
One of the primary tenets of studying historical performance practice is the significance of primary source accounts to assist in formulating either a technical or interpretive approach to the music, and aside from Johann Joachim Quantz’s 1752 treatise *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, the most general access points to primary sources regarding Baroque-era performance practice may be Carol MacClintock’s *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* and Oliver Strunk’s *Source Readings in Music History*. However, where MacClintock and Strunk appear to organize their excerpts according to the “feel” of the content (A Gentleman’s Recreation, On Singing, Expression and Sensibility, Principles for Performance, etc.), Dennis Shrock employs categories for practical areas of performance: Types of Solo Voices, Vibrato, Dance Tempos, Messa di Voce, Triplet Conformity, etc. This main difference makes the volume more directly usable to the performer wishing to explore fundamental topics of Baroque performance practice, as they can quickly access specific concepts without having to read around more loosely-paired excerpts like those often presented by MacClintock and Strunk, which can help create more of a context if not provide the same amount of physically applicable value.

As he is a respected choral scholar who has also published a Classical-era volume in this vein, Shrock presents a fairly impressive selection of excerpts, ranging from the pithy (“It is at all times a very good thing to play legato, in order not to interfere with the vocal part.” – Lorenzo Penna, figured bass treatise (1672) in Articulation and Phrasing: Keyboard and Lute Articulation [p. 230]) to the extensive and detailed (Georg Muffat’s entire section on “The Manner of Bowing” from *Florilegium Secundum* [239-246]). Depending upon the subject in question, the reader is sometimes supplied with what could be considered more information than is necessary, some of it entertaining, most of it enlightening but all of it potentially useful, in the end. Although many of the selections are familiar to those with experience
in performance practice, the breadth and depth of focus occasionally surprises even the most wizened. Shrock also regularly provides accompanying text throughout the book, usually to introduce or solidify a concept to modern musical eyes (especially when it may be somewhat foreign, like rhythmic alteration), almost always in a palpably pragmatic voice.

In fact, these brief moments of commentary may be one area where the book misses an opportunity: part of the value of studying primary source accounts is the importing of those concepts into a modern performance aesthetic, and Shrock’s explanations sometimes seem to consciously avoid entering into the gritty details of physically applying certain ideas in the playing of one’s instrument. However, most of those occasions are in areas not specifically within his choral experience (string bowings, instruments, keyboard and lute articulation, etc.) and his commentary for issues specific to the voice, conducting or general artistic execution are proportionally stronger. Also, there is something to be said for the contextual approach afforded by MacClintock and Strunk’s presentation of excerpts, as it requires the performer to delve more deeply into the primary resources themselves: although one may have to dig around for information that could prove to be meaningful, treatises like Quantz’s and Mersenne’s do contain a wealth of hidden gems that may provide more insight than a single extract, however intelligently selected and organized it may be.

But that remains outside of the scope of what Shrock apparently aims to accomplish: a volume which presents interested readers with thoughtful, efficient primary source content for exploring practical approaches to Baroque performance practice. For that goal, it succeeds and will likely prove to be a valuable addition to any student, teacher or library collection supporting the study of this discipline.