neumann. Overdotting is often indeed the best reading, but sometimes it should be limited to certain rhythmic figures, instead of being applied as a general solution.

Ex.3 Synchronization in the *Partenope* overture, keyboard version (Walsh edition)

Ex.4 J. S. Bach, Largo from Trio Sonata, *Musical offering*:  
 (a) bar 1; (b) bar 28

Ex.5 J. S. Bach, Brandenburg Concerto no. 5, iii: (a) original rhythm; (b) underdotted reading (Dolmetsch)

## Uniforming

Uniforming, as I call it, is similar to synchronization, but whereas synchronization concerns mainly the vertical aspect, such as concurrent rhythms in different parts, uniforming becomes its horizontal counterpart, referring to the congruence of the short notes within a complete melodic phrase, a section, or an entire piece.

The beginning of the trio sonata in Bach's *Musical offering* (ex.4a) is a good example of uniforming. Reading the first bar *uniformly* means equating the values of the two short notes after the dot (i.e. one semiquaver and one quaver): the last *c*" will be shortened to a semiquaver, being uniformed with the *e*" of the first crotchet. Indeed, a 'uniformed' reading seems here necessary, as two short notes of different durations in a single bar (♩. ♪. ♩) would create an awkward standstill. This reading is corroborated by Bach's own subsequent notation in bar 28 (ex.4b). It also conforms to

C. P. E. Bach's rules for the duration of an appoggiatura before a dotted note.<sup>16</sup>

Another instance calling for uniforming is the third movement of Brandenburg Concerto no.5 (ex.5), which, however, does not concern overdotted. If we agree that the semiquaver upbeats should be equated to the quaver triplets, it is due to (horizontal) uniformity, rather than from an actual need of synchronization, which does not arise until bar 9.

In the Overture in F major, BWV820/1 (ex.6), all short notes after the dots are to be uniformed, which in practice means that the quaver after the first dot in bar 1 (and in practically all subsequent bars) is to be contracted, although the first instance of possible synchronization occurs only at bar 6, confirming the need of uniforming felt from the beginning.

This example also suggests an 'etymological' link between *notes inégales* and 'strict' overdotted, namely the practical identity in performance of figures like ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. and ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩., being different (rather inexact) notations of one and the

Ex.6 J. S. Bach, Overture BWV820/1

Reproduced from: J. S. Bach, *Suiten, Sonaten, Capriccios*, G. Von Dadelsen, ed. (Munich, 1975), with kind permission of G. Henle Verlag, Munich



same rhythmic figure. One can no longer tell whether the short notes after the dotted ones are contracted as a result of overdotting 'proper', or as part of the *inéga* tradition. This very flexibility shows that the main question of 'overdotting' is not one of reading notation, but of a wider scope, namely how certain musical gestures are rhythmically characterized and interpreted, regardless of how they had been explicitly written down by the composer. The same characteristic rhythm, *marche à la française*, was differently notated at different times, for example, by Philidor (ex.7a), Jeremiah Clarke, (ex.7b), Bach (ex.6) and Bizet (ex.7c).

The same types of rhythm are sometimes fully notated, sometimes written in rhythmic shorthand. Thus Neumann's attempt to distinguish between rhythmic alterations due to the *inéga* tradition and those resulting from so-called 'overdotting proper'<sup>17</sup> was, in the end, misleading. His reluctance to treat differently notated parallel passages as *possibly* analogous may be recommended practice in the methods of a critical edition, but is of little help to performers confronted with notational variants. Refusing to acknowledge these as spelling inconsistencies undermines any general discussion of the problem.

The impression gained from the last few examples is that French Baroque composers used simple dotting, probably expecting their performers to read these figures overdotting, whereas others (including 19th-century Frenchmen, like Bizet) used double dotting or extra pauses with the same rhythmic figures. This general trend is confirmed by another 18th-century English source, Roger North, trying to convey the character of a French overture in the spirit of Lully, in words as well as in music. To his short and very simple example (ex.7d) he added a beautiful description: 'And no one could hear an entree with its starts, and saults but must expect a dance to follow, so lively may human actions be pictured by musick.'<sup>18</sup> No need to tell that his 'starts and saults' are notated in the form  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$ .

The Overture in B minor, BWV831, is of special interest, as it exists in two rhythmically different versions. Version 1, in C minor, BWV831a (ex.8), was copied by Anna Magdalena no later than 1733;<sup>19</sup> version 2, in B minor (ex.9) was published in 1735 (*Clavier-Übung*, ii). The entire rhythm of the  $\text{♩}$  sections of version 2 underwent a remarkable, albeit one-sided, transformation: most of the simply dotted figures  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$  were changed to  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$  or  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$ ; also, nearly all upbeat groups in the form of  $\text{♩} \cdot \text{♩} \cdot \text{♩}$  were

Ex.7 (a) Pierre Danican Philidor, *Marche en rondeau*; (b) Jeremiah Clarke, *Trumpet Tune*; (c) Georges Bizet, *L'Arlesienne*, Suite no.1, overture; (d) Roger North, example from *The Muscicall grammarian*

Ex.8 J. S. Bach, French Overture in C minor, BWV831a (version 1), from NBA V/2, ed. W. Emery (Kassel, 1977)

The musical score is presented in six systems, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The second system starts at measure 5, the third at measure 9, the fourth at measure 12, the fifth at measure 15, and the sixth at measure 18. The sixth system includes first and second endings. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks like slurs and accents.

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Ex.9 J. S. Bach, French Overture in B minor, BWV831 (version 2), from NBA V/2, ed. W. Emery (Kassel, 1977)

The image displays a musical score for the French Overture in B minor, BWV831, by J.S. Bach. The score is presented in a grand staff format, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is B minor (two sharps: F# and C#). The piece is in 3/4 time. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, and 19 clearly marked. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, as well as rests. There are several trills (tr) and ornaments (wavy lines) indicated throughout the piece. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is present at the beginning. The score concludes with a first ending bracket labeled '1.' at the end of measure 19. The page number '53' is visible in the bottom right corner.

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contracted to *tirata*-like figures  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ . Beside this rhythmic ‘blue shift’, there are but few notational differences, other than the transposed key. This led some authors to infer that Bach did not intend in version 2 any new rhythms but wrote the old ones more literally.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly,  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  in version 1 was supposed to have been written *à la manière française*: in simpler rhythmic notation of mostly semiquavers instead of demisemiquavers, and with simple dotting ( $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ ), expecting the performer of the time to read it according to the rules of the ‘French tradition’. Bach’s reverting to a more explicit way of notation, characteristic of his later works, thus makes version 2—supposedly—merely an *explication* of the older one. Neumann rejected this hypothesis, stating that Bach did actually change the rhythmic *Gestalt* of the  $\text{♩}$  sections of the overture.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the opinion of the authors mentioned above (see n.19), Neumann denied that Bach would have relied on any ‘real’ convention of overdotting. But it seems that the answer should be divided:

- (a) Version 1 requires overdotting, at least of certain figures;
- (b) Bach may have written version 2 more literally than version 1, but he also added some deliberate rhythmic changes in the new version;
- (c) in version 2, as well as in version 1, there are points that should be not be read literally, but call for overdotting.

The first  $\text{♩}$  section of version 1 (i, bars 1–20) con-

tains 16 simply dotted figures ( $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ ). Only at four other points (bar 4, 16, twice in each bar) does Bach use the figure  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ . These two bars, both occurring on authentic cadences with strong suspensions (6-4 chords), are conspicuously different from the others of version 1, in that only here does Bach explicitly use a sort of ‘double dotting’, or its equivalent ( $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ ), and thus may be interpreted as rhythmically distinct from the other dotted figures ( $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ ). On the other hand, all four  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$  figures coincide with other figures of the form  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ , apparently calling for synchronization. But synchronization is probably required here in all dotted figures, therefore a possible explanation is that Bach meant to stress the sharp articulation, rather than the rhythmic difference of these bars. However, comparing the 16 simply dotted figures with their parallels in version 2, we see that 11 of them were changed to  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ , or  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$  (ii, bars 9, 10). Bach preserved the simple dotting ( $\text{♩} \text{♩}$ ) only where problems of synchronization could not arise.<sup>22</sup>

Thus Bach apparently expected all  $\text{♩} \text{♩}$  figures *in both versions* to be overdotting;<sup>23</sup> but in version 2 he spared the performer the trouble of synchronizing. Shortening the single quaver after the dot is also justified by considerations of uniforming. Reading the quavers literally would disturb the general flow of the piece, abounding in fast and nervous short notes.

However, the most outstanding change in the new version is the consistent renotation of the *Hauptfigur*, from semiquavers to demisemiquavers:  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$  instead of  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ . Demisemiquaver

Ex.10 BWV831, bars 12, 13: (a) version 1; (b) version 2



figures are also found in version 1, but are limited there to proper *tirate*; thus one could hardly expect the performer of version 1 to guess, on stylistic grounds, that he should convert all semiquaver figures to demisemiquavers, particularly when figures of undotted semiquavers (bars 13 and 148—second  $\text{♩}$  section), unchanged in version 2, coincide with the *Hauptfigur*, which Bach did change to demisemiquavers throughout the entire movement (ex.10).

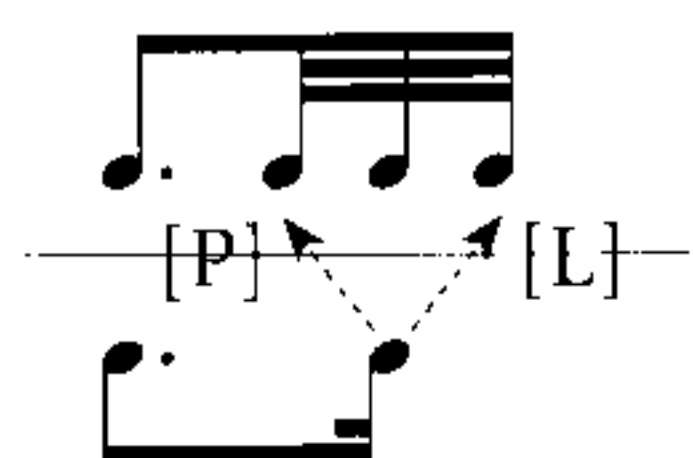
But such a comparison would be misleading if we regard both versions as equivalent alternatives. Version 2 is an actual 'improvement' over the older one, in that a greater rhythmic unity is achieved. The few fast *tirate* (in demisemiquavers) of version 1, which at first seemed as ornaments of no special consequence, have now become organically related to the *Hauptfigur*; the  $\text{♩}$  section has acquired an 'inevitability' which it lacked in the first version. Aesthetically, there is no way back to version 1, which thus has become a preparatory stage of version 2.

Some other instances of consistent rhythmic revision are known in Bach's work, e.g. in the C major Fugue of *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, i, where the figure  $\text{♪♪♪}$  was consistently 'sharpened' to  $\text{♪♪♪}$ .<sup>24</sup>

To sum up, the only rhythmic figures which Bach doubtless intended to be read in a contracted manner are of the form  $\text{♪♪}$ . Some of these are renotated in version 2, where the performer is expected to read them *nearly* literally. There are no indications about synchronizing complex figures, but this problem may nearly solve itself if we neither take the tempo too slow, nor dwell too heavily on each single fast note.<sup>25</sup>

Looking beyond BWV831, the whole controversy apparently reflects a problem of the 20th century rather than one of the 18th. As stated above, overdotting—among other devices—has become a label of a 'progressively authentic' interpretation, and for this reason is often exaggerated. Neumann's motivation for his crusade against overdotting could be justified,

Ex.11 Typical ways of synchronization—by Pinnock (P), and Leonhardt (L)



or at least understood, as a musical and aesthetic reaction against modern mannerism; but he made a point of confining it to scholarly debate. Perhaps his critique should be instead directly aimed at certain performers rather than scholars (although they are often incarnated in one and the same person).

At this point I would like to examine how some well-known performers handle French overture rhythms, beginning with two recordings of BWV831, by Gustav Leonhardt and Trevor Pinnock.<sup>26</sup> Both play version 2 and both read this already highly dotted piece in a highly overdotted manner. Leonhardt's overdotting is sharper, due perhaps to his slower tempo, or it is possibly his emphasized overdotting which leads him to take a slower tempo. The same differences are also observed in their recordings of variation 16 of the Goldberg Variations, a French overture.<sup>27</sup> Pinnock's overdotting is more flexible than Leonhardt's: when a simply dotted figure coincides with a *tirata* (see ex.11), Leonhardt synchronizes the note after the dot with the very last note of the *tirata*, whereas Pinnock usually lets it coincide with the third before last note of the *tirata*. Landowska, on the other hand, has accepted Dolmetsch's theories,<sup>28</sup> but she carefully avoids a too systematic application. In her recordings of the *Goldberg Variations*<sup>29</sup> (the same occurs with Glenn Gould's)<sup>30</sup> she sometimes synchronizes the fast notes, sometimes not, keeping the listener constantly alert and constantly surprised.

Gustav Leonhardt persistently applies precisely measured double-dotting, not only in French overtures, but equally in pieces of quiet movement, calling for no hurry or rhythmic nervousness, notably in the Adagio BWV968 (ex.12), a keyboard arrangement of the first movement of the Violin Sonata in C major (BWV1005).<sup>31</sup> Here Leonhardt acts as a missionary for overall overdotting. It would be altogether sufficient to criticize such an interpretation simply on musical grounds. Moreover, his rhythm, verging on caricature, would alone justify Neumann's attacks against the entire *manière française*, had they been addressed to this style of performance. But such an undertaking would, of course, present difficulties of its own, as the post-Leonhardtian trend of historically aware performance cloaked it-

1 The openings of two parts from the Overture in D, BWV1069: (a) Violino 2; (b) Tromba 1 (Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Mus. Ms. Bach St 445)

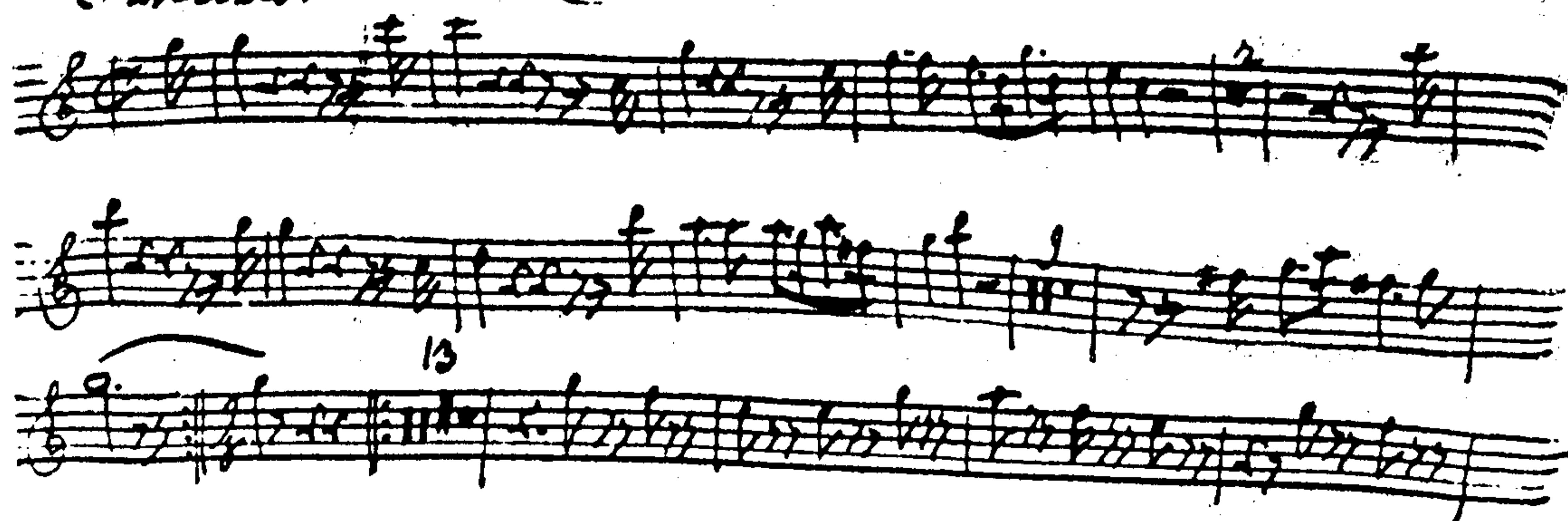
(a)

*Overture* *Violino. 2.*



(b)

*Overture.* *Tromba. 1.*


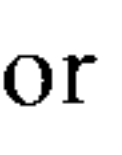
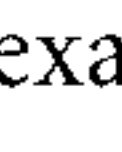
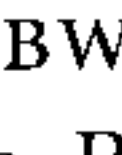
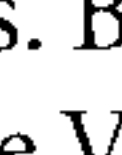



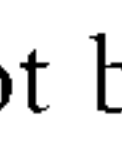








Ex.12 BWV968: (a) original; (b) Leonhardt's reading

Ex.13 BWV1066, bar 3

self with a protective aura of authenticity, if not rendering it invulnerable to direct musical criticism, then at least transporting it to some more rarefied plane, where the usual criteria of interpretation, reserved for non-authentic mortals, are not quite valid.

The general impression is that the 'jerky style', as recommended by Thurston Dart and practised by Leonhardt, has now become a permanent accessory amongst harpsichord players. More recent recordings of BWV831<sup>32</sup> reveal systematic, often extreme, overdotting, with the short note (after the dot) synchronized with the last note of a *tirata* or a similar figure, when they coincide. The situation is different with conductors. For example, Bach's orchestral suites (or Overtures), BWV1066–9, are considerably simpler rhythmically and pose fewer problems of dotting (the smallest note value is seldom smaller than a semiquaver) than his keyboard overtures. They also offer fewer occasions for a 'jerky' interpretation. However, comparing the sources of BWV1067 and 1069 used by the Neue Bach-Ausgabe shows several slight rhythmic discrepancies between the various part copies, with typical contractions of the upbeats. Some rhythmic figures occasionally appear in alternative versions. For example: (a)  or  (b)  or  (c)  or  (d)  or  (*sic*).<sup>33</sup> Some examples may be seen in the part facsimiles of BWV1069 (Berlin, Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Mus. Ms. Bach St 445), as reproduced in the NBA (illus.1). The Violino 2 part also confirms the practical identity (or unifying) of the semiquaver figure  with the tripled figure  ( $\frac{9}{8}$   = ).

Few as they are, these differences cannot be dis-

missed as accidental errors. The most plausible explanation is that to the copyists these slightly different notations practically meant the same thing. They show that overdotting (mainly of the figure ) survived in practice as a shorthand formula for a double dot. Bach's overtures for orchestra are nowadays commonly read in this manner of selective overdotting,<sup>34</sup> unlike his clavier overtures, which, as we have seen, harpsichordists read with excessive overdotting.

One interesting exception to fashionable overdotting is the recording of Bach's orchestral overtures by Musica Antiqua Köln, led by Reinhard Goebel.<sup>35</sup> It was begun in April 1982, with BWV1067, the other overtures being recorded in May 1985. In the meantime Goebel, as he relates in his programme notes, had adopted the theories of Neumann and decided to dispense altogether with overdotting and with synchronizing the short notes. Notwithstanding his professed attitude against synchronization, Goebel is well aware of the unpleasant clash caused by non-synchronized notes and takes measures to diminish it. He systematically reads the short quavers lightly, softly articulated, and deliberately unaccented, to soften their clashing with the semiquavers (BWV1066, bars 2, 3, etc.: see ex.13).

The only occasions where Goebel indulges in overdotting are short *tirata* flourishes, at the close of the movement (BWV1066, bar 112; BWV1068, bars 116–17), shortened to half their written value. Rendering these figures more ornate or 'festive' by overdotting is, in a sense, a concession to flagrant 'jerky style', in that it regards overdotting as aesthetically desirable, at least in certain cases. Although I find Goebel's interpretations musically most satisfying,



both before and after his 'conversion', it is hard to see any musical advantage gained by avoiding synchronization of the short notes. In his programme notes Goebel adopted Neumann's stance against overdotting and synchronization, yet in other details of performance he faithfully sticks to the modern conventions of reading dotted notes, such as persistent sharp articulation (♪♪ or ♪♪♪, instead of ♪♪). One should also be sceptical about this device, now overused. Sharp articulation after the dot, as recommended by Quantz and some of his contemporaries (and also clearly indicated in version 2 of BWV831), is of course a legitimate interpretation, but it is taken today as an automatically inevitable concomitant of overdotting. One should, however, remember that dotted notes may, but do not always have to be, articulated in this manner. Some liberty and variety should always be recommended.

It seems that in the long polemic around overdotting some major points have been missed. The debate was whether, or to what extent, one should overdot in a French overture, while scarcely any consideration was given to whether there really was only *one* such entity, or rhythmic type of overture. Not only should one bear in mind that the French overture had undergone a long historic development, from Lully to Handel, but also that French overtures differ widely in affect, tempo and rhythmic character. Their rhythms range from simply dotted crotchets followed by quavers (like the *Messiah* overture) through the relatively simple BWV831a (version 1), to the ornate, rhythmically sharpened (*fort pointée*) version 2, abounding in complex rhythmic groups (*tirate* etc.) following the dotted notes. This is exactly where consistently sharp overdotting would be appropriate, had the composer not already written it in the score. In light of the above, one should be able to tell to what rhythmic type a given work belongs, and what, if anything, should be added to the original text. The general affect of the piece, now as then, is the best indication to the performer. It is not impossible for a given piece to have undergone a rhythmic change after its composition, as in the case of BWV831, but for such a change to be fully written out would be a rare occurrence, requiring the thoroughness of a Johann Sebastian Bach.

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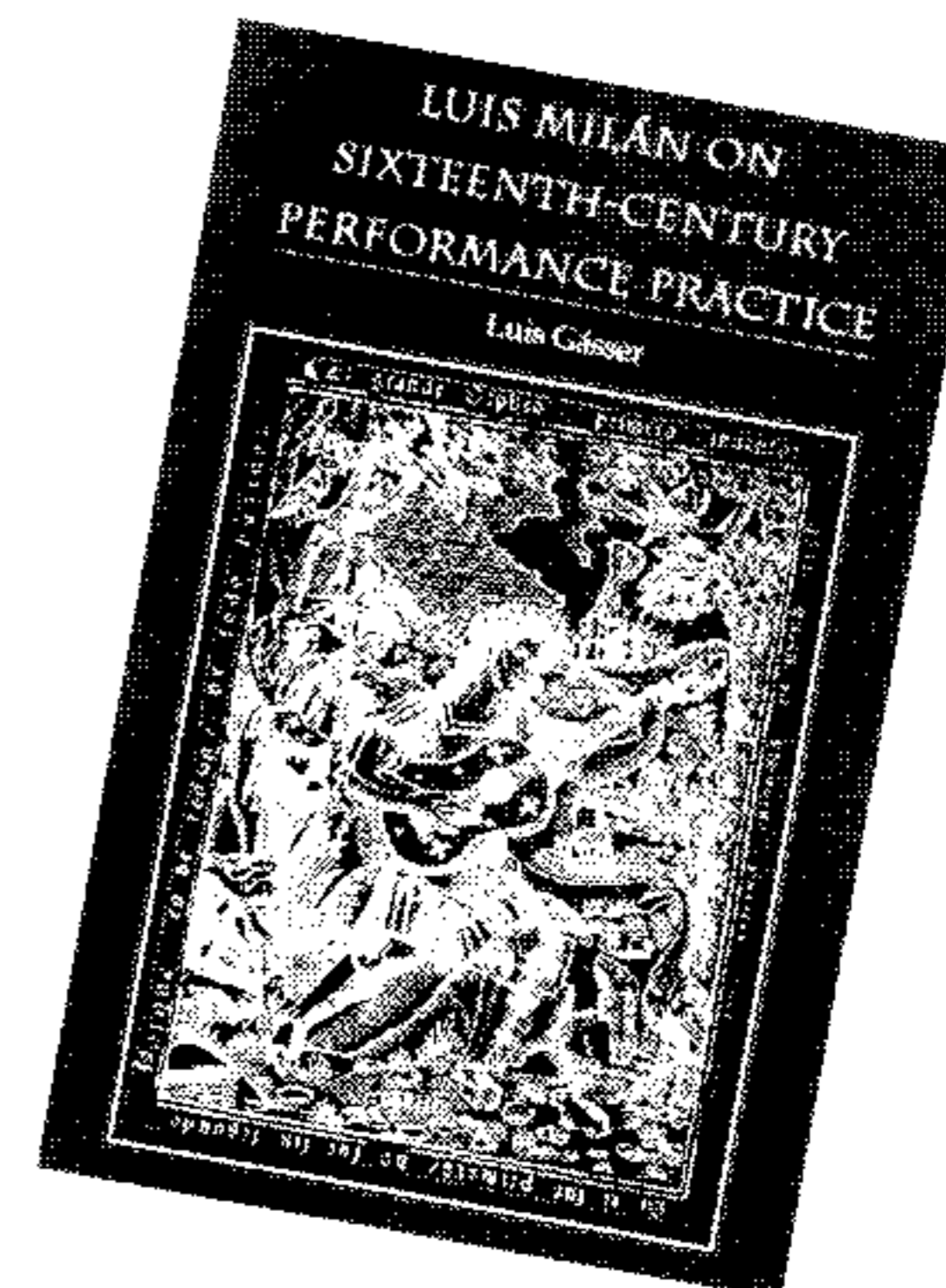


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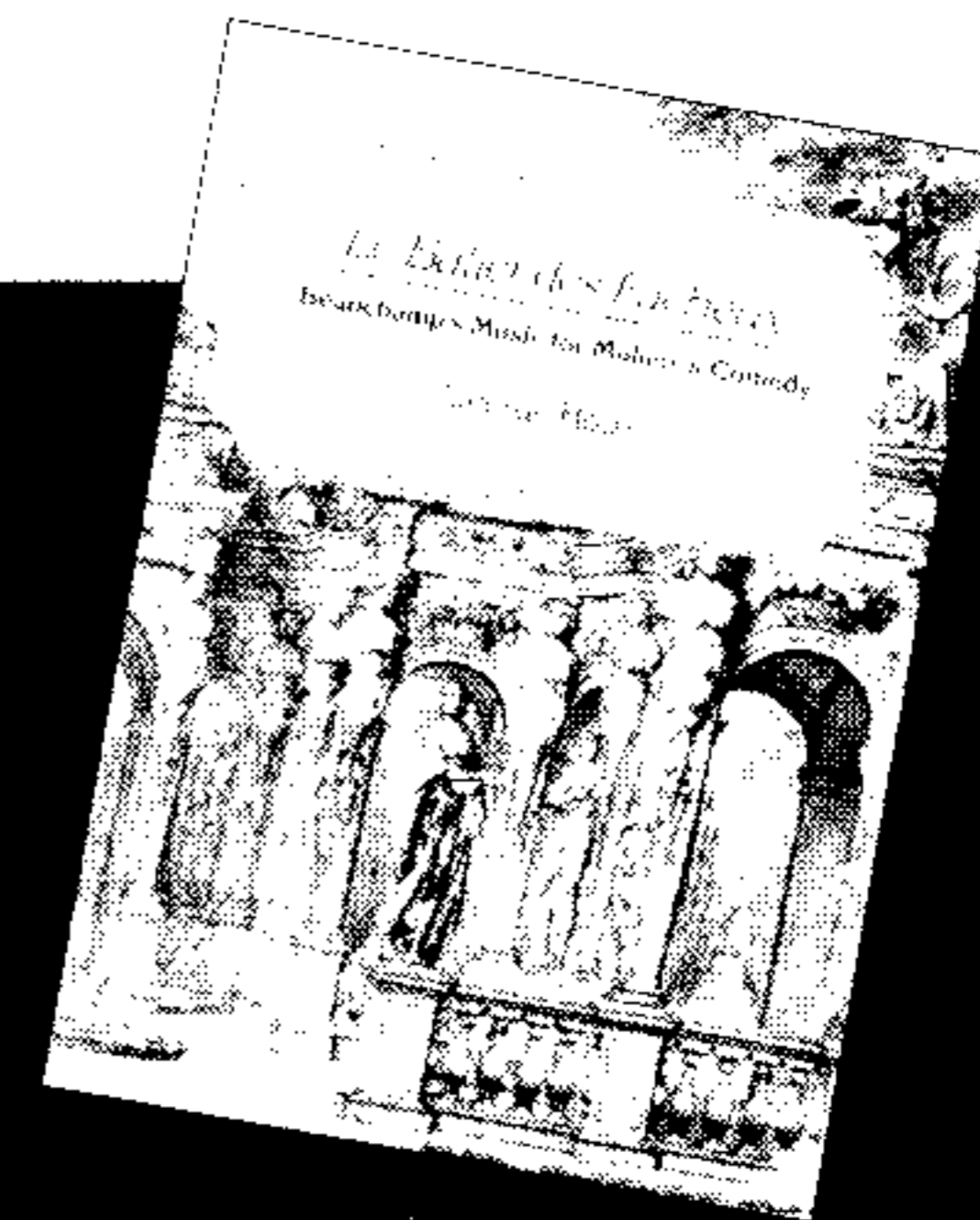
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1 François Couperin, *L'art de toucher le clavecin* (Paris, 1716), ed. and trans. M. Halford (Sherman Oaks, CA, 1974), p.49.

2 E. Bodky, *The interpretation of Bach's keyboard works* (Cambridge, MA, 1960), p.190.

3 A. Dolmetsch, *The interpretation of the music of the XVII and XVIII centuries* (London, 1915), pp.53-65; Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anleitung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752; 3/Breslau, 1789; R/Kassel, 1953), chap. v, §21, p.58. Dolmetsch refers also to C. P. E. Bach, Rellstab, Türk and Agricola, but only to support his reliance on Quantz.

4 The title of chap. 3 of Dolmetsch, *The interpretation of the music of the XVII and XVIII centuries*.

5 R. Donington, *The interpretation of early music* (rev. edn, 1974), pp.441-51.

6 T. Dart, *The interpretation of music* (London, 1954), p.81.

7 F. Neumann: 'La note pointée et la soi-disant "manière française"', *Revue de musicologie*, I (1965), pp.66-92, trans. as 'The dotted note and the so-called "French style"', *Early music*, v (1977), pp.310-24; 'External evidence and uneven notes', *Musical quarterly*, lii (1966), pp.448-64; 'The question of rhythm in the two versions of Bach's French Overture, BWV831', *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque music in honor of A. Mendel* (Kassel, 1974), pp.183-94; 'Facts and fiction about overdotted', *Musical quarterly*, lxiii (1977), pp.155-85; 'Once more: the "French overture style"', *Early music*, vii (1979), pp.39-45; 'The overdotted syndrome: anatomy of a delusion', *Musical quarterly*, lxvii (1981), pp.305-47.

8 M. Collins, 'A reconsideration of French over-dotting', *Music and letters*, I (1969), pp.111-23; D. Fuller, 'Dotted, the "French style", and Frederick Neumann's Counter-Reformation', *Early music*, v (1977), pp.517-43; J. O'Donnell, 'The French style and the overtures of Bach', *Early music*, vii (1979), pp.190-96, 336-45; G. Pont, 'Handel's overtures for harpsichord or organ', *Early music*, xi (1983), pp.309-22.

9 S. E. Hefling, *Rhythmic alteration in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century*

*music: 'notes inégales' and overdotted* (New York, 1993).

10 Hefling, *Rhythmic alteration*, pp.xii, 74, 145; the phrase in quotation marks is from Donington's *The interpretation of early music* (p.451).

11 F. Neuman, 'Notes inégales for Bach, overdotted for everybody?', *Historical performance*, vii (1994), pp.13-26; S. E. Hefling, 'Déjà vu: all over again?', *Historical performance*, vii (1994), pp.85-94.

12 In one instance, even the publisher. See Neuman, 'External evidence', p.455.

13 Neuman, 'The question of rhythm', p.484.

14 W. Apel, *Die Notation der polyphonen Musik* (Leipzig, 1970), pp.118f.; Hefling, *Rhythmic alteration*, pp.66-7.

15 Late German Baroque style is tolerant of even the sharpest dissonances, as long as they are introduced with some melodic 'justification' of one sort or another (as passing or changing notes, suspensions etc.). No composer of the time would 'waste' dissonances like these in the present example, letting

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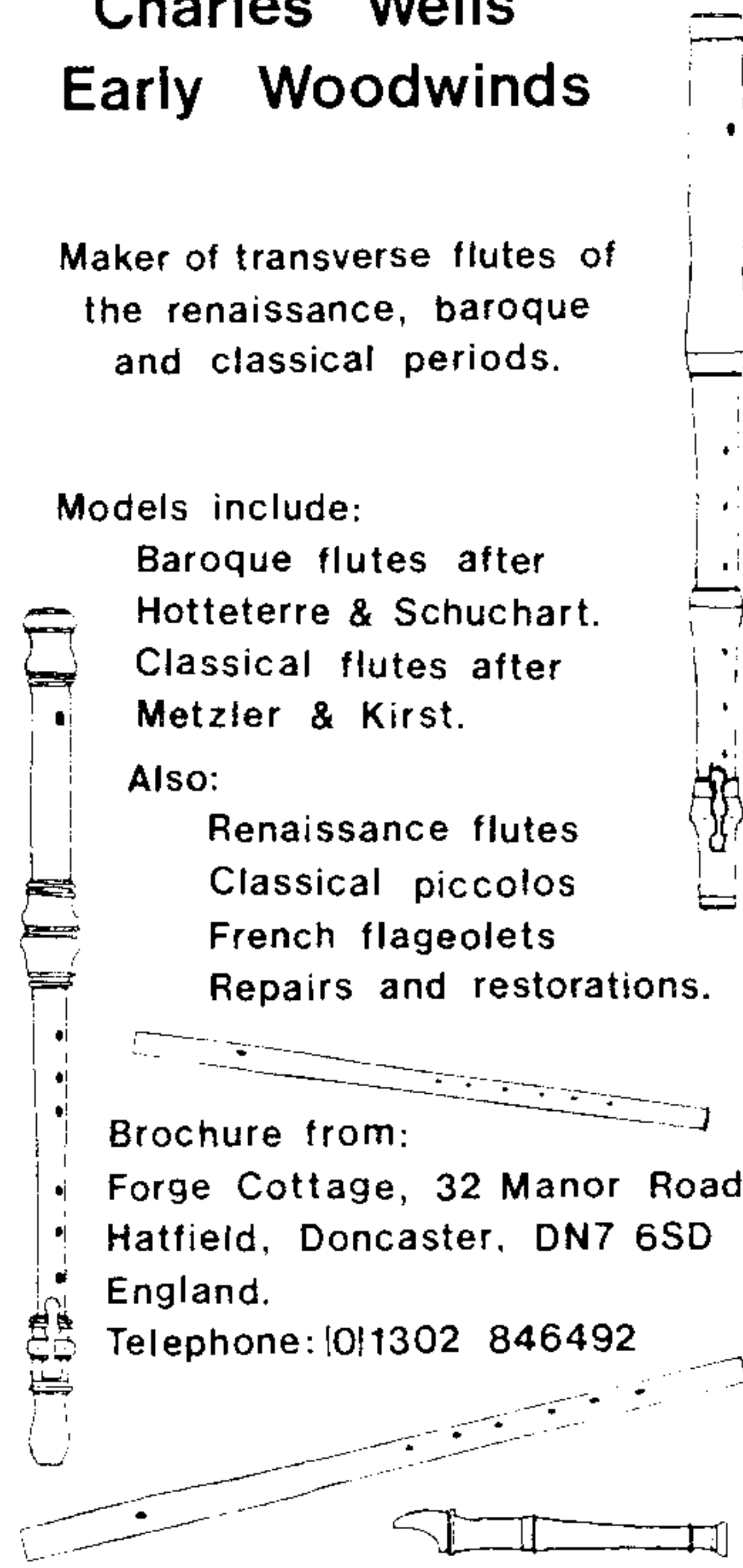
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them occur as if by chance, or by error.

16 C. P. E. Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (Berlin, 1753; R/Leipzig, 1969), part I, chap. ii, §11 (p.65) and table III, fig.vi.

17 Neumann, 'Facts and fiction', pp.164f.

18 Roger North, *The Muscicall Grammarian, 1728*, ed. M. Chan and J. C. Kasser (Cambridge, 1990), f.135 (p.262); the music example is on f.72 (p.184).

19 W. Emery and C. Wolff, NBA v/2, *Kritische Bericht* (Kassel, 1981), p.51.

20 Collins, 'A reconsideration of French over-dotting'; Donington, *The interpretation of early music*, p.668; Emery and Wolff, *Kritischer Bericht*.

21 Neuman, 'External evidence', p.453; 'The question of rhythm', p.186.

22 E.g. in ii, bars 1, 11, 12, 13, 19, 144, 147, 148, 153, 159, 162, where the dotting is limited to one voice (or two rhythmically identical voices), all other parts being static [↓].

23 For a similar conclusion, see L. Schenbeck, 'Tempo and rhythm in

Bach's cantata *ouvertures*', *BACH*, xvii (1986), pp.3-16.

24 See *Das wohltemperirte Clavier*, book 1, NBA, v/6.1, ed. A. Dürr (Kassel, 1989), pp.4, 6.

25 William Malloch has tried to minimize the problem of overdotting by a similar argument ('Bach and the French overture', *Musical quarterly*, lxxv (1991), pp.174-97), but I still doubt that fast tempo will solve all overdotting problems. A decidedly fast tempo does not seem the best for Bach's French overtures, which surpass in rhythmic density and complexity those of Lully or even Handel. Malloch's position reflects an overall trend, biased against really slow tempos. But the tempo policy of modern performance practice deserves a separate discussion.

26 Leonhardt: Deutsche Harmonia Mundi, ic 065-99867, *rec* 1967; Pinnock: Archiv, ST 2533-424, *rec* 1979.

27 Leonhardt: Deutsche Harmonia Mundi GD 77149, *rec* 1978; Pinnock: Archiv CD 415130-2, *rec* 1980.

28 *Landowska on music*, ed. D. Restout (London, 1965), p.387.

29 EMI 51-43371, *rec* 11/1933; RCA KR 11018/1, *rec* 1945.

30 CBS 72261, *rec* 1955; Frequenz/Memoria CD-991-007, *rec* 1959; CBS D 37779, *rec* 1981.

31 EMI/Deutsche Harmonia Mundi CD- 7-47601-2, *rec* 1985.

32 Scott Ross: Erato CD 2292-45434-2, *rec* 1988; Christophe Rousset: L'Oiseau-Lyre CD 433054-2, *rec* 1990.

33 BWV1067/1 (a: fl, vn I, vn II, bars 203, 205, 212); BWV169/1 (b: timp, bars 1-3; c: ob II, III, bars 3, 169, 174; d: tromba I, bar 4). See NBA, vii/1, *Krit. Ber.*, ed. H. Bessler and H. Grüss (Kassel, 1967), pp.50, 93ff.

34 For example, BWV1066-69 with the English Baroque Soloists, dir. John Eliot Gardiner, Erato, CD 2292-45192/3-2, *rec* 1983; BWV1067, with the English Concert, dir. Trevor Pinnock, Archiv ST 2533-410, *rec* 1978; BWV1069 (with the same), Archiv ST 2533-440, *rec* 1979.

35 Archiv CD 289415671-2, *rec* 4/1982 (BWV1067); 5/1985 (BWV1066, 1068, 1069).

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