Apr 20th, 3:00 PM - 3:20 PM

Improvisation: The History of Unplanned Notes in Structured Music

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Since improvisation is an important aspect of music in today's society, questions arise whether improvisation was essential in music from the past or whether it even existed in the past. Rather than discussing when improvisation first began, this paper will discuss the evolution of improvisation in music history. This paper argues that improvisation did exist in the medieval period, and will seek to show certain ways in which it was evident and how it developed in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.

The idea of improvisation could be understood in various ways; however, to clarify the context in which it will be used, this paper will present a definition. The sense of improvisation that is more likely associated with drama, music, and choreographed dance in the Middle Ages "refers to the addition of supplementary material to a scripted but incomplete text."[1] In other words, material is presented or improvised as a result of pre-established material, which provides structure. In regard to music, "[m]usical improvisation is likewise conditioned by structural conventions which were at times codified into very precise rules."[2] There were precise rules that governed the use of improvisation. As Tinctoris shows in his book *The Art of Counterpoint*, counterpoint was "either written out or improvised."[3] (Despite the fact that Tinctoris published this work in 1477, many characteristics of music in the fifteenth century, such as the *formes fixes* as well as "improvised. . .counterpoint," were basically in the style of a medieval art.)[4] When counterpoint was improvised, also known as singing *super librum*,[5] there was a structure upon

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[1] Timothy J. McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 12.
[2] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 18.
[3] Johannes Tinctoris, *The Art of Counterpoint*, trans. and ed. Albert Seay (N.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1961), 102.
[4] John Caldwell, *Medieval Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 253.
[5] Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 103.

which it was built – either a plainchant or a figured song[6] – that required the observance of rules. Thus, most improvised music contained structure. This definition for improvisation can be considered regarding the medieval period (which is interchangeable with the Middle Ages).[7] However, this paper argues that improvisation changes over time as music progresses in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Thus, the definition of improvisation will be modified as new information is revealed about improvisation in different time periods. In order to understand the use of improvisation in the medieval period, it is necessary to put aside any other connotations that may exist with this word and to study the essence of medieval music in order to understand what improvisation looked like in that time. The use of the word *improvisation* became popular in the nineteenth century when synonyms to this word began being used in titles, such as *impromptu* or *moment musicale*, suggesting that the music was made up on the spot and was unplanned.[8] However, despite these impressions that were given, the music was probably just as planned as other works that were composed.[9] Therefore, it is important not to think of medieval music as the result of "the impulsive and the unplanned,"[10] but to understand that improvisation was planned and did contain structure. In fact, this paper will demonstrate that improvisation contained some form of structure regardless of the time period. Therefore, since improvisation and composition both contain good development based on structure, people should not view them as two completely separate ideas. Rather, improvisation and composition should sound indistinguishable to the audience.[11] With this idea of improvisation, in order to further

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[6] Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 105.
[7] Leo Treitler, "Medieval Improvisation," in *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made* (N.p.: Oxford University Press, 2007): 3, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199214761.003.0001.
[8] Treitler, "Medieval Improvisation," 4.
[9] Treitler, "Medieval Improvisation," 4.
[10] Treitler, "Medieval Improvisation," 4.
[11] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 21.

understand how it developed from the medieval period to the Renaissance and the Baroque, it is important to first see how musicians employed improvisation in the Middle Ages.

The idea that "melismatic chants were improvised" goes back many centuries before AD 900.[12] However, there is much debate among scholars concerning the early Gregorian chant in regard to its composition, improvisation, oral traditions, and musical notation.[13] Therefore, the focus of medieval improvisation in this paper will begin with the art of discant. Discant can be defined as "the singing of consonant intervals over given melodies."[14]

Example 1, Excerpt from *The Art of Counterpoint*

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[12] Caldwell, *Medieval Music*, 19.

[13] Leo Treitler, "Written Music and Oral Music: Improvisation in Medieval Performance," in *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made* (N.p.: Oxford University Press, 2007): 1-10, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199214761.003.0002.

[14] Rob C. Wegman, "From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450-1500," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 413, http://www.jstor.org/stable/831769.

In this example, Tinctoris shows the harmonic intervals made with a set tenor line.[16] The art of counterpoint involved in discant was an oral tradition that included the practice of improvisation.[17] The use of terms such as *discant* can be seen as early as the fourteenth century.[18] "Wyclif, for example, writing in the second half of the fourteenth century, condemns the musical practices of the clergy," which include discant.[19] As is clearly notable, this improvisation occurred with the voice. While "the terms 'counter' and 'discant' refer only to a single improvising voice," there is strong evidence that two or more improvisatory voices were a common practice as well.[20] Tinctoris states that these voices had to primarily focus on the tenor line and make sure that they were improvising consonances over it; however, he did praise the practice of planning and preparing beforehand for multiple voices to harmonize "a fuller and more suave [effect]."[21] Thus, it is evident that improvisation was not something unplanned or completely spontaneous, but a creatively-planned structure following a set of rules. The tradition of discant in England eventually crossed over to the main continent where local musicians adopted these practices of improvisation that later developed into what they called fauxbourdon,

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[15] Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 110-11.
[16] Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 110.
[17] Wegman, "Maker to Composer," 413.
[18] Ann Besser Scott, "The Beginnings of Fauxbourdon: A New Interpretation," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1971): 346, http://www.jstor.org/stable/830274.
[19] Scott, "Beginnings of Fauxbourdon," 346.
[20] Scott, "Beginnings of Fauxbourdon," 346-47.
[21] Tinctoris, *Art of Counterpoint*, 105.

which is a specific form of discant in which one of the improvised lines is in the bottom voice.[22] This shows that improvisation was common in the medieval period.

However, improvisation was not only evident in the voice but in instrumental music as well. It is evident that instruments did play a role in the medieval period, including in the use of improvisation. Not only were they used for accompanying voices in polyphony, but "they were also used, from the thirteenth century, in alternation with them."[23] Furthermore, since voices were able to improvise polyphony, "instrumentalists could do the same."[24] In addition, "until the end of the fourteenth century instrumentalists evidently worked almost exclusively within an aural tradition."[25] Therefore, evidence for instrumental improvisation is more clearly seen in the Renaissance period, even though, according to Timothy McGee, "[t]here has never been any doubt that. . .[i]nstrumentalists improvised music for dancing and processing."[26] Nevertheless, in these circumstances, instrumentalists still had a foundation or reference point to which they could improvise, such as the structure of the dance. Thus, the practice of instrumental and vocal improvisation continued to develop in the following years after the medieval period.

As music advanced to the age of the Renaissance, improvisation did not disappear, but rather it developed further in various ways and continued to be employed. Counterpoint, which found much use in the medieval times, also existed in the Renaissance. "For music students of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it [counterpoint] meant something different: a set of practices, partly improvised, that depended on acute aural skills."[27] The fact that people in the city of Leiden were still teaching discant, a form of counterpoint, in 1454 shows that

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[22] Scott, "Beginnings of Fauxbourdon," 345.
[23] Caldwell, *Medieval Music*, 91.
[24] Caldwell, *Medieval Music*, 91.
[25] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 98.
[26] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 31.
[27] Richard Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), 28.

counterpoint continued well into the Renaissance.[28] The students were learning "the practical skill of singing correct successions of consonant intervals" by practical application, which included improvising counterpoint over monophonic tunes sung by their master.[29] Again, in this example, the students had a structure upon which to improvise. They used the monophonic tunes, sung by their master, as foundations with which they could then practice their improvised discant. Thus, it is evident that improvised counterpoint continued in the centuries following the Middle Ages; however, Gnorimus, a teacher of extemporized counterpoint, worried that the counterpoint, which used "improvisation upon a given melody," was in decline because experienced musicians had turned away from using it.[30] Yet, it is clear that counterpoint whether in improvisation or in composition did not decline. Although the oral tradition of counterpoint, according to Rob C. Wegman in *Improvising Early Music*, "has died out," it is possible through the available written music from that time to understand traces of what was heard.[31] Since the art of counterpoint, though it was often unwritten, infiltrated the composition process by creating genres such as faburden as well as fauxbourdon;[32] it is evident that pieces that fall under these genres are a direct influence of improvisation. The same techniques that were used for improvising counterpoint were used to compose pieces in the aforementioned genres.[33] One example is John Dustable's piece *Quam pulchra es*, which was composed in the early fifteenth century, and provides illustrations to fifteenth century counterpoint.

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[28] Wegman, "Maker to Composer," 414.
[29] Wegman, "Maker to Composer," 416.
[30] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 28-29.
[31] Rob C. Wegman, Johannes Menke, and Peter Schubert, *Improvising Early Music: The History of Musical Improvisation from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Baroque* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 48.
[32] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 28-30.
[33] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 30.

Example 2, *Quam pulchra es*

The counterpoint in the example is not the same as fourteenth-century counterpoint because of

the display of a large quantity of consonances by using thirds and sixths.[35] As a result,

counterpoint was still evident in the fifteenth century.

Furthermore, it did not stop in the fifteenth century, but "[t]he practice of improvisatory

counterpoint. . .was cultivated throughout the sixteenth century and beyond."[36] Hippolito

Chamaterò di Negri, who was a "choirmaster at the Duomo of Udine," compiled a collection of

liturgical music which contained "polyphonic Introits for several major feasts in the liturgical

calendar."[37] This collection, which is titled *Li introiti fondati sopra il canto fermo del basso*,

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[34] J. Peter Burkholder and Claude V. Palisca, eds., *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, vol. 1, *Ancient to Baroque* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 179-80.

[35] Burkholder and Palisca, *Norton Anthology of Western Music*, 182.

[36] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 32.

[37] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 48.

were "essentially records, transcriptions, of an improvised practice that could be heard in the Duomo under his [Chamaterò] influence."[38]

Example 3, Excerpt from *Li introiti fondati sopra il canto fermo del basso*

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This example provides the beginning pages of this collection, which, as Chamaterò describes, contains music, printed in 1574, that was the result of improvised music being transcribed.[40] Therefore, there exists "a reliable idea of improvised polyphony as it could typically be heard in Italy in the late sixteenth century."[41] Even though its popularity may have decreased towards the end of the sixteenth century, "German theorists in the period 1550-1650 observed that extemporized counterpoint, although by then rare in churches, was still being practiced."[42]

In the Renaissance, various ways of improvisation developed as music continued to advance. Performers as well as composers often worked hand in hand on pieces, and it was often

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[38] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 48.
[39] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 49.
[40] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 48.
[41] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 50.
[42] Wegman, "Maker to Composer," 420.

"unnecessary and unworthy to specify too clearly how and what to play or sing."[43] In other words, the art of improvised counterpoint was manifest since composers did not present their performers with every single note they wanted them to execute. Also, the performer had the ability to interpret how to play or sing a piece of music without it being notated. "[P]rofessional musicians depended on their knowledge of these unwritten conventions to flesh out scores."[44] However, as music printing continued to advance, the conventions of music notation changed, thus allowing new ways of improvisation to develop.[45] Concerning instrumentalists, by 1475, they "incorporated three basic approaches in their performances: they would play a piece as written, they could add embellishments, or they could improvise."[46] Embellishments were simply a less elaborated form of improvisation. These changes resulted because of the increase in music notation. Adding embellishments was a necessity for all performers and involved adding "decorations to simple melodic outlines."[47] One area where both vocalists and instrumentalists could improvise by adding embellishments was around cadences.[48] Conforti, "a virtuoso falsettist," presents an example of music in his *Breve et facile maniera d'essercitarsi a far passaggi* that shows how ornaments were added in a cadence of a descending second.[49]

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[43] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 216.
[44] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 216.
[45] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 216-17.
[46] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 98.
[47] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 99.
[48] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 222.
[49] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 222.

Example 4, Excerpt from *Breve et facile maniera d'essercitarsi a far passaggi*

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These examples provide evidence of a variety of ways in which melodic material was rhythmically added on a cadence so that the "original melody is drowned in a flood of energetic ornament."[51] The cadences provided a set format or structure upon which a musician could then improvise embellishments that were the result of a planned idea.

In addition to embellishments, there were several other ways in which musicians could improvise. One way for musicians to create variety in a piece was "to base an improvisatory scheme upon repetitions of a bass pattern."[52] For example, in Susato's piece *Passe e medio*, performers playing the upper parts would take turns improvising over a repeating bass pattern.[53]

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[50] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 223.
[51] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 222-23.
[52] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 102.
[53] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 104.

Example 5, *Passe e medio*

The bass pattern in this example was "intended to be repeated, undoubtedly many times, for

dancing."[55] Since such repeated patterns eventually turned into a harmonic structure, musicians

could use this framework as "foundations for improvisatory performances."[56] These are just a

few ways in which improvisation, whether with the voice or with instruments, manifested itself

within various structures in the Renaissance.

Next, the variety of improvisation did not decline during the Baroque period; on the

contrary, improvisation continued to develop and manifest itself in numerous ways.

Improvisation in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance always had some form of structure

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[54] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 105.
[55] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 104.
[56] McGee, *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 104.

upon which it was built. Likewise in the Baroque, improvisation had a structure that aided its

practice. Not every aspect of music made a complete change with the beginning of the Baroque

period.[57] "The basic principles for organizing sound progressions, which are valid for

composition as well as for improvisation, had already been established in the 16th century and

many did not change."[58] In other words, even though some aspects of music at the beginning of

the seventeenth century changed, the "technique of composition and improvisation. . .was

founded on the roots of Renaissance polyphony."[59] Since counterpoint had been established in

the Renaissance, it continued into the Baroque. The compositional process as well as the process

of improvisation had its basis in counterpoint.[60] Johannes Menke explains in *Improvising Early*

Music that "composition is defined by counterpoint."[61] However, "the concept of sound

progression, defined by the contrapuntal relationship of the outer voices to one another," in

Baroque music did develop further from the Renaissance.[62] Whereas the sound structure of the

Renaissance concentrated more on the tenor voice in the middle, known as *con centro*, the

Baroque focused primarily on the outer voices, known as *ex centro*.[63] "[T]he *ex centro* structure

was clearly founded upon the bass over which the soprano built the framework."[64] This

framework then provided a setting to improvise the inner chordal structure with a continuo.[65]

Even though the establishment of the outer-voice setting was evident in the Renaissance, this

setting dominated the Baroque.[66] The preferred method for harmonizing over a melody included

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[57] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 69.
[58] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 69.
[59] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.
[60] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.
[61] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 71.
[62] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.
[63] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.
[64] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.
[65] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 71.
[66] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 70.

using "thirds and fifths between the soprano and the bass."[67] This is evident in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*.

Example 6, Excerpt from *Orfeo* (reduction of the outer voices)

Here, in Act III of the play, Monteverdi provides "a very *ex centro* embellished melody over an ostinato bass."[69] Since this excerpt is a reduction to display the outer voices more clearly, it is obvious that thirds and fifths were favored. "This evokes the image of an improvising singer, who gravitates towards the 3-5 structure and fills it out with his own expressive and *ex centro* melodies."[70] Thus, within the *ex centro* setting, thirds and fifths were the emphasized intervals between the soprano and bass. Consequently, using these intervals, "the composer or improviser

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[67] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 71.
[68] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 76.
[69] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 75.
[70] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 75.

is quickly able to find a 'harmonization' that sounds convincing."[71] These intervals in the outer voices, amongst others, standardized the Baroque period and laid the foundation for sound progression.[72] Therefore, it is clear to see that counterpoint advanced in the Baroque as a result of being established in the Renaissance.

Another important aspect of the Baroque setting is the continuo.[73] The basso continuo existed prior to the Baroque period; however, it developed further in the Baroque by becoming "an integral part of the whole, without which the rest of the composition would be incomplete."[74] Improvisation in the basso continuo was evident before the Baroque period through the accompaniment of "chords and also counterpoints suitable to the melody" over a given bass.[75] However, an improvisatory practice in the basso continuo was still evident in the eighteenth century. F. T. Arnold, the author of *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass*, provides an example from Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, who had written much about the art of accompaniment from a figured bass.[76] Bach describes that a performer may begin to improvise embellishments as a result of inspiration, and therefore, not play the indicated harmonies.[77] The accompanist must then improvise by playing alternate harmonies based on what he hears the performer playing.[78]

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[71] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 74.
[72] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 77-78.
[73] Wegman, Menke, and Schubert, *Improvising Early Music*, 71.
[74] F. T. Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass: As Practiced in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 1:9.
[75] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:5.
[76] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:468.
[77] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:469.
[78] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:469.

Example 7, Excerpt from *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass: As Practiced in the 17th and 18th Centuries*

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In this example, the first line shows different harmonies that the accompanist could follow, while the second line indicates "a delayed progression" that the accompanist may have to follow if the performer altered the original harmonies.[80] Nonetheless, the accompanist had various ideas of what to do by following the structure set by the performer should he decide to improvise.

As was seen previously in the Renaissance period, adding embellishments to pieces was a necessity for most performers. This practice of embellishing melodic lines carried over into the Baroque period and existed in great quantities. Even though Ben Bechtel in his article "Improvisation in Early Music" distinguishes between *ornamentation* and *embellishment*, not every article or book makes that distinction, and some even use them interchangeably. In this part of the paper, *embellishments* will refer to "extensive and elaborate melodic additions, including heterophony and countermelodies."[81] In other words, the melodic line is altered past the point of simply adding a neighboring or a passing tone. On the other hand, *ornamentations* will generally refer to "uniform or standardized units of a few notes, such as trills, mordents, and

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[79] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:469.
[80] Arnold, *The Art of Accompaniment*, 1:469.
[81] Ben Bechtel, "Improvisation in Early Music," *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 5 (January 1980): 110, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3395787.

turns."[82] One example of ornamentation was in the use of the cadenza, which included the

"spontaneous ornamentation which is made by a solo part, at the close of a piece."[83]

Example 8, Excerpt from *Sonata in F Major*

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In this illustration, Loeillet, a Baroque composer, writes out a cadenza in his *Sonata in F Major*

for flute, and violin or oboe.[85] This is an ornament rather than an embellishment because the

cadenza is limited to a set of notes, usually over the fifth of the root.[86] Thus, there is evidence of

how a cadenza was ornamented at the close of a piece. These cadenzas, even though they were

spontaneous, they still followed a set of common practices[87] showing that there was structure

involved.

The art of improvising ornaments also extended into orchestras of the eighteenth century.

However, several writers seem to disapprove the practice of improvisation in an orchestra

because of the haphazard manner in which it was being played.[88] One of these writers, Johann

Georg Tromlitz, makes the following statement: "Extempore ornamentation really concerns only

the concerto and solo performer. In orchestral pieces, where several play from the same part, one

must play what is written, so that no confusion will arise out of such additions–for one performer

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[82] Bechtel, "Improvisation in Early Music," 110.
[83] Robert Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance* (London: Faber Music, 1982), 96.
[84] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 104.
[85] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 104.
[86] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 96.
[87] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 96.
[88] John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw, "Improvised Ornamentation in Eighteenth-Century Orchestras," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 527, http://www.jstor.org/stable/831627.

will certainly not add the same ornamentation as another."[89] Thus, by describing that ornamentation was only supposed to be by a solo performer and not by a combination of multiple musicians, Tromlitz confirms the abundant practice of improvised ornaments in eighteenth-century orchestras.

In addition to ornamentations, performers used "free ornamentation" (which in this case equals embellishments) to improvise variations or melodies, sometimes using only notated harmony notes.[90] The identity of the performer was "almost tantamount. . .with the composer."[91] As a result, a lot of improvisation resulted from the performers investing themselves into the performance of composed music.[92] One person who portrayed a good example of such improvisations is J. S. Bach. Embellishments played a "fundamental role. . .in Bach's method of performance and improvisation."[93] Not only did Bach embellish music, but he also took this stage of improvisation one step further.[94] Bach used his practice of improvising over the music of others to stimulate creativity in his own compositions.[95] Bach's *Partita II* provides evidence for such practices.

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[89] Spitzer and Zaslaw, "Improvised Ornamentation," 528.

[90] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 9.

[91] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 91.

[92] Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*, 92.

[93] Warwick Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus to Composition in Bach's Partita 2," *Bach* 31, no. 1 (2000): 98, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41640467.

[94] Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus," 98.

[95] Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus," 99.

Example 9, Openings of the sarabandes of Kuhnau and Bach

Here the opening of Bach's *Sarabande* (second staff) in his *Partita II* is contrasted with the opening of Johann Kuhnau's sarabande in his "partie of the same key."[97] Bach uses "details of the intervallic relationships" as well as harmonic progressions from Kuhnau's music in his own music.[98] However, he accomplishes this by embellishing over the already composed music of Kuhnau in order to write more elaborate music of his own, as is evident in the example provided. So, in this case, Bach uses the structure of another person's music as his foundation for improvising in order to compose his own music. Consequently, Bach provided another illustration of how improvisation continued permeating the Baroque period through different practices.

Thus, after having analyzed musical examples from each time period, there is evidence that supports the claim that improvisation did in fact exist in the medieval period, and that it

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[96] Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus," 100.
[97] Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus," 99.
[98] Cole, "Improvisation as a Stimulus," 100.

continued to develop in the Renaissance and Baroque periods. In addition, there is proof that

each example and musical practice of improvisation contained structure and planning

beforehand. While many people may associate improvisation with the idea of randomly playing

notes out of the blue to somehow fit into a coherent whole, improvisation is quite different. Not

only did improvisation exist as far back as the medieval time, but it also contained structure.

Despite the fact that some people, like Gnorimus, worried about the decline of improvisation,[99]

or that some people, like Tromlitz, disproved of improvised ornamentation in Baroque orchestras

by condemning its practice;[100] there is no evidence that indicates that improvisation did not exist,

nor that people denied its existence. Rather, there is abundant evidence, as provided in this paper,

which shows some realities of improvisation. Improvisation required practice and planning.

While there is a significant difference between improvising and playing notated or memorized

music for the performer, the listener should be able to recognize the close similarities of the

structure and development between improvisation and composition. Now that people can

recognize the existence of improvisation in the Middle Ages and its development in the

Renaissance and Baroque periods, they can also understand its structure. With this knowledge,

people should not think lightly of any mention to improvisation, regardless of time period, but

should give credit to the well-structured and well-developed art of improvisation.

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[99] Freedman, *Music in the Renaissance*, 28-29.
[100] Spitzer and Zaslaw, "Improvised Ornamentation," 527.

Annotated Bibliography

Arnold, F. T. *The Art of Accompaniment from a Thorough-Bass: As Practiced in the 17th and 18th Centuries*. 2 vols. New York: Dover Publications, 1965.
This volume seeks to provide an exhaustive study of the thorough bass in the 17th and 18th centuries. It provides adequate information by giving musical examples, interpretations of other scholars, and citations of authorities. It shows how the thorough bass was treated and that it was a necessity in most musical performances.

Bechtel, Ben. "Improvisation in Early Music." *Music Educators Journal* 66, no. 5 (January 1980): 109-12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3395787.
This article discusses the way music was improvised in the Renaissance and Baroque era. By providing some understanding of the Renaissance and Baroque styles through some of the interpretive techniques involved in performing, the article seeks to show elements musicians used to improvise.

Burkholder, J. Peter, and Claude V. Palisca, eds. *Norton Anthology of Western Music*. Vol. 1, *Ancient to Baroque*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2014.
This anthology contains a variety of musical selections by various composers from the ancient world until the Baroque period. This includes music that was influenced by the art of improvisation.

Caldwell, John. *Medieval Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.
This book focuses on the technical aspects of medieval music. It focuses less on biographies and sociological topics, but rather concentrates on notation as the key to understanding the musical style of medieval music. Through this aspect, it shows that much music existed in the medieval period that was not improvised.

Cole, Warwick. "Improvisation as a Stimulus to Composition in Bach's Partita 2." *Bach* 31, no. 1 (2000): 96-112. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41640467.
This article discusses Bach's method for composing his partitas, specifically Partita II. It discusses how Bach may have been stimulated to compose his own music by playing and improvising over the music of others. Examples and excerpts from Bach's Partita are included to support this discussion.

Donington, Robert. *Baroque Music: Style and Performance*. London: Faber Music, 1982.
This book provides readers with a basic foundation of Baroque style and performance. It covers details of interpretation and practical application in performing. It also provides information on free ornamentation, which includes improvising variations or melodies.

Freedman, Richard. *Music in the Renaissance*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2013.
This book looks at how music developed in the Renaissance. It takes into consideration sacred, secular, and instrumental genres. As part of the development of music in the Renaissance, this book focuses on the art of improvisation as well.

Gould, Carol S., and Kenneth Keaton. "The Essential Role of Improvisation in Musical Performance." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 143-48. http://www.jstor.org/stable/432093.
This article argues that improvisation is a part of every musical performance. It starts by examining a historical background to improvisation starting in the Middle Ages. It then looks at the essence of improvisation as well as its fluency in musical performance while comparing various styles such as jazz and classical.

McGee, Timothy J. *Improvisation in the Arts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003.
This book discusses the topic of improvisation prior to the 18th century. It is not a comprehensive study of improvisation in every aspect of the arts; however, it shows different aspects of improvisation in all of the arts, including music, drama, dance, and visual art.

Menerth, Edward F., Jr. "Singing in Style: Baroque." *Music Educators Journal* 52, no. 6 (June-July 1966): 73-74+76+101-7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3390718.
This article provides an understanding of the Baroque style as a development from the Renaissance. In particular, it focuses on vocal music and how to properly understand and apply the art of the Baroque. It includes information on improvisation as a part of Baroque vocal music.

Palisca, Claude V. *Baroque Music*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968.
This book contains a panoramic view of the Baroque period. It does not contain a complete study of each composer or of every piece of Baroque music. It does, however, provide many musical examples by varying artists to show the reader the style of composition that was employed during this time. It is there to provide the reader with an understanding of the principle styles of the Baroque era.

Scott, Ann Besser. "The Beginnings of Fauxbourdon: A New Interpretation." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 24, no. 3 (Autumn 1971): 345-63. http://www.jstor.org/stable/830274.
This article looks at the development and the origin of fauxbourdon. It argues that its beginning involved the tradition of improvised polyphony in England.

Shull, Jonathan. "Locating the Past in the Present: Living Traditions and the Performance of Early Music." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15, no. 1 (June 2006): 87-111. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20184541.
This article focuses on performers of early music. It considers their philosophies, values, and ethics as they seek to revive lost traditions of performance techniques from the past.

Spitzer, John, and Neal Zaslaw. "Improvised Ornamentation in Eighteenth-Century Orchestras." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 524-77. http://www.jstor.org/stable/831627.

This article discusses the negative reasons behind the common practice of improvised ornamentations in 18th-century orchestras. It shows how the orchestra developed in regard to the use or lack of use of improvised ornamentations in the orchestra.

Stauffer, George B. *The Organ Preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980.
This book presents a detailed study of the organ preludes of Bach. It looks at the source, the style, the chronology, and other characteristics related to the prelude, giving detailed examples for each.

Tinctoris, Johannes. *The Art of Counterpoint*. Translated and edited by Albert Seay. N.p.: American Institute of Musicology, 1961. Originally published as *Liber de Arte Contrapuncti* (n.p.: n.p., 1477).
As the title mentions, this book discusses the art of counterpoint. In so doing, readers get a glimpse of some theoretical assumptions that composers held during the second half of the 15th century. It contains information on consonances, dissonances, and discords in counterpoint. It also addresses the difference between improvised and composed counterpoint, and describes them both.

Treitler, Leo. "Medieval Improvisation." In *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made*. N.p.: Oxford University Press, 2007, n.p. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199214761.003.0001.
This chapter examines the art of improvisation in medieval music. It discusses that our understanding of medieval music may be distorted as a result of our concept of improvisation because of its connotations in modern times.

Treitler, Leo. "Written Music and Oral Music: Improvisation in Medieval Performance." In *With Voice and Pen: Coming to Know Medieval Song and How It Was Made*. N.p.: Oxford University Press, 2007, n.p. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199214761.003.0002.
This chapter discusses the meaning of improvisation in medieval music practice. It argues that our understanding of improvisation may not be found in medieval times at all; but that in the medieval period, the art of composing music could involve and be the result of improvising oral as well as written music.

Wegman, Rob C. "From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450-1500." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 409-79. http://www.jstor.org/stable/831769.
Contained in this article is the development and understanding of the concept of composer. The seeming opposition between compositions and improvisations and its development is included in this discussion. The article concludes by defining and describing the new musical authorship that was established at the beginning of the 16th century.

Wegman, Rob C., Johannes Menke, and Peter Schubert. *Improvising Early Music: The History of Musical Improvisation from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Baroque*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014.

This book takes a look at improvisation in the late medieval, renaissance, and early baroque periods. It shows us that improvisation was an integral part of music education by studying the connection between improvisation and composition and by looking at music performance as well as written scores in their historical context.