


Ornamentation and Improvisation

he “long lost, late won, and yet half regained” art of ornamentation, as it has been called, figures prominently in the theories of performance practice, because improvised ornamentation in music used to be the completion of the written score. The practice is as old as music itself, though its modern terminology comes in good measure from the visual arts, with the attendant confusion when applied to music. Embellishments, diminution, division, *passaggi*, *gorgia*, *broderie*, *agréments*, *Verzierung*, and whatever else they were called, these additions to existing compositions were improvised or written down, indicated by special signs or simply by small notes, but they could also be fully integrated into the composition. It seems that the embellishments illuminate the music in an almost magical way; they become glowing, even mystical, against the body upon which they are lavished. One of the motivations for ornamentation may be the ancient *horror vacui*, the “horror of empty spaces,” which many feel should be filled; but while this is no doubt true, the artistic reasons are stronger, for one of the basic human instincts is decoration, “an irresistible and even consuming impulse” (Ada Huxtable). Fritz Winckel thought that there must be a certain neurophysiological necessity for some sort of ornamentation. At any rate, an orna-