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This study seeks to establish the feasibility of *assai* as a moderating term in more cases than is typically assumed. Since evidence of concurrent competing definitions for the term *assai* exists from the mid- to late-18<sup>th</sup> century, understanding and putting into practice a composer's indications according to his own understanding of the term becomes murky where the word *assai* is concerned during and beyond the time when the two definitions exist concurrently. Through investigation of musical scores, examining such features as ornamentation, the relative brilliance of the work, tonality, meter, and structure, the characteristics of a piece of music that are crucial to navigating the multivalent qualities of the word *assai* are identified and tested against the actual musical content of examples from works of J. S. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, W. F. Bach, J. C. F. Bach, Johann Friedrich Agricola, C. P. E. Bach, W. A. Mozart, F. J. Haydn, Ludwig van Beethoven, Frédéric Chopin, and Franz Liszt.

ASSAI: HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF A CONTESTED MUSICAL TERM

by

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CHAPTER I  
HISTORIC DEFINITIONS OF ASSAI

As an increasing number of modern *Urtext* editions, acclaimed for their scholarly accuracy, become widely available, the artist is ostensibly brought closer to that which the composer penned. Some editions of musical texts include facsimiles of autographs, providing the inquisitive performer insight into the editorial process. However, despite the plethora of scholarly contributions available to the performer today, *Urtext* editions often offer widely divergent conclusions regarding particular issues of notation. For example, there is still considerable disagreement over the presence of and distinction between dots and dashes in autographs of works from the Viennese classical period. The open questions are not limited to ambiguous diacritical markings or indecipherable notation; all aspects of a musical text are to be scrutinized for their meaning, worth, and contribution to the composers' musical statement.

While ornamentation, the relative brilliance of the composition, meter, key, and mode all establish essential attributes of a piece's character, special attention must be given to tempo. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach in his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (1753) says, "The pace of a composition...is based on its general content as well as on the fastest notes and passages contained in it. Due consideration of

these factors will prevent an allegro from being rushed and an adagio from being dragged.”<sup>1</sup> While it is not precisely clear what Bach means by “general content,” it can be surmised that such content encompasses the aforementioned essential attributes of a piece, implying that choosing the best tempo is a result of considering these salient attributes of a given piece of music. Alternatively, Johann Joachim Quantz in his *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (1752) states, “to determine a tempo is certainly not one of the easiest matters in music, but it is therefore even more necessary to establish the most definite possible rules. Those who know how much depends on correct tempo in each piece, and what great errors can be made in this regard, will not doubt this necessity.”<sup>2</sup> While not offering much insight into the realization of a relationship between tempo and character, it is clear Quantz believes that determining an appropriate tempo plays a primary role in expressing the essence of a piece of music. In contrast to Bach’s implication that tempo is a result of determining the affect of a given piece, Quantz defines tempo as one of these essential attributes of a piece, Bach’s “general content,” stating:

To be still more convinced of the necessity of such definite rules, make an experiment and play an Adagio, for example, one, two, three, or four times slower than it should be. Is it not found that the melodies gradually expire and nothing but harmony is heard? And if an Allegro that should be played with particular fire were performed so much more slowly than it should be, the listener would certainly soon feel like going to sleep.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949), 151.

<sup>2</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, *Essay of a Method for Playing the Transverse Flute*, 2nd ed., trans. Edward R. Reilly (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 283.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Despite their concurrent employment under Frederick the Great's court in Potsdam, C. P. E. Bach and J. J. Quantz espouse differing views in their treatises. About 15 years prior, in Hamburg, Johann Mattheson, in his *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739), also links together character and tempo, stating that tempo "depends principally upon the feeling and emotion of each composer and secondarily upon good execution, or the sensitive expression of the singer and player."<sup>4</sup> Regardless of the cause-and-effect relationship, the symbiotic connection between the tempo and character of a piece of music is held up in both treatises as paramount to the successful interpretation of a musical text.

Whether the performer views tempo as an attribute itself or as a result of the "general content" of a piece, determinations of character and tempo hinge upon other clues provided in a piece of music. For example, in the case of a dance suite, a movement with the marking *minuet* instructs the performer to draw upon knowledge of the *minuet* archetype to establish a proper beat and phrase structure. This helps the performer distinguish a *minuet* from other triple-meter dances such as a *sarabande* or a *corrente* based upon a set of agreed-upon conventions developed through tradition over time. Additionally, a composer may use a tempo marking, such as *Allegro*, *Presto*, *Adagio* or *Lento*, to further aid the performer in choosing a tempo through a different series of indicative markings. Furthermore, the composer can append other descriptive words to a tempo marking, for example *molto*, *vivace*, or *assai*, to lend greater nuance to the overall speed of a piece.

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<sup>4</sup> Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister: a revised translation with critical commentary*, trans. Ernest C. Harriss (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 366.

A problem arises when the matrix of commonly understood definitions is lost or unknown to the performer, either as a result of uninformed instruction or through the influence of observed performance traditions. In many cases, a performer in search of a correct understanding of a term may simply consult a dictionary or other instructional source, find a working definition, and put it into practice, while considering the other salient characteristics of the piece. However, languages being living systems of communication that gain, lose, or redefine words over time, the critical performer is tasked with determining an interpretation appropriate to the definition understood by the composer using the term in question, which may or may not be accurately represented in current lexicons.

Determining feasible definitions for commonly used tempo descriptors, such as *Allegro* and *Adagio*, may appear to be simple. On the contrary, these two terms are related only inferentially to the speed of a composition. The performer may infer that an *Allegro*, which translates as “happy,” requires a lively tempo. Similarly, he may infer that an *Adagio*, meaning “at ease,” requires an inactive tempo. In practice, the relationship between the two terms gives them their most potent meaning. The manner in which *Adagio* implies a slower tempo relative to *Allegro* generates a tempo hierarchy based on inference. Appending descriptors to these terms, such as *molto*, *ma non troppo*, or *vivace* lends nuance to this hierarchy by exerting a heightening or lessening influence on the tempo descriptor and can also provide clues as to the general character or tone of the movement.

The Italian term *assai* is one such descriptor that is often succinctly translated in modern dictionaries as “very.” Indeed, *assai* is so widely accepted as indicative of the superlative that this definition has been used as a clue and answer pairing in crossword puzzles.<sup>5</sup> Although it might be presumed such a well-established modern definition stems from a long history of consensus, to delve into the history of the word *assai* is to reveal a more complex story that casts doubt on this received modern interpretation.

The critical performer can turn to a wide variety of sources to determine a historical definition of the word *assai*. For example, Sébastien Brossard offers the following entry on *assai* in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (1703):

Assai: Adverb of quantity, which the Italians often associate with Allegro, Adagio, Presto, & c. For some, it is synonymous with A LOT, and for others it means that the tempo & the movements should be nothing outrageous, but remain in a sufficient, ordinary fast and slow pattern, depending on the different emotions that are to be conveyed. Thus it must be understood in the Motets of this book.<sup>6</sup>

Brossard’s nuanced definition provides ample room for interpretation. It appears from the beginning of the entry that Brossard has encountered some uncertainty about the usage of the word (“for some, . . . and for others”) and is attempting to provide a clear definition for his fellow Frenchmen. He appeals to the sensibilities of the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century musician,

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<sup>5</sup> Jeanette K. Brill, “Out-Of-Place Words,” in *The New York Times Sunday Crossword Omnibus*, vol. 5, ed. Eugene T. Maleska (New York: Random House, 2000), 161.

<sup>6</sup> Sébastien de Brossard, *Dictionnaire de musique*, (Paris: Ballard, 1703). Trans. by Lucie Eckert in an email dated Oct. 18, 2012. ASSAI: Adverbe de quantité, que les Italiens joignent souvent avec Allegro, Adagio, Presto, &c. Selon quelques uns il veut dire BEAUCOUP; & selon d’autres que la mesure & les mouvements ne doivent avoir rien d’outré, mais demeurer dans une sage médiocrité de lenteur, & de vitesse, selon les différents caractères qu’il faut exprimer, c’est ainsi qu’il faut l’entendre dans les Motets de ce Livre.



citing the character of the piece as the determinant factor for the tempo within the framework of the doctrine of the affects.

A concurring example found in Johann Gottfried Walther's 1732 book *Musikalisches Lexikon oder musikalische Bibliothek* (1732), first published in Germany less than 30 years after Brossard's *Dictionnaire*, is in full agreement with its interpretation of *assai*. Furthermore, Walther's entry is so similar as to suggest he was aware of Brossard's attempt and simply translated it into his native language:

Assai (Italian): an adverb of quantity, usually added to the words *adagio*, *allegro*, *presto*, etc. *Assez* (French). Some say it should mean very or much, while others say the beat should be maintained neither too fast nor too slowly but at the appropriate or fitting level, whether it be slow or fast, according to what the various prescribed characters require.<sup>7</sup>

As in Brossard's dictionary entry, Walther asks the reader to consider the character of the piece as it relates to a decision regarding tempo. In both entries the key words are "sufficient" (*sage*) and "appropriate" or "fitting" (*gehöriger Maße*).

The *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730) published in London by Nathan Bailey, includes an entry on *assai* which goes one step beyond Brossard and Walther's entries:

Assai [in *Musick Books*] is always joined with some other Word to weaken the Strength or Signification of the Word to which it is joined. Thus, for example, when it is joined with the Words *Vivace Allegro* or *Presto*, all which denote a quick Movement, it denotes that the Musick must not be performed quite so brisk or quick as each of these Words alone, would require: Again, being joined to

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<sup>7</sup> Johann Gottfried Walther, *Musikalisches Lexikon*. (Leipzig: Wolfgang Deer), 1732. Trans. by Scott Hendrix in an email dated October 3, 2012. Assai (ital.) ein Adverbium quantitatis, so oft zu den Worten: *adagio*, *allegro*, *presto*, &c. gesetzt wird. *Assez* (gall.) wie einige wollen, soll es sehr oder viel heissen; und nach andern: es soll der Tact nicht zu geschwinde, noch zu langsam, sondern in gehöriger Maße, was recht ist (quod satis est) es mag nun Langsam oder geschwinde gehen, fortgeführt werden, nachdem die verschiedene vorgezeichnete Characteres es erfordern.

either of the Words, *Adagio*, *grave* or *largo*, which all denote a slow Movement, it intimates that the Musick must not be performed quite so slow, as each of those Words, if alone, would require.<sup>8</sup>

Bailey's was one of the most popular English language dictionaries of its time, having gone through thirty editions by 1802. His *assai* entry, though not similar in structure to Brossard's and Walther's, reflects the understanding of *assai* as sufficient, thus a weakening modifier. If anything, Bailey's entry is all the more certain in its assessment of the word since his definition is considerably more direct in ignoring the intensifying tradition, offering only the lessening interpretation.

Underpinning these three definitions is the notion that *assai* denotes sufficiency or the moderation of a tempo indication. Brossard's "sufficient" (*sage*) and Walther's "appropriate or fitting" (*gehöriger Maße*) are echoed in Bailey's word "weaken." Looking to the etymology of the term, we find confirmation in the Latin root for *assai*, *ad satis*, meaning "to satisfaction" or "sufficiently." Given the occurrence in several musical cultures of definitions consistent with the Latin root, it is tempting to postulate this as the original definition of *assai*, thus limiting the strength of the term with which it is paired. Such a definition might have metamorphosed and grew with usage, until the modern definition came to predominate.

The story is not so simple as that, however, for only 23 years after Walther's confirmation of Brossard's definition, an entry appears in Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg's *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen* (1755) placing *Allegro assai* under "very fast or very

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<sup>8</sup> Nathan Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum: or a More Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary Than Any Extant*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed., s.v."assai," (London: Lamb, 1730).

moving” (*sehr geschwind oder sehr bewegt*) in his catalogue of tempos.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Leopold Mozart, in his *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756), goes so far as to describe *Allegro assai* as “little distinguished from” *presto* and places it faster than *molto allegro*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, 65 years after Brossard and some 30 years after Walther and Bailey, Jean-Jacques Rousseau publishes a *Dictionnaire de Musique* (1768) that includes an entry for the word *assai* in which he roundly criticizes Brossard and gives a definition diametrically opposed to that of Bailey-Walther-Brossard:

Assai. Augmentative adverb that often relates to the word that describes the movement of a melody. So “presto assai” and “largo assai,” mean “quite fast,” “quite slow.” Abbot Brossard made one of his usual mistakes when he substituted its true and unique meaning with “sufficient, ordinary fast and slow pattern.” He believed that Assai meant Assez (“enough”). However one must admire this Author’s singular idea to prefer a foreign language, which he did not understand, to the vocabulary of his mother tongue.<sup>11</sup>

Claiming the conflation of meaning between *assai* and *assez* as a mistake, Rousseau provides a clearly opposed definition. Subsequently, many others follow Rousseau’s, Mozart’s, and Marpurg’s lead. Among them, Johann Georg Sulzer’s *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* (1771) states, “Allegro di molto or allegro assai designates the very

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, *Anleitung zum Clavierspielen*, (Berlin: A. Haude & J. C. Spener, 1755), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, third edition, (Augsburg: Johann Jakob Lotter and Son, 1787), 49. Trans. by author.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique*, (Paris: Duchesne, 1768). Trans. by Lucie Eckert. Assai. Adverbe augmentatif qu’on trouve assez souvent joint au mot qui indique le mouvement d’un Air. Ainsi presto Assai, largo Assai, signifient fort vite, fort lent. L’Abbé Brossard a fait sur ce mot une de ses bévues ordinaires en substituant à son vrai & unique sense celui d’une sage médiocrité de lenteur ou de vitesse. Il a cru qu’Assai signifioit assez. Sur quoi l’on doit admirer la singuliere idée qu’a cet Auteur de préférer, pour son vocabulaire, à sa langue maternelle une langue étrangère qu’il n’entendoit pas.

nimble”<sup>12</sup> and Muzio Clementi’s *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Pianoforte* (1801), an Italian source, similarly denotes: “Molto, di molto, or Assai, very.”<sup>13</sup> Despite growing consensus, Daniel Gottlob Türk’s *Klavierschule* (1789) clearly translates *assai* to the German *genug*, which can only be translated as “enough” or “sufficiently.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Niccolò Tommaseo, in his *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana* (1861), corroborates a possible moderating interpretation using the Italian *abbastanza* (enough) and *a sufficienza* (to sufficiency).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert’s exhaustive *Encyclopédie*<sup>16</sup> (1755) does not deal directly with the issue of an interpretation for *assai*; however, the entry on *battre le mesure* implies that flexibility of tempo is expected in Italian music more than French. Further confusing the issue, Rousseau appears to have written the entries on specific tempo markings, such as *allegro*, *presto*, *grave*, *etc.*, yet conspicuously leaves out his interpretation of *assai*.

The relatively short time that elapsed between Walther’s mention of *assai* as describing sufficiency (1732) and the first describing intensification (1755) might encourage the assumption that the usage of the word changed during the period between these two dictionary entries. However, given Rousseau’s sharp criticism of Brossard’s dictionary entry and Türk and Tommaseo’s later interpretation to the contrary, it is

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<sup>12</sup> Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste: A-J.*, Volume 1, (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1771), 43. *Allegro di molto oder allegro assai bezeichnet das ganz hurtige*

<sup>13</sup> Muzio Clementi. *Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Pianoforte*, (London: Clementi, Banger, Hyde, Collard & Davis, 1803), 14.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule*, (Leipzig & Halle: Schwickert; Hemmerde and Schwetschke, 1789.), 116.

<sup>15</sup> Niccolò Tommaseo, *Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, s.v. “assai” (Torino: Soc. L’Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1865). Accessed March 22, 2017. <http://www.tommaseobellini.it>.

<sup>16</sup> Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, *Encyclopédie*, s.v. “battre le mesure” (Paris: Breton, David, Durand, and Briasson, 1751-66). Accessed March 22, 2017. <http://http://encyclopédie.eu/index.php/logique/grammaire/29637986-BATTRE>.

perhaps more likely that there existed a period of uncertainty about the appropriate usage of this word. Rousseau, attempting to debunk opposing opinions, employs strong language and an *ad hominem* attack to bolster his argument that the word *assai* is, in fact, not a cognate to the French *assez*. Whether or not one considers Brossard, Bailey, and Walther to have been in error, the similarity of their definitions suggests a widespread understanding that must have persisted, especially given the popularity and proliferation of Bailey's dictionary. One may reasonably conclude that these two opposing definitions existed concurrently during the 18<sup>th</sup> century continuing into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Table 1).

Modern lexicons and scholarship surrounding the term *assai* perpetuate the discrepancy regarding its interpretation. While Salvatore Battaglia's *Grande Dizionario della lingua Italiana*<sup>17</sup> includes both the moderating and intensifying interpretations, the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*<sup>18</sup> and *Harvard Dictionary of Music*<sup>19</sup> offer variations on the intensifying interpretation; however, *Grove Music Online*<sup>20</sup> offers that the term "indicates the superlative," while at the same time indicating that "the meaning for Beethoven may not have been consistent" citing Stewart Deas's work.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, s.v. "assai," (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961).

<sup>18</sup> "Assai." The Oxford Dictionary of Music, 2nd ed. rev. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e596>.

<sup>19</sup> Apel, Willi. "Assai." *Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

<sup>20</sup> David Fallows, "Assai." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed January 16, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01426>.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart Deas, "Beethoven's 'Allegro Assai,'" *Music and Letters* XXXI/4 (October 1950): 333-336. Accessed September 27, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/730495>.

Table 1. Summary of *Assai* Entries in Dictionaries and Treatises.

Source	Year	Summary of Content (E = enough/V = very)
Florio, <i>Queen Anna's New World of Words</i> <sup>22</sup>	1611	enough, mickle, much, merry. (Ambiguous)
Brossard, <i>Dictionnaire de Musique</i>	1703	Remain in a sufficient, ordinary fast and slow pattern, depending on the different emotions that are to be conveyed. (E)
Bailey, <i>Dictionarium Britannicum</i>	1730	Always joined with some other word to weaken the strength or signification of the word to which it is joined. (E)
Walther, <i>Musikalishes Lexikon</i>	1732	Neither too fast nor too slowly but at the appropriate or fitting level, whether it be slow or fast, according to what the various prescribed characters require. (E)
Marpurg, <i>Anleitung zum Clavierspielen</i>	1755	Allegro assai placed under very fast tempos. (V)
Mozart, <i>Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule</i>	1756	Allegro assai is little distinguished from presto. (V)
Rousseau, <i>Dictionnaire de Musique</i>	1768	Presto assai and largo assai mean quite fast, quite slow. (V)
Sulzer, <i>Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste</i>	1771-74	Allegro d' molto or allegro assai designates the very nimble, near Presto. (V)
Türk, <i>Klavierschule</i>	1789	enough i.e. genug. (E)
Clementi, <i>Introduction to the Art of Playing on the Piano Forte</i>	1801	Molti, di Molto, or Assai – Very. (V)
Tommaseo, <i>Dizionario della Lingua Italiana</i>	1861	Abbastanza, a sufficienza. (E)
Bataggia, <i>Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana</i>	1961	Abbastanza, a sufficienza, molto. (Ambiguous)

<sup>22</sup> John Florio, *Queen Anna's New World of Words, Or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues*, s.v. "assai," (London: Printed by Melch. Bradwood, for Edw. Blount and William Barret, 1611).

Placing Beethoven in agreement with Bailey, Brossard, and Walther, Deas primarily examines situations where Beethoven uses multiple languages, allowing for a direct comparison between them. Other methods include investigating particular movements that include designations in addition to a tempo marking, such as the Op. 130 quartet movement that is characterized as *alla danza tedesca*. In cases involving performance and character considerations, Deas refrains from pointing to specific events within the music and instead speaks in generalities about the overall feel of the work.

Thus, the aforementioned task of understanding and putting into practice a composer's indications according to his own understanding of them becomes murky for *assai* during the time when the two definitions exist concurrently. It is dangerous to assume that all music written after 1755/6 follows the definition put forth in Marpurg's *Anleitung* or Mozart's *Versuch*, as their treatises could not have entered the canon of musical instruction immediately upon their release. In addition, Türk's translation amid a period of widening consensus around a heightening interpretation, delineates a period of at least 33 years of contention over the usage of *assai*. Yet, despite this period of semantic shift illustrated in part by Table 1, at some point the now accepted modern definition must have taken hold and become the standard meaning associated with *assai*. Given the apparent instability of the definition, it requires more information than the word itself can provide to be able to confidently choose one meaning over another, particularly as applies to the middle-to-late eighteenth century.

Since it is likely that both meanings of the word *assai* were variously intended during this time period, the performer must consider whether any clues hidden in the

structure and syntax of a given piece of music may point to either an augmenting or limiting sense of the term *assai*. The attentive musician can inspect definitive character elements in the works of various composers and time periods to reveal a basis for deciding how *assai* is best interpreted; it is the objective of this paper to initiate a survey of this type. Through case by case analysis, the present investigation seeks to support the feasibility of *assai* as a term evoking sufficiency by assessing musical content through that very lens, a necessary hermeneutic given the modern proclivity for interpreting *assai* as an intensifier.

Thus, the following pages present examinations of a relatively small number of examples across a broad swath of time with the goal of justifying the consideration of the sufficiency interpretation of *assai* in many more cases than might widely be assumed. An awareness of the instability of the term invites a performer to assess how the term applies in any given instance by pinpointing those aspects of a piece of music that determine its character and tempo. As a result, the performer gains the opportunity to generate freshly conceived performances that incorporate historically and contextually relevant thinking with regard to the word *assai*.

Through investigation of musical scores, examining such features as ornamentation, the relative brilliance of the work (evidenced by rapid passages played with considerable force), tonality, meter, and structure, the characteristics of a piece of music that are crucial to navigating the multivalent qualities of the word *assai* will be identified and tested against the musical content of the chosen examples. Comparative studies will be made both within certain composers' *oeuvres* and among works of



different composers during given periods of time. While arguments and conclusions will be founded upon objective data to the greatest possible extent, the tastes and aesthetic viewpoints of the author will inevitably contribute to particular conclusions, given the necessity of interpreting information that by the nature of musical notation must remain incomplete and imprecise. Much of this study approaches the material with historical instruments in mind, but many of the considerations and conclusions will be applicable to modern instruments. The performer should also note that the guidelines discussed here relate to the overall pulse and must allow for the possibility of tempo fluctuations. Where they contribute materially to the discussion, compositional genres outside keyboard music may be taken into consideration, since the subject matter is encountered in a broad variety of generic contexts.

## CHAPTER II

### ASSAI IN KEYBOARD WORKS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By examining the works of Johann Sebastian Bach; his contemporary Domenico Scarlatti; and his students and sons, Johann Friedrich Agricola, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, and Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach, evidence can be discovered for the widespread feasibility of *assai* as a moderating term in the baroque and galant styles. The following examples, although not necessarily representative of each composer's entire *assai* output, present the strongest of such evidence.

#### ***Assai* in Baroque Keyboard Works**

Of the 46 completed chorale settings in J. S. Bach's *Orgelbüchlein* (1716), three make use of tempo markings. Two of them, "Christum wir sollen loben schon" (BWV 611) and "O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig" (BWV 618) are marked *Adagio* while the third, "O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde groß" (BWV 622), is marked *Adagio assai*. Despite the somber tone of the Lenten text associated with its tune, Bach decorates the entirety of the chorale melody of BWV 622, with the exception of measures 19 and 23, with mordents, trills, appoggiaturas, passing and neighbor tones, a "veritable catalogue of Baroque graces, both written out and indicated by symbols."<sup>23</sup> In the measures where he withholds ornamentation, Bach still achieves an overall effect of excess through a rising chromatic

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<sup>23</sup> Russell Stinson, *Bach: The Orgelbüchlein* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 91.

bass line, stretto entrances, and accented passing notes in the left hand, culminating, in measure 23, in a surprising C-flat major chord. Bach marks *adagissimo* at this point, clearly a slower tempo than previously. Thus, an interpretation of the opening tempo marking must allow for greater tranquility in the final measure.

Furthermore, if the performer were to focus only upon the *adagio* marking, adopting a tempo in which the ornamented chorale melody feels at ease, she would create a beat structure based upon eighth notes in direct contrast to Bach's common-time marking. On the other hand, acknowledging the implications of Bach's four-beat structure, based upon quarter-note motion, the performer will find *assai* to have a moderating quality. That is, for the four quarter-note beats to be perceived, the performer must adopt a tempo that is only somewhat at ease, thus faster. However, if the piece moves too quickly, the ornamented line becomes overworked and the piece lacks the relaxed feeling implicit in Bach's *adagio*. Thus, the performer is well-advised to take Bach's tempo marking as permissive in spirit; that is, sufficiently at ease to elucidate a four-beat structure while retaining the expressive power of the highly-ornamented chorale melody.

Bach's later addition of a title page to the *Orgelbüchlein* interpreting the set as an instruction book for the beginner at the organ<sup>24</sup> lends the scholar-performer the didactic hermeneutic as well. In the case of the "O Mensch" chorale prelude, Bach demonstrates

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<sup>24</sup> Russell Stinson, *Bach: The Orgelbüchlein* (New York: Schirmer, 1996), 31. "Orgel-büchlein, in which guidance is given to a beginning organist in how to set a chorale in all kinds of ways, and at the same time to become practiced in the study of pedaling, since in the chorales found therein the pedal is treated completely obbligato."

the extent to which a chorale tune can be ornamented while maintaining the original melody, a melody that the performer is expected to deliver with enough clarity that the listener may perceive it. Thus, a performer may convincingly interpret *Adagio assai* as sufficiently at ease to great effect in Bach's BWV 622, balancing the four-beat structure with Bach's extensive ornamentation.

Among Domenico Scarlatti's famous output of over 555 sonatas, there are four that he marks *Allegro assai*. Each example is unique; no two of the four sonatas have the same meter (Table 2). Although there is a possible relationship between the compound meter of K. 519 and the simple meter of three beats of K. 527, the two pieces differ widely in texture and rhythmic vitality. K. 527 and K. 533 are related by their simple meters and major keys, but the similarities end there as each movement's motivic material is manipulated in vastly different ways. The two minor-key sonatas, K. 43 and K. 519, while closer in character than the major-key pair, still maintain individuality. The apagogic argument, attempting to apply the superlative interpretation of the word *assai* to prove the opposite, demonstrates commonality among these four pieces that would otherwise be difficult to determine.

Table 2. *Allegro Assai* Sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti.

Sonata	Key	Meter	Compound/Simple
K. 43 <sup>25</sup>	G Minor	$\frac{12}{8}$	Compound
K. 519	F Minor	$\frac{3}{8}$	Compound
K. 527	C Major	$\frac{3}{4}$	Simple
K. 533	A Major	$\phi$	Simple

The opening of Scarlatti's K. 43 features a static harmonic statement, due to the nearly-pedal  $g^1$  in the lower staff, reinforced by falling internal lines of eighth notes, and remains squarely in the minor mode, with only a short visit to the relative major in measures 11-12. The performer must take care to execute the scales in measures 8-12 (Ex. 1) and large leaps in the left hand in measures 14-20 (Ex. 2) such that each tone speaks well. To quicken the tempo of the piece beyond fast enough to very fast is to render these passages nearly impossible to execute with clarity, thus causing them to sound harried or flustered and in direct contrast to the inaugural character. Applying the moderating interpretation for *assai* to accommodate these passages, the performer discovers a tempo quick enough to draw out the brilliant aspects of the piece, yet slow enough to retain its resoluteness.

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<sup>25</sup> Parma source indicates *Allegro assai*, other sources *Allegro*

Example 1. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 43, mm. 8-9.<sup>26</sup>



Example 2. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 43, mm. 14-15.<sup>27</sup>



Similarly, Scarlatti's choice of the word *assai* in K. 519 relates to its unrelenting texture. The steady stream of repeated bass  $f^1$  tones with which the piece begins establishes unyielding rhythm and a firm harmonic base that is continued in measures 17-24 (Ex.3) with a series of dotted quarters on the note a-flat in the bass. These sections of persistence, and others like them, are heightened more by interpreting the 3/8 meter as a three-beat structure. If the performer perceives only a single beat per measure, each measure becomes a single unit, moving ever forward regardless of the chosen tempo and therefore detracting from the static character of these sections. If the performer adopts a three-beat pulse, however, he enhances the resoluteness implied by the pedal. Thus,

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<sup>26</sup> Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonata, K. 43*, in *Le Pupitre*, vol. 31, edited by Kenneth Gilbert, (Paris: Heugel, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

interpreting *assai* as sufficient contributes a more vital characterization of the rhythmic energy. In addition, the descending diminished 7<sup>th</sup> arpeggio figure in the bass voice of measures 49ff. in K. 519 requires special attention (Ex. 4). Played too quickly this passage runs the risk of sounding pushed aside, detracting from the rhythmic vigor initiated at the beginning of the piece. On the other hand, by choosing a more moderate allegro the performer provides a sturdy framework within which the forward-moving traits can act, creating a sense of urgency.

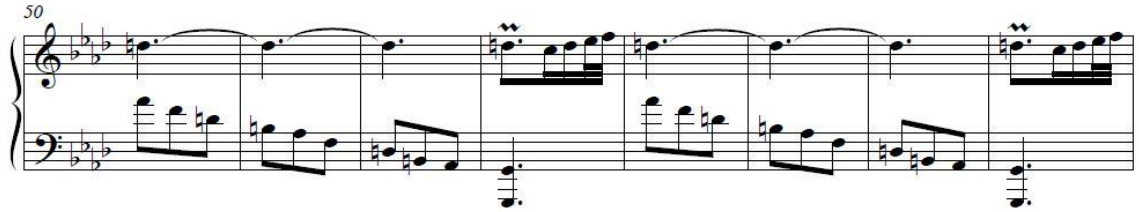
Example 3. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 519, mm. 1-25.<sup>28</sup>

**Allegro assai**

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<sup>28</sup> Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonata, K. 519*, in *Le Pupitre*, vol. 41, edited by Kenneth Gilbert, (Paris: Heugel, 1984).

Example 4. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 519, mm. 50-57.<sup>29</sup>



In contrast to K. 43 and K. 519, where rhythmic vitality is tied to the relationships found within a three-beat eighth-note pulse, throughout K. 533 the listener is peppered with an unrelenting stream of loquacious eighth notes in cut time. The treble and bass voices converse at times, emphasizing the dialogical nature of the piece. While the upper voice is dominant, the lower voice does interject several independent ideas. Measure 9 finds the lower voice introducing a turn figure around  $e^1$  followed by a turn figure around  $c^{\sharp 1}$ , a figure that is immediately imitated in the treble (Ex. 5). The shift in register between the voices regulates the forward motion of the treble voice while the eighth notes maintain the flow of the conversation. The bass voice again leads with the eighth notes in measure 14, this time as a descending melodic figure that attempts to coax the treble voice away from an E major sonority.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



Example 5. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 533, mm. 9-20.<sup>30</sup>

Much as with the rhythmic vigor established at the beginning of K. 519, these two voices in conversation, coupled with their setting in eighth notes in cut time, have an inherent rapidity to them. Pushing the tempo beyond “sufficiently fast” to “very fast” can easily render this conversation unintelligible; the performer can best elucidate the conversational aspects of this piece by choosing a moderate tempo.

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<sup>30</sup> Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonata, K. 533*, in *Le Pupitre*, vol. 41, edited by Kenneth Gilbert, (Paris: Heugel, 1984).

If applying the currently predominant superlative function for the word *assai* presents certain problems with Scarlatti's K. 43, K. 519, and K. 533, the difficulty increases with K. 527. Where harmonic, rhythmic, metrical, and dialogical details were relevant considerations for the other three sonatas, a tuneful melody and articulation have a moderating influence upon K. 527. The opening musical line begins with a descending tetrachord that is immediately repeated down one diatonic step in the second measure (Ex. 6). the addition of the full two-measure descent of measures 3 and 4 that follows creates a 1-1-2 structure benefitting from a moderate tempo that allows the line to regain energy. Furthermore, a moderating influence is implied by the stressed second beat in 6 of the first 8 measures, e.g. octave entrances in the right hand of measures 5-8 and the impossibility of playing beats 1 and 2 connected in the first two measures, requiring the left hand to restrike. The double voice suspension from measure 3 to 4 adds to the rhythmic influence.

Additionally, the frequent ornamentation in K. 527 advocates for a slower tempo in this tuneful movement. In addition to the characteristic embellishments at the cadence points, the ornaments in measures 21-26 (Exx. 7& 8), which weight the weak half of the beat, require more time to execute than plain notes. Requiring sufficient time to register in the ear and disappear before the next bass note is played, these ornaments, combined with clear articulation of the descending line found on the strong part of the beat in the

bass have the overall effect of greater vitality. Finally, a tangible reference to a minuet's two-bar phrases implies a moderate tempo.

Example 6. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 527, mm. 1-9.<sup>31</sup>

Allegro assai

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Example 7. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 527, mm. 20-23.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Domenico Scarlatti, *Sonata, K. 527*. In *Le Pupitre*, vol. 41. Edited by Kenneth Gilbert, 81-83. Paris: Heugel, 1984.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Example 8. Domenico Scarlatti, Sonata K. 527, mm. 24-28.<sup>33</sup>



To play these pieces satisfactorily fast, as opposed to very fast, allows the performer to accommodate each of the different concerns illustrated above. K. 43 and K. 519 can move forward while allowing space for the quick scalar passages and ornaments to feel grounded. Likewise, a tempo based on sufficient rather than extreme animation in K. 527 can simultaneously accommodate liveliness, clear ornamentation, and the rhythmic particularities in the piece, elements which would be at odds if the piece were taken too quickly. Finally, the conversational textures of K. 533 are clarified when *assai* is interpreted as “sufficiently”. In the case of these four sonatas by Scarlatti, holding together the surface details of each piece with a tempo that is sufficiently fast yields a clearly defined characterization that might otherwise be obscured.

The process of determining precisely what that tempo is must include consideration of personal taste and aesthetics. Such determinations, though subjective, can be expressed in objective terms. Table 3 proposes potential tempos which encapsulate the analysis and objectives put forth above. Here the two pieces in a compound meter are assigned a slower tempo than the two pieces in simple meter due in part to the subdivision of the beat into three parts. The tempo should reflect this because

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

the triplet subdivision requires more tones to sound per larger unit. The subdivisions per second produce a busier feel in the sonatas with triplet subdivision despite the recommendation of a tempo slower than that for the sonatas with duplet subdivision. Furthermore, K. 43, K. 519, and K. 533 are essentially the same length at these chosen tempos. Although uniformity in length is not expected across the spectrum of Scarlatti's works, these three sonatas contain similarly persistent figures, making their similar lengths somewhat logical, whereas the slower note values and rhythmic vitality of K. 527 imply and sustain a lengthier movement overall.

Table 3. Comparison of Piece Length and Subdivisions per Second in Scarlatti's *Allegro Assai* Output.

<b>Sonata</b>	<b>Tempo</b>	<b>Subdivision</b>	<b>No. of Beats</b>	<b>Length of Piece</b>	<b>Subdivisions/Second</b>
<i>K. 43</i>	90 bpm	Eighth, triplet	82 x 4 = 328	3.64 min	4.5
<i>K. 519</i>	90 bpm	Eighth, triplet	342 x 1 = 342	3.8 min	4.5
<i>K. 527</i>	104 bpm	Eighth	158 x 3 = 474	4.56 min	3.46
<i>K. 533</i>	104 bpm	Quarter	192 x 2 = 384	3.69 min	3.46

Mitigated by lyricism, ornamentation, subdivision, and the topography of the keyboard, each of Scarlatti's *Allegro assai* sonatas benefits from a tempo fast enough to accommodate its character but not so fast as to obfuscate its character. When considering the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti, it is productive to adopt the sufficiency interpretation of *assai* rather than the heightening one. Thus, the evidence presented by the prevailing definition of the time as found in contemporary dictionary entries is

corroborated in these early cases and the feasibility of *assai* as satisfactory is borne out in these examples. It is time to consider examples within the early time when the competing definitions exist to test the feasibility of *assai* as a word that moderates.

### ***Assai* in Galant Keyboard Works**

While not a work of the utmost importance, Johann Friedrich Agricola's Sonata in F Major (1762) holds two movements of interest; both the first and last movement of the three-movement sonata are marked *Allegro assai*. Written only 6 years after Leopold Mozart's *Versuch*, these movements point toward the moderating usage of *assai* despite being relatively contemporary to Marpurg and Leopold's definitions to the contrary. Identifying the characteristics of this piece provides a window into the generation of composers immediately following and influenced by J. S. Bach.

Well situated within the galant style, the first movement of Agricola's sonata reflects a general bent toward self-restraint and understatedness over brilliance. Although the streams of sixteenth notes might seem to imply the contrary, the musical content of the piece provides clues suggesting a moderate tempo. The thirds and sixths found in such places as measures 10-14 exemplify the melody-driven content typical of the *galant* style (Ex. 9). Shortly following this section, the piece regains its initial momentum rising to the B-flat<sup>2</sup> near the top of the keyboard in measure 17, without the use of brilliance in the upper staff, rather the slow harmonic rhythm plays out with a series of predictable arpeggiations on the dominant. The sequence in measures 25-27 also eschews brilliance in favor of meticulous neighbor and passing tone motion (Ex. 10).

Example 9. Agricola, Sonata in F Major, mvt. I, mm. 10-19.<sup>34</sup>

Example 10. Agricola, Sonata in F Major, mvt. I, mm. 25-27.<sup>35</sup>

Further moderating the tempo is the vii<sup>07</sup>/ii in measures 35-37 (Ex. 11) which heralds a short-lived turn to the key of the supertonic, g minor, particularly when considered relative to the primarily sixteenth- and eighth-note movement found elsewhere in the piece. This figure, which Agricola uses again as transitional material between the first and second movement, in addition to exemplifying the slower harmonic

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<sup>34</sup> Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Sonata in F Major*, ed. Borys Medicky, (IMSLP/Petrucchi Music Library, 2006). Accessed January 19, 2017, [http://ks.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP220619-WIMA.cc09-Sonata\\_f.pdf](http://ks.imslp.info/files/imglnks/usimg/1/18/IMSLP220619-WIMA.cc09-Sonata_f.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

rhythm characteristic of the *galant* style, is comprised of markedly slower note values than much of the remainder of the piece with quarter notes in the bass and syncopated quarters in the treble as well as reverse echo dynamic markings (*piano-forte*).

Example 11. Agricola, Sonata in F Major, mvt. I, mm. 35-37.<sup>36</sup>



The third movement of Agricola's sonata, also marked *Allegro assai*, opens with triplet sixteenth notes in the upper voice and a bass voice. The opening phrase splits into three two-bar statements, the third of which is a direct repeat of the second. An arpeggiated figure in one voice and a rest in the other punctuates each of these three statements, breaking up the forward motion. In measure 7 the triplets give way to calmer figuration consisting of duplet sighs (Ex. 12). The retarding effect heightened further by the syncopation in measure 9, is a form of rubato in which each melodic note is heard in relation to two bass tones, another moderating influence. Agricola groups these sigh figures in a 1:1:2 distribution, further breaking the line into smaller segments until measures 11-14. There, Agricola highlights the supertonic, changing the mode from major to minor, and condenses the sigh figure to sixteenth note pairings. Each sigh figure requires the performer to execute a strong-weak relationship as well as a restriking at the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



beginning of each two-note group. Such repeated sighs, especially in rapid succession as in the case of the sixteenth-note sighs, require an overall slower tempo for the performer to give appropriate expression to the articulation. Further, the sixteenth-note motion gives way to triplet motion immediately in measure 15. Such a quick shift, in contrast to the gradual change from before, juxtaposes the two affects requiring the performer to reconcile them.

Example 12. Agricola, Sonata in F Major, mvt. III, mm. 1-16.<sup>37</sup>

The musical score for Example 12 is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-5) is marked "Allegro assai" and shows a primary voice with triplet sixteenth notes and a secondary voice with quarter notes. The second system (measures 6-11) features a primary voice with quarter notes and a secondary voice with eighth notes, marked with "p" (piano). The third system (measures 12-16) features a primary voice with triplet sixteenth notes and a secondary voice with quarter notes, marked with "f" (forte).

If the primary voice spoke consistently in triplet sixteenth notes, the performer would be tempted to treat this movement as an opportunity to demonstrate manual dexterity, bearing a very fast tempo quite well. Alternatively, if the piece strictly made

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

use of sixteenth notes, the overall effect would be one of slightly more tranquility, resisting a very fast tempo. However, the presence of both sixteenths and triplet sixteenths as primary material in the same movement requires the performer to reckon with both within a single tempo framework.

Had Agricola marked *Allegro moderato*, he would indicate too slow a pace for this movement in  $\frac{2}{4}$  time, erecting a four-beat structure based on eighth notes where the triplet and duplet sixteenths act as the subdivision of the beat. However, overcompensating for this and proceeding too quickly would prevent the ornaments from speaking clearly, such as the turn in measure 34, as well as the trills in measures 3, 5, 26, and 29, and the accented chords in measures 31 and 32 (Ex. 13). Thus, the performer is well-advised to take the *allegro assai* marking as permissive in nature, adopting a tempo that is neither too fast, nor too slow.

Example 13. Agricola, Sonata in F Major, mvt. III, mm. 28-39.<sup>38</sup>

The image displays a musical score for measures 28-39 of a piece. It is written for a single melodic line on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (F major). The time signature is 2/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 28 through 33. The second system covers measures 34 through 39. The music is characterized by frequent sixteenth-note patterns, including triplet and duplet groupings. Measure 34 contains a turn ornament. Measures 31 and 32 feature accented chords. The notation includes various ornaments such as trills and mordents.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

Given that these movements share the same tempo marking, the performer may ask if these two movements could be played at the same speed. As shown in Table 4, various hypothetical tempi generate contrasting results when applied to both movements. Choosing 108 beats per minute (hereafter bpm) makes the first movement satisfyingly exciting while remaining accessible to the expected *galant* music consumer. Yet, the same tempo renders the third movement nearly unplayable. By the same token, choosing 72 bpm for the third movement allows sufficient time for the ornaments and sighing figures but at that tempo, the first movement becomes dull and unanimated.

Table 4. Comparison of Fastest Notes per Second (FN/Second) and Resultant Total Time for *Allegro Assai* Movements in Agricola's Sonata in F Major.

	<i>First Movement</i>		<i>Third Movement</i>	
<b>MM</b>	<b>FN/second</b>	<b>Total Time</b>	<b>FN/second</b>	<b>Total Time</b>
72bpm	4.8	185 s	<b>7.2</b>	<b>90 s</b>
84	5.6	~158.5 s	8.4	~77 s
96	6.4	139.75 s	9.6	67.5 s
108	<b>7.2</b>	<b>~123.3 s</b>	10.8	60 s
120	8	111 s	12	54 s

However, considering the most comparable data point, the number of fastest notes played per second for each movement, provides a viable solution. Choosing 108 bpm for the first movement and 72 bpm for the third yields the same number of fast notes per second of music (7.2). Since these movements are marked with the same tempo marking,

the performer expects that they may match one another in speed or feel. Comparing the fastest notes of each piece, rather than beat-level quarter notes, yields individual tempos for the two movements that are organically related. Each tempo strikes a balance of sufficiency in energy to satisfy the *Allegro assai* designation at the beginning of each movement while facilitating the executional concerns found in each movement, namely melodically-driven style, lack of brilliance and modal shifts in the first movement or the sighs, ornamentation, or the relationship between the triplet sixteenths and sixteenths of the third movement. Thus, the interpretation of *assai* as “sufficiently”, both feasible and beneficial to the expression of each movement.

A case for the feasibility of interpreting *assai* as “sufficiently” in Leipzig, Germany in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is found in the first movement of Johann Christoph Friedrich Bach’s Sonata in D Major, number 4 of *Sechs Leichte Sonaten fürs Clavier oder Pianoforte* (1785). As with the Agricola sonata, a number of contextual details urge the performer to take into consideration dynamic markings, ornamentation, fluctuating tonal orientation, and the absence of brilliancy, all of which advocate for a moderated reading of the *Allegro assai* tempo marking.

In the opening phrase, Bach juxtaposes one-measure gigue-motives in forte and piano, inviting comparisons that break up the forward momentum (Ex. 14). These echo effects consistently occur on both the measure level and the phrase level, for example, measures 17 through 20 are echoed in measures 21 through 24 (Ex. 15). The echo effect is heightened by shifting what was in the tenor to the alto range. Such juxtapositions of

*forte* and *piano* inherently require attention and temporal space lest the echo effect become mechanical rather than rhetorical assertion-reflection pairings.

Example 14. J. C. F. Bach, Sonata in D Major in *Sechs Leichte Sonaten*, mvt. III, mm. 1-4.<sup>39</sup>

**Allegro assai**

The musical score for Example 14 is in treble and bass clefs, 6/8 time, D major. It features a series of alternating forte (*f*) and piano (*p*) dynamics in a rhythmic pattern. The treble clef part consists of eighth notes, while the bass clef part consists of quarter notes. The dynamics alternate every two measures: *f*, *p*, *f*, *p*.

Example 15. J. C. F. Bach, Sonata in D Major 4 in *Sechs Leichte Sonaten*, mvt. III, mm. 14-24.<sup>40</sup>

The musical score for Example 15 is in treble and bass clefs, 6/8 time, D major. It features a series of eighth notes in the treble clef and quarter notes in the bass clef. A piano (*p*) dynamic marking is present in the second measure of the second system. The score is divided into two systems, with measures 14-19 in the first system and measures 20-24 in the second system.

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<sup>39</sup> J. C. F. Bach. *Sonata in D Major*, in *Sechs Leichte Sonaten*, edited by Hugo Ruf, (Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1968).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

The fluctuating tonal orientation of measures 49-66 also advocates for a slower tempo as the performer will want to emphasize the tonal waypoints of this development section. Having tonicized B minor in measure 49, J.C.F. Bach moves through F<sup>#</sup> minor (measure 52), A Major (54), C<sup>#</sup> minor (56), E minor (58), G Major (62) and back to B minor in measure 66. In addition, the ornament in measure 50 (Ex. 16) furthers the case for an unhurried execution of this development section. Finally, a consistent avoidance of brilliance characterizes this eighth-note gigue, supporting a moderate reading of *assai*.

Though vastly different in style, the work of J. C. F. Bach's elder brother Wilhelm Friedemann also argues against the intensification definition of *assai*. The third movement of his Sonata in A Major, F8 (1784, possibly earlier), an *Allegro assai* movement in  $\frac{2}{4}$  time, presents declamatory sections, primarily in eighth and quarter notes, in conversation with sections of triplet sixteenths. The opening theme, with its moderate note values and carefully articulated theme, might easily lure the player into an unsustainably quick tempo, but a careful examination shows that the timing and spacing of events advocate for a moderated rather than a heightened *allegro*. The first appoggiatura on b<sup>1</sup> has the value of a dotted-quarter, resolving on the last eighth of measure 1 (Ex. 17). In the middle of the appoggiatura, an imitative left-hand entry turns it into a suspension. This leads to a stepwise upward eighth-note figure in both voices energized by staccato. Thus, the primary note values register as half note in the treble, joined by a quarter in the other voice, and leading to two emphasized eighths. In contrast to the iambic eighth-note pick up, these eighth notes constitute a spondee with both

eighth notes emphasized, producing an accelerating rhythm of quarter-quarter-eighth-eighth. The same is true of measures 3 and 4; however, in this statement the appoggiatura is followed by an upward leap in the top voice, lending it yet more energy.

Example 16. J. C. F. Bach, Sonata in D Major in *Sechs Leichte Sonaten*, mvt. III, mm.

49-69.<sup>41</sup>

Measures 49-53 of the piece. The music is in D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. The top staff (treble clef) features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and an appoggiatura in measure 51. The bottom staff (bass clef) provides a rhythmic accompaniment with quarter and eighth notes.

Measures 54-58. The top staff continues the melodic development with eighth-note runs and a leap in measure 56. The bottom staff maintains the accompaniment pattern.

Measures 59-63. The top staff shows further melodic elaboration with eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff continues the accompaniment.

Measures 64-69. The top staff concludes the passage with a final melodic phrase. The bottom staff provides the final accompaniment notes.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Example 17. W. F. Bach, Sonata in A Major, mvt. III, mm. 1-13.<sup>42</sup>



The consequent phrase in measures 5-8 opens with two appoggiaturas on  $b^1$  resolving to  $a^1$ , each of which taken together occupies one and a half beats. The printed small-quarter appoggiatura in measure 7 is in effect an ornament of an ornament, since the underlying half-note D itself functions as a long appoggiatura resolving on the first beat of the next measure. This third appoggiatura doubles the value of the preceding two, occupying three beats in all. If this hierarchy is to be made audible it seems there is much other business for the performer to handle than playing fast.

A triplet-sixteenth note section beginning in measure 13 would present technical challenges for the performer if played at a very fast speed. In addition to the unremitting flow of quick notes, the short appoggiaturas on the fourth eighth notes of measures 21 and 23 and the second eighth note of measure 25 require expressive handling by the performer. Meanwhile the left-hand trills, which intensify the trochaic quality of the first

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<sup>42</sup> W. F. Bach, *Sonata in A Major*, in *Sämtliche Klaviersonaten*, edited by Friedrich Blume, (Hannover, A. Nagel, 1930).



beat, add to the difficulty of this toccata section as they require truly independent coordination of the hands. (Ex. 18). Finally, the trills on the second eighth note of measures 47 and 48 demand more time and attention than the appoggiaturas before them (Ex. 19). These ornaments complicate an already busy surface, advocating for more time to execute them cleanly and meaningfully.

Example 18. W. F. Bach, Sonata in A Major, mvt. III, mm. 22-26.<sup>43</sup>



Example 19. W.F. Bach, Sonata in A Major, mvt. III, mm. 48-49.<sup>44</sup>



After a restatement in the key of the dominant in measures 27-38, the development section begins in measure 57 with the opening material, this time in F-sharp minor, the key of the submediant. Where previously each statement of the declamatory section ended in a fermata on the raised fourth scale degree, here the toccata material

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

interrupts in measure 65. The elision of the two different compositional idioms heightens this section, continuing until the recapitulation of the opening subject in measure 79.

While hearkening back to the opening measures, Bach interrupts the fourth measure of the theme with an applied fully diminished seventh chord on beat two of measure 82 (Ex. 20). This already surprising chord is given heightened expression by a sudden shift in dynamic from *forte* to *pianissimo* as well as a *tenuto* marking.

Example 20. W. F. Bach, Sonata in A Major, mvt. III, mm. 80-82.<sup>45</sup>



The expressive qualities of Bach's sonata movement are aided by a tempo chosen for its moderation. A "sufficient" tempo allows the performer to execute the ornaments in the fast-note sections gracefully while affording the opportunity to delineate the articulations and motivic structure found in the declamatory sections. Overall, the content of the movement points toward the feasibility of a moderated, rather than heightened, understanding of *allegro assai*.

Each of these cases, drawn from J. S. Bach, Scarlatti, Agricola, J. C. F. Bach and W. F. Bach, argues for an interpretation of "sufficiency" for the term *assai* up through at least 1785, 30 years after Marpurg categorized *Allegro assai* as a very fast tempo. Given

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

the particular timing of the treatises and compositions produced during these 30 years, the multiple understandings of this word are to be expected for music written during this period, as any shift in understanding would have taken time to permeate the culture.

Certain compositional and interpretational themes emerge from the above analyses. First, the presence and placement of ornamentation and two-note slurs plays a role in nearly every example considered above; however, the performer should be careful not to oversimplify and presume that the presence of ornaments alone supports a slower tempo. Rather, the thoughtful performer will consider the placement of ornaments, whether en masse, upon quick notes, or in strange metric positions, and their effect upon the overall musical line. Second, one must consider the multiple subdivisions of the beat in the Agricola and W. F. Bach examples. As was the case with ornamentation, these movements do not bear a slower interpretation due to the mere presence of duplets and triplets in the same piece; it is the way these two compositional devices interact with one another that accounts for the interpretive decision. Finally, many of these pieces demonstrate a general avoidance of brilliance, prompting the performer to consider a tempo based upon sufficiency. Thus, *assai* is seen to have enjoyed a widespread application as a term which moderates the word to which it is appended, a notion that is well-supported by many early treatises and dictionaries.

## CHAPTER III

### ASSAI IN KEYBOARD WORKS OF CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH

Examining the works by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, whose work falls within the period in which the meaning of *assai* was strongly contested, demonstrates a continued plausibility for a moderating interpretation of *assai*. The third movement of Bach's Concerto in D minor, Wq. 23 (1748), opens with a declamatory unison statement from the orchestra. The large leaps and rhetorical pauses in the opening measures (Ex. 21) comprise a dramatic statement which is further enhanced by a tempo of moderation, creating more musical space and deliberateness. Additionally, the solo section after the introduction includes an accompaniment figure of repeated block chords in the left hand, a cumbersome device which requires a degree of finesse afforded by a slower tempo.

Example 21. C. P. E. Bach, Concerto in D Minor, Wq. 23, mvt. III, mm. 1-9.<sup>46</sup>

The image displays a musical score for the first nine measures of the third movement of C. P. E. Bach's Concerto in D Minor, Wq. 23. The score is written for a keyboard instrument and is in 3/4 time. It begins with the tempo marking "Allegro assai." The notation consists of five staves: two for the upper voices (treble and alto clefs), two for the lower voices (bass and tenor clefs), and one for the left hand (bass clef). The upper voices feature a declamatory unison statement with large leaps and rhetorical pauses. The lower voices and left hand provide accompaniment, including repeated block chords in the left hand.

<sup>46</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Concerto in D Minor*, Wq. 23, edited by Karl Straube. (Leipzig, Breitkopf and Härtels, 1907).

The relative lack of brilliance in the opening statement, with sixteenth notes occurring primarily at cadences, continues throughout the movement and into the solo part. When Bach does employ sixteenth notes in the brilliant fashion, for example in the keyboard filigree of measures 196-225, these sections are found to be augmentative of the long lines in the strings and of secondary importance (Ex. 22). David Schulenberg also points to the tonal structure of the movement, in which Bach sets the second ritornello in the subdominant and the third in the dominant minor, as a limiting factor in generating harmonic tension stating that “such a tonal design lacks, at least in theory, the harmonic tension generated by the more typical first modulation to the dominant or, in a minor key, the relative major.” He goes on to say that this “formal design arguably dilutes rather than intensifies the expressive effect.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, in the case of this concerto movement, interpreting *assai* as a diluting term supports its rhetorical and tonal characteristics.

Example 22. C. P. E. Bach, Concerto in D Minor, Wq. 23, mvt. III, mm. 194-201.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> David Schulenberg, *The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2014), 98.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

As with his predecessors and contemporaries, C. P. E. Bach's placement and usage of ornaments within his solo keyboard works, coupled with factors such as dynamic shifts and harmonic landscape point to this same interpretation of *assai*. In a similar fashion to J.S. Bach's didactic usage of *assai* in his *Orgelbüchlein*, C. P. E. uses the *assai* term to modify the tempo of the second movement of his *Sonata Wq. 63/5* (1753), one of the *Probestücke*, a series of demonstration pieces which are organized overall in order of progressive difficulty and published alongside his *Versuch*. The tempo marking, *Adagio assai mesto e sostenuto*, prompts the performer to approach the interpretation of *assai* from the slow end of the tempo spectrum. As adjectival words in Italian typically modify that which comes before, *assai* most likely pertains to *adagio* rather than to *mesto e sostenuto*. As a moderating term, *assai* broadens an *allegro* tempo. By the same token, since *adagio* belongs to the slow tempos, *assai* effectively pulls the tempo forward. Here, the danger is in adopting a speed that is too much at ease.

The common meter requires four distinct beats per measure, already an important clue to determining an effective tempo. Proceeding too slowly obstructs the primary beat structure, supplanting it with a pulse based on the eighth note rather than the quarter. Such an eighth-note beat structure has the potential to lengthen phrases beyond the point where each can be perceived as a single coherent unit. Keeping the quarter-note pulse in the forefront of awareness also helps to regulate the grand pauses found in measures 6 and 18 (Exx. 23 and 24).

Example 23. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 63/5, mvt. II, mm. 1-6.<sup>49</sup>

Adagio assai mesto e sostenuto

Example 24. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 63/5, mvt. II, mm. 17-20.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Sonata, Wq. 63/5*, in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*, Ser. 1, Vol 3, edited by David Schulenberg, (Los Altos, California: Packard, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

*Mesto*, implying melancholy and mourning, manifests through the quick, wide-ranging shifts in dynamics, texture, and mode. Representing a mourner's alternation between grief, fond remembrance, and anger, at times these extreme shifts happen in close juxtaposition, perhaps no more clearly than in the penultimate measure. The two-note slurs on beats 2, 3, and 4 come down to a single voice at a *pianissimo* dynamic followed by a *fortissimo* full chord on the third sixteenth note of the beat (Ex. 24). These loud interjections and the invocation of the recitativo style bring in a dramatic context that justifies the heightened emotion. In this case the chordal punctuation, representing the voices of the community much in the same way of a Greek tragic chorus, are seemingly in opposition with the individual, represented by the single line, who is perhaps unwilling to accept the fatal necessity. Indeed, when these juxtaposed extremes occur in somewhat quick succession, the oscillation between the two is altogether a highly effective illustration of the *mesto* indication.

Retaining a sense of forward motion also prevents this movement from resembling a funeral march. The second half of measure 4 to the downbeat of measure 6 exemplifies a pleasant memory with its turn to the major mode, which began in measure 3, quick note values imparting lightness, and recurrent insistence on *mezzo forte* that enters in a syncopated rhythmic position that serves to keep the forward momentum alive (Ex. 23). Additionally, the long tones that escape via quick ornament to a descending interval are tender moments, characteristic aspects of the *empfindsam* style. These motives return in measures 16 through 18, however, in the minor mode with a real sense of loss (Ex. 24). And yet, with the structure of leaps, long notes, and quick ornaments,



this section must continue to move forward, giving weight to the grand pause in measure 18.

Interpreting *assai* at the beginning of the piece as ‘somewhat’ yields the indication ‘somewhat at ease’, an appropriate indication for a piece which has a wide emotional range. C. P. E. Bach is acknowledging at the forefront that this piece should retain a slow feel, but is not entirely a piece to be played at ease. Placed late in the series of progressively difficult demonstration pieces, this sonata movement is difficult not only in matters of execution, but also in matters of expression, and Bach’s tempo marking must be seen in the context of an exemplar piece in a lamenting mode of expression serving an educational purpose. Bach instructs the student that the piece, though it is melancholy and sustained, should not be so much at ease as to preclude a feeling of restlessness.

Throughout C. P. E. Bach’s music, ornamentation continues to play a role in determining feasible interpretations of the word *assai*. For one example among many similar ones, in the third movement of his Sonata in B-flat Major, Wq. 62/1 (1731) Bach places ornaments (*prallender Doppelschlägen*) on the fourth and last eighth notes of measures 34 and 36 (Ex. 25). Both ornaments occur on the weakest beat of the measure and each is slurred to the previous note, indicating that the ornamental motion begins after the beat. With little time allotted to execute the *prallender Doppelschlägen*, the marking *assai* permits the performer to accommodate this executional issue by adopting a moderate tempo.

Example 25. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 62/1, mvt. III, mm. 34-36.<sup>51</sup>



Similarly, it can be argued that the performer should adopt an accommodating tempo for the Sonata in F Minor, Wq. 57/6 (*Kenner and Liebhaber*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Collection, 1763), in relation to its ornaments. The most pertinent examples here come from the second beat of measure 8 as well as the entirety of measure 14. In measure 8 a trill occurs on the e<sup>2</sup> resolution of a two-note slur from the beat before (Ex. 26). Followed by a quick register shift signaling the beginning of a new phrase, there is not much time to bring this half cadence to a close. Measure 14 includes both a similar two-note slur ending in a trill and an appoggiatura leading into a turn (Ex. 26). Considering the measure-long harmonic rhythm that C.P.E. Bach has employed to this point in the piece, the multiple harmonic changes within this measure argue for a moderate tempo. Further confirmation of the usefulness of a moderate tempo is provided by the harmonic oddities and dynamic shifts found in the second half of the development.

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<sup>51</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Sonata, Wq. 62/1*, in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*, Ser. 1, Vol 5.1, edited by Darrell M. Berg, (Los Altos, California: Packard, 2005).

Example 26. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 57/6, mvt. I, mm. 5-16.<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning of the development, the dynamic drops from *forte* to *piano* as Bach arrives at an unusual A-flat minor sonority, the parallel minor of the tonic (Ex. 27). Two measures later, he boldly appears to tonicize an extraordinary  $\flat$ VI chord (F-flat Major) through measure 57, where a sudden change to a *piano* dynamic signals the reinterpretation of the chord as a stage in an ongoing modulation.<sup>53</sup> Using chromatic voice leading, to reharmonize the common tone F, Bach moves through a diminished seventh chord to a first inversion  $B^{\flat}$  minor sonority,  $ii^{\flat 6}$  in the key of the development and  $iv^{\flat 6}$  in F minor. The rapid shifts of dynamic emphasis reaching *forte* in measure 59,

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<sup>52</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Sonata, Wq. 67/6*, in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*, Ser. 1, Vol 4.1, edited by Christopher Hogwood, (Los Altos, California: Packard, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> David Schulenberg, *The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2014), Online supplement 10.6.

followed by *piano* in measure 60 and back to *forte* again in measure 61, invoke the emotional caprice associated with improvisation. Alongside the aforementioned ornaments, this strange harmonic progression, as well as the dynamic shifts that accompany it, advocates for a tempo that affords time to savor and wonder at its exoticism. Taken at too quick a tempo, this unconventional harmonic progression can lose its effectiveness as an extraordinary event.

Example 27. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 57/6, mvt. I, mm. 49-63.<sup>54</sup>

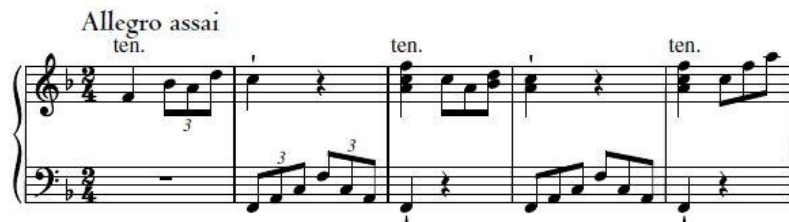
The musical score for Example 27, C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 57/6, mvt. I, mm. 49-63, is presented in four systems. The first system (measures 49-52) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a simple accompaniment. The second system (measures 53-55) features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a more complex accompaniment. The third system (measures 56-59) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a simple accompaniment. The fourth system (measures 60-63) features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a simple accompaniment. Dynamics include p, ff, mf, and f.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Interpreting C. P. E. Bach's usage of *assai* in the permissive sense need not be limited to his earlier works. In the third movement of the Sonata in F major, Wq. 55/2 (*Kenner und Liebhaber*, 1<sup>st</sup> collection, 1778) the tenuto markings in mm. 1, 3, and 5 (Ex. 28). imply a somewhat heavier execution than might otherwise be assumed for a piece with a  $\frac{2}{4}$  time signature and primary subdivision into eighth-note triplets. Additionally, the occasional rhetorical pauses in the melodic line, such as the rests in measures 2, 4, 22, 24, and similar places, imply that a moderate delivery is preferable to a rash one (Ex. 29) because their effect requires the listener to perceive their interrelationship as discrete units. Furthermore, the musical line is interrupted by the chromatic voice leading and fermatas in measures 27 and 28, requiring nuanced expression.

Example 28. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 55/2, mvt. III, mm. 1-5.<sup>55</sup>




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<sup>55</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Sonata, Wq. 55/2*, in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*, Ser. 1, Vol 4.1, edited by Christopher Hogwood, (Los Altos, California: Packard, 2005).

Example 29. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 55/2, mvt. III, mm. 17-32.<sup>56</sup>

The image displays a musical score for Example 29, C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 55/2, mvt. III, mm. 17-32. The score is in E minor and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 17-24) shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a harmonic accompaniment. The second system (measures 25-32) continues the piece with dynamic markings like 'f', 'p', and 'pp', and includes slurs and accents.

Bach also makes use of *tenuto* markings in measures 1, 3, and 8 of the third movement of his Sonata in E Minor, Wq. 58/4 (Kenner and Liebhaber, 4<sup>th</sup> collection, 1782), also marked *allegro assai*, suggesting a feasible moderate interpretation (Ex. 30). Additionally, the two-note slurs throughout this piece, found for the first time in measure 4, are a key indicator regarding tempo interpretation. As the first sixteenth note of the second beat is tied to the previous quarter note, this figure requires an unusual restrike on the second sixteenth note of the second beat, slowing down the forward motion of the musical line and encouraging the performer to inflect the seven sixteenth notes at the end of the measure to the first beat of the following measure.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Example 30. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 58/4, mvt. III, mm. 1-9.<sup>57</sup>

Later, in mm. 11-12, Bach further complicates the line by adding an ornament on the note of resolution as well as a half or short trill (*halb oder Prall-Triller*) on the third of a sixteenth note grouping in measure 17 and again in mm. 42-45 (Ex. 31 and 32). According to the *Versuch*, “this ornament joins the preceding note to the decorated one and therefore never appears over detached notes”<sup>58</sup> implying a smoother surface than might otherwise be assumed given the lack of slurs. The performer is certain to be well-occupied with these and other expressive issues to the point that playing very fast is of secondary concern; *assai* tests well as a term denoting sufficiency in each of these cases.

<sup>57</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Sonata, Wq. 58/4*, in *Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: The Complete Works*, Ser. 1, Vol 4.2, edited by Christopher Hogwood, (Los Altos, California: Packard, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> C. P. E. Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. and ed. William J. Mitchell (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949), 151.

Example 31. C. P. E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 58/4, mvt. III, mm. 10-17.<sup>59</sup>

Musical score for Example 31, measures 10-17. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 10-13) shows a treble staff with a melodic line featuring grace notes and a bass staff with a simple accompaniment. The second system (measures 14-17) continues the melodic line in the treble staff, with the bass staff providing harmonic support. The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 17.

Example 32. C. P.E. Bach, Sonata, Wq. 58/4, mvt. III, mm. 38-46.<sup>60</sup>

Musical score for Example 32, measures 38-46. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 38-42) features a treble staff with a melodic line containing grace notes and a bass staff with a simple accompaniment. The second system (measures 43-46) continues the melodic line in the treble staff, with the bass staff providing harmonic support. The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 46.

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach carries the moderating interpretation of *assai* forward in much the same way as his brothers and other German *galant* composers have been seen to do. Some considerations are maintained from this period, particularly those concerning the execution of ornaments and the way *assai* signals caution on the part of

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.



the performer. Of growing importance to the performer is the particular way a composer makes use of the term in the presence of extraordinary harmonic progressions and dynamic shifts. In shifting our focus to late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Vienna, it will be seen that harmony and dynamics play an increasingly important role in making informed tempo choices.

## CHAPTER IV

### ASSAI IN THE FIRST VIENNESE SCHOOL

#### ***Assai* in the Keyboard Sonatas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

The third movement of Mozart's Sonata in F Major, K. 332 (1784) is an excellent case study of the compound duple meter *allegro assai*. This movement fits squarely into the mold of a final movement in a fast-slow-fast sonata framework with its abundance of passagework and buoyant character. However, the flashy characteristics of this sonata movement, if given too much importance, can overshadow the lyrical sections found throughout the movement. Identifying the salient characteristics of this movement and examining their interaction helps determine a practicable tempo for this piece, particularly as relates to *assai* as a moderating term.

Mozart launches the movement with a full close-positioned tonic triad in the bass answered by a stream of sixteenth notes in a display of pianistic virtuosity (Ex. 33). In measure 14, the response to this virtuosic display appears in the form of a melody based on dotted-quarter note values and supported by a three-voiced accompaniment figure. The crux of the initial melodic phrase is an upward appoggiatura on  $b^{\flat 1}$  (Ex. 34), in stark contrast to the virtuosic element. In this material, the performer must sustain the rhythmic momentum of the piece using the repeated-eighth accompaniment figure.

Example 33. W. A. Mozart, Sonata, K. 332, mvt. III, mm. 1-3.<sup>61</sup>

(Allegro assai.)



*f legato*

Example 34. W. A. Mozart, Sonata, K. 332, mvt. III, mm. 16-32.<sup>62</sup>



*sf* *sf*

*sf* *p* *b*

*p* *calando*

Additional characteristics that require sufficient time to register include the two staccato markings found on the last two eighth notes in measures 17 and 19 (Ex. 34) and the *fp* markings in measures 20-21 (Ex. 34). Accenting the weakest part of the measure,

<sup>61</sup> W. A. Mozart, *Sonata, K. 332*, in *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts Werke*, Ser. XX, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1878), 138.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 138-9.

Mozart here frustrates the forward momentum of his melody. Moving forward he continues to impede an easy flow of ideas through various pauses and denial of expected resolutions. Thus, in measures 22-23, a compound line composed of a rising, mostly chromatic line from a to e<sup>1</sup> in the lower voice and a rising diatonic line from g<sup>1</sup> to b-flat<sup>1</sup> in the upper voice generates expectations for a tonic resolution on beat one of measure 24 (Ex. 34, a). Instead Mozart takes a large, unprepared diminished 12<sup>th</sup> leap from e<sup>1</sup> up to b-flat<sup>2</sup>, a heightened version of the leaps found in measures 15, 17, and 19; this interruption of the listener's expectations demands emphasis owing to an unresolved tritone, the sudden registral shift, and the shift of texture from octave doubling to an exposed single note.

The resolution of this exposed note brings the phrase to a complete halt by means of a deceptive cadence in measure 26 followed by almost two beats of silence (Ex. 34, b). After this apparent failure to cadence Mozart reattempts the compound-line phrase from measures 22-23, this time establishing a full cadence by inserting space in the form of rests between the chords of the progression I<sup>6</sup> – IV – V.

A moderated *Allegro assai* is further supported by Mozart's use of the term *dolce* at measure 15, implying sincerity of expression and a vocal tone quality. Mozart's use of this word is sparse in the keyboard sonatas; it appears elsewhere only at the outset of the *Andante cantabile* of K. 330 and in the *Allegro* of K. 576. Together with the *cantabile* modification of the *Andante* in K. 330, the *dolce* indication in the third movement of K. 332 implies a similarly lyrical, singing character. Similarly, the *dolce* marking in K. 576 shades a single-line melody following a flourish of sixteenth notes in  $\frac{6}{8}$  time. In all three

cases, the *dolce* marking softens the expression of primary material that would be at odds with itself if pushed too fast.

In juxtaposing the opening virtuoso sixteenth notes with a halting, *dolce* melody, Mozart contrasts two extremes of pianism, forcing the issue of tempo. If the performer is tempted by the flashy passagework of this piece to choose a fast tempo, he finds his tempo does not accommodate the ensuing melodic content. But to begin the piece with only the halting melody in mind would undercut the effect of the virtuoso sixteenth notes. Therefore, in this case, as in the earlier Agricola example, a middle ground emerges. The performer must choose a tempo fast *enough* for the sixteenth notes to attract attention yet not so fast as to take away from the lyrical melody and its nuance.

Moving ahead through this sonata-rondo movement, the next instance of lyrical writing takes the form of a c-minor episode in measures 50-64 (Ex. 35). Here Mozart employs a pianistic texture combining a solo melody with an arpeggiated-chord accompaniment. He also varies the structure of this episode here employing a double period. Rather than begin several consecutive sub-phrases on the same tone for several consecutive phrases, he heightens the tension from one phrase to the next by raising the pitch level of each. Beginning with  $e^{b2}$  in measure 50, the successive statements begin on  $a^{b2}$  and  $c^3$  (Ex. 35), falling to a half cadence in measure 57. The consequent phrase starts again on  $e^{b2}$ , moving through  $a^{b2}$  and this time rising all the way to the  $e^{b3}$  (Ex. 35) in the highest range of the keyboard in measure 62. The minor mode, itself signaling a more disturbed mood, is well-supported by a tempo which allows for temporal space to maintain the introspective character shift.

Example 35. W. A. Mozart, Sonata, K. 332, mvt. III, mm. 48-63.<sup>63</sup>

The image displays a musical score for Example 35, which is a section from the third movement of W. A. Mozart's Sonata, K. 332, measures 48-63. The score is written for piano and consists of three systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system begins with a treble staff featuring a complex sixteenth-note texture and a bass staff with a simple accompaniment. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and the articulation *legato* are indicated. The second system continues the melodic and harmonic development, with a *tr* (trill) marking in the treble staff. The third system concludes the section with further melodic and harmonic elaboration.

Mozart sheds further light on a tempo of sufficiency for K. 332/III by measures 112-127 (Ex. 36). Here, after a lengthy sixteenth note run through the circle of fifths (measures 91-111), Mozart reuses the double period structure of measures 50-64, drawing a parallel between these two sections of music that each serve as an alternative episode in the sonata-rondo layout of the movement. The first half of this double period recalls the earlier accompanied-melody texture. After the half cadence in measure 119, Mozart varies the consequent phrase with running sixteenth notes that embellish the solo melody and provide harmony, uniting his melodic and passagework textures. With both ideas so closely intertwined, this section provides a quick route to establishing an appropriate

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 139-40.

tempo for the piece. To choose a tempo based solely on the passagework in the second half of the period would sacrifice the grace of the first half. In particular, the chromatic harmony of measures 117-119 (I-b VI-iv-vii/V-V) would lose much of its expressive power if glossed over too quickly. Alternatively, placing too much importance on the lyricism of this first section would handicap the activity found in measures 120-126. Used here in close proximity to one another, these two styles inform one another. For one character, the tempo must not be too fast lest its expression be shortchanged; for the other, the tempo must be fast enough or risk losing its brilliance.

Example 36. W. A. Mozart, Sonata, K. 332, mvt. III, mm. 112-125.<sup>64</sup>

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano and violin. The first system shows the piano part with dynamics *p* and *sf*, and the instruction *legato*. The second system shows the violin part with dynamics *f* and *legato*, and the piano part with dynamic *f*. The third system shows both parts with various articulations and dynamics. The score is in a key with one flat and a 3/4 time signature.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 142.

The retransition in measures 127-147 exhibits a similar dual nature. After the brilliance exhibited in measures 120-126, the musical line distills to a single voice rising from the bottom of the keyboard accompanied by close-position chords (Ex. 37).

Example 37. W. A. Mozart, Sonata, K. 332, mvt. III, mm. 126-143.<sup>65</sup>

Assiduously avoiding virtuosity, the line flirts with the minor tonic, employing  $d^{b3}$  and  $a^{b2}$  in measures 133-136 followed by the German augmented sixth chord in 138. Travelling smoothly through long wide-ranging phrases, the single voice contrasts with the preceding brilliance, forming a distinctly lyrical, melismatic figure. The music reaches a dominant pedal point in measure 139 while the treble voice rises to  $b^{b2}$  in measure 142.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 142.



Gathering energy in staccato, the bass voice arpeggiates the dominant triad heralding the return of brilliance in measures 143-147. The right hand's cascade of sixteenths runs nearly the whole length of the keyboard from d<sup>3</sup> to F and announces the reprise of the opening of the movement, arguing for a tempo that smoothly integrates both modes of expression.

It would be logical to expect Mozart's sonata to be in agreement with his father's treatise published 28 years before; after all, Leopold, who classified *allegro assai* as little distinguished from *presto*, was certainly Mozart's first and arguably most influential music teacher. And yet, Mozart invokes lyricism and avoids brilliance in his own *allegro assai* movement, suggesting that a moderated tempo offers the most effective mode of expression.

Additional insight into Mozart's view of *assai* can be found by considering his Symphony in G Minor, K. 550 (1788) and Sonata in C Minor, K. 457 (1784). Both the first and final movements of the symphony were initially marked *Allegro assai*, but Mozart crosses out the first movement's tempo, replacing it with *Molto allegro*. Similarly, in the autograph of the sonata, Mozart marks the third movement *Molto allegro*, but the first edition bears the marking *allegro assai*, likely reflecting a change of mind on the composer's part. Nikolaus Harnoncourt tackles this particular problem in regard to the symphony in his book *The Musical Dialogue: Thoughts on Monteverdi, Bach, and Mozart*. Of particular note are these comments:

It is also obvious that the two designations had to represent clearly different tempos – otherwise, the correction would not have been necessary... Since *molto allegro* is Mozart's fastest *allegro*, the first movement must be taken faster than

the last. This is also confirmed by musical arguments based on the work itself...The tempo corrections can also be taken to mean that Mozart wanted to warn against an ordinary, accented eighth-note allegro in the first movement, but also against a cheap finale effect based on speed alone.<sup>66</sup>

Although the task exceeds the scope of this survey, an examination of the content of the first and third movements of the C minor sonata may be expected to support an analogous line of reasoning.

Thus, in 1788, despite Mozart's father's treatise and the semantic shift toward a "heightening" interpretation of this term, Mozart makes a distinction between *Allegro assai* and *Molto allegro*. In the test case of the K. 332 sonata, significant evidence justifies the choice of a "moderating" definition of *assai*.

### ***Assai* in the Earlier and Later Keyboard Sonatas of Franz Joseph Haydn**

Whereas Mozart indicated *Allegro assai* in a movement that alternated between brilliance and lyricism, Haydn begins the third movement of his Sonata in D Major, Hob. XVI:19 (1767) with disjunct eighth notes passed from the right to left hand (Ex. 38). This opening figure, with the right hand primarily off the beat, points the performer to a moderate tempo at the outset so as to manage the eighth-note motion and highlight the well-balanced dialogue between two equally important voices. Haydn returns to this structure again in measures 27, 29-30, and 33-34, varying the disjunct figure such that the order of voices is flipped (Ex. 39). Measures 33-34 are transitional in function, separating the major-mode opening of the second part of a rounded-binary episode from the return

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<sup>66</sup> Nikolaus Harnoncourt, *The Musical Dialogue*. Translated by Mary O'Neill. (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997), 94.

of the initial minor-mode material. The compositional connection is characteristic of Haydn's witticisms and the performer is to savor this detail by adopting a moderate tempo.

Example 38. F. J. Haydn, Sonata, Hob. XVI: 19, mvt. III, mm. 1-4.<sup>67</sup>



Example 39. F. J. Haydn, Sonata, Hob. XVI: 19, mvt. III, mm. 22-36.<sup>68</sup>



Sixteenth-note level subdivisions of the beat, such as those in measures 4, 7, 11, and 12 are largely ornamental, and eighth-note division dominates until measure 45. But at that point the subdivision of the beat into sixteenth notes assumes the function of a

<sup>67</sup> F. J. Haydn, *Sonata, Hob. XVI: 19*, edited by Georg Feder, (Munich: Henle, 1970).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

variation of the original theme, persisting throughout the variation and encompassing many unpredictable twists and turns. Furthermore, the performer must reckon with the ornamentation found on the anacrusis to measures 93 and 97, requiring thirty-second level subdivisions (Ex. 40). Therefore, the performer is encouraged to consider Haydn's further subdivisions later in the piece as evidence that points to the viability of the moderating influence of *assai*.

Example 40. F. J. Haydn, Sonata, Hob. XVI:19, mvt. III, mm. 90-100.<sup>69</sup>

Having a special place among Haydn's *oeuvre* among a set of three 2-movement sonatas, often referred to as *Damensonaten*, dedicated to the Princess Esterházy, he marks Hob. XVI:42/II (likely 1783) *Vivace assai*. Haydn begins with an eighth-note figure that quickly gives way to running sixteenth notes (Ex. 41). Haydn then inserts a technical challenge by requiring scalar, parallel thirds in the right hand in measures 19-20 and 77-78 (Ex. 42). If the performer is to believe that *assai* truly means "very," and that a *vivace* marking is overall quicker than an *allegro* marking, the resultant high speed leaves little

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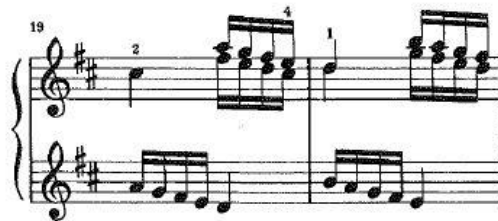
<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

scope for elucidating the character, well-described by Tom Beghin as full of rhetoric, sly, and high-spirited. On the other hand, interpreting the tempo marking as permissive in nature allows the performer to adopt a tempo lively enough to project the wit of the piece all the while satisfying the compositional details and pointed articulations found throughout.<sup>70</sup>

Example 41. F. J. Haydn, Sonata, Hob. XVI:42, mvt. II, mm. 1-5.<sup>71</sup>



Example 42. F. J. Haydn, Sonata, Hob. XVI:42, mvt II, mm. 19-20.<sup>72</sup>



As with any piece of music, the tempos of these two movements by Haydn are influenced not only by material located at the very beginning of the movement, but by the entire content of the movement. Imposing a very fast tempo upon either of these pieces

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<sup>70</sup> Tom Beghin, "Haydn as Orator: A Rhetorical Analysis of his Keyboard Sonata in D Major, Hob.XVI:42," in *Haydn and His World*, edited by Elaine Sisman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 201-245.

<sup>71</sup> F. J. Haydn, *Sonata, Hob. XVI: 42*, edited by Georg Feder, (Munich: Henle, 1966).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

would cause later details, as well as their inherent characters, to suffer. Thus, Haydn appears to have used the marking *assai* consistently with its meaning as a marker of sufficiency, as evidenced by the technical shifts in the latter halves of these two examples that are in opposition to a very quick tempo.

### **Assai in the Keyboard Sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven**

*Assai* originally meant the same as *assez*. Both in Italian and French the same ironical process has caused these equivalents of ‘pretty fast’ to suggest extremes. Never lose sight of the literal meaning, and be content to take *Allegro assai* “fast enough.”<sup>73</sup>

Donald Francis Tovey

Of the above passage from Donald Francis Tovey’s notes in the Associated Board’s edition of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, Stewart Deas says, “Tovey is finding in the tempo-indication a justification for his instinctive feeling about the music, and not merely forcing the music to conform to the literal meaning of a label.”<sup>74</sup> Deas’s article traces a path through Beethoven’s work, highlighting those pieces where Beethoven uses the word *assai* conspicuously to mean ‘rather’ or ‘somewhat’ as opposed to ‘very.’ Of particular importance are Deas’s questions about Beethoven’s Sonata in F minor, op. 57 (1806): “Is this movement really to be taken very fast? Is ‘*allegro assai*’ here equivalent to ‘*allegro molto*’ or even ‘*presto*’? If so, what becomes of the ‘*più allegro*’ at the end?” Deas also identifies the direct comparison Beethoven makes in the *Diabelli Variations*

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<sup>73</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Complete Pianoforte Sonatas*, ed. Harold Craxton, annotated by Donald Francis Tovey., 3 vols., (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1989), 59.

<sup>74</sup> Stewart Deas, “Beethoven’s ‘Allegro Assai,’” *Music and Letters* XXXI/4 (October 1950): 333-336. Accessed September 27, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/730495>.

between its Variation 22 and Mozart’s aria ‘Notte e giorno faticar’ from *Don Giovanni*. Each is marked *allegro molto* and each is followed by a movement marked *allegro assai*. Deas asks, “Will anyone dare to affirm that Variation 23 goes faster than Variation 22?” The performer is also encouraged to consider the second-movement Scherzo of the *opus 106* Sonata, “Hammerklavier,” (1818) whose *assai vivace* marking is generally assumed to imply velocity, especially Beethoven’s tempo marking (dotted half = 80). Yet, the presto cut-time sections suggest to the performer some amount of restraint is required for contrast. Through analyses of Beethoven’s piano sonata movements that make use of the word *assai*, we will continue to test for the feasibility of a moderating interpretation of the term.

Among early Beethoven keyboard sonata movements designated *scherzo* (Table 5), the third movement of Sonata in G Major, op. 14, no. 2 (1799) is unique in having a compound meter and thirty- second note subdivisions. Beethoven marks op. 14, no. 2 as *Allegro assai* partly to alert the performer to the multiple textures that carry the puckishly humorous character throughout the movement.

Table 5. Beethoven's Early Piano Sonata Scherzos.

<b>Work</b>	<b>Meter</b>	<b>Tempo Indication</b>	<b>Fastest note values</b>
Op. 2, no. 2/III	$\frac{3}{4}$	Allegretto	Sixteenth
Op. 2, no. 3/III	$\frac{3}{4}$	Allegro	Eighth triplet
Op. 14, no. 2/iii	$\frac{3}{8}$	Allegro Assai	Thirty-second
Op. 26/II	$\frac{3}{4}$	Allegro Molto	Eighth
Op. 28/III	$\frac{3}{4}$	Allegro Vivace	Eighth

At the outset, Beethoven employs hemiola to imply duple meter by means of a threefold repetition of a figure of two sixteenths and an eighth note. Then, at the end of measure 2, the pattern is broken by a single eighth with an accidental (Ex. 43). Tovey exhorts the performer to consider the character of the  $c^{\#2}$ , allowing it to have an effect on the interpretation of the tempo marking: “if the tempo is not too fast you will have time enough for the proper quizzical expression of the C# in b. 2, though this is not allowed to have a *sforzando* until near the end of the sonata.”<sup>75</sup> The performer must also consider the final statement of the rising hemiola figure, which, as Tovey points out, includes a *sforzando* on the  $c^{\#2}$ - $c^{\#3}$  octave (Ex. 44).

Example 43. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 1-4.<sup>76</sup>



Example 44. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 237-240.<sup>77</sup>



<sup>75</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Complete Pianoforte Sonatas*, ed. Harold Craxton, annot. by Donald Francis Tovey., 3 vols., (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1989), 208.

<sup>76</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonata, op. 14, no. 2*, in *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke*, series 16: *Sonaten für das Pianoforte*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1862).

<sup>77</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonata, op. 14, no. 2*, in *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke*, series 16: *Sonaten für das Pianoforte*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1862).



Whereas each previous instance of the C# was unaccompanied, now a busy sixteenth-note triplet figure activates the bass (mm. 239ff). The performer soon discovers that this figure resists being played very quickly suggesting the usefulness of a limiting effect of *assai* on the tempo. By limiting the tempo with a busy accompaniment and overemphasizing with a heavy accent what was initially a light, skipping upbeat, Beethoven allows the player to relish the humor inherent in the hemiola ruse.

Beethoven develops the hemiola idea further in the transition to the second episode of this rondo, measures 68-71, layering the rising sixteenth-note triplet figure in two overlapping voices (Ex. 45). The effect of this hemiola is even stronger than the opening figure and confuses the sense of direction during the transition. Beethoven uses hemiola in the music leading into and coming out of the second episode and withholds it from the center section to distinguish this episode from the principal theme.

Example 45. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 67-72.<sup>78</sup>



Despite having made it difficult to pinpoint which parts in the refrain might be considered accompanimental, Beethoven makes such determinations obvious in the second episode: the left-hand plays the accompanying voice. Though the bass does include melodic content, marked by slurs and double-beamed note-heads, the regularity

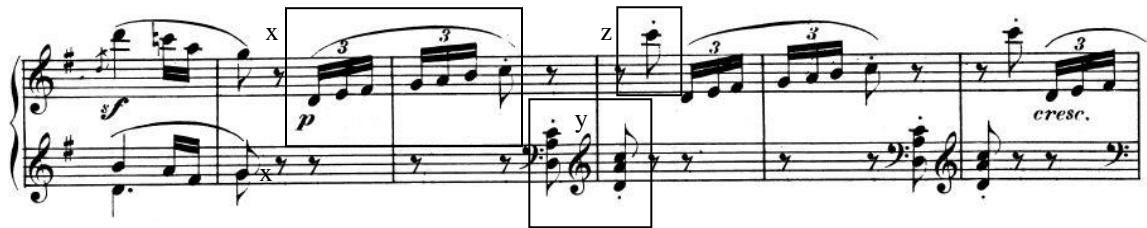
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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

of the figuration in the bass part makes it clear that such melodic content is secondary to the main line in the upper voice. This primary line occupies one register for a length of time implying a single voice that presents a song, fittingly marked *dolce*. As this sweet song contrasts so fully with the opening theme, it is important to reconcile these disparate textures within the same movement by adopting a tempo that is satisfying for both the *scherzo* and the song.

Registral shifts and articulation play an important role in determining character and expression throughout this *scherzo*. Measures 8-12 are comprised of a rising sixteenth-note triplet figure (x), two leaping chords (y), and a final singular staccato pitch (z) (Ex. 46). The first combination of these three figures ends in the high register, but at the return in measures 160-164, Beethoven alters the order, arranging the x and y figures as low to high, placing z an octave below the register attained by y, and marking z *sforzato* to drive the point home (Ex. 47). Such subtle changes advocate for a more moderate tempo, since the joke languishes unless there is time to notice the change. Similar reshuffling of registers is found throughout the movement. The sixteenth notes in measures 89-91 switch from the left hand to the right hand in 97-99 and the quarter to eighth note figure switches hands as well. Additionally, measures 89-91 slur beat three to beat one in the quarter-eighth figure whereas each measure is itself slurred together in measures 97-99.

Example 46. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 7-12.<sup>79</sup>



Example 47. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 159-165.<sup>80</sup>



Similarly, the hands switch duties between measures 189-200 and measures 213-224 (Exx. 48 and 49). In measures 190 and following, the leading voice leaps rapidly between the bass and treble at two-measure intervals, then compressed to one-measure intervals, forcing the performer to cover leaps of up to two and a half octaves in an instant. Tovey says of this passage:

Cling to the proper meaning of *assai*. Not 'extremely' but *assez*: lively enough. This movement is often attacked at a tempo which would make bb. 197-200 a scramble even for experienced players. Make no such mistake. Regard the movement as on the quaver standard, like the first movement; and take it no faster than a comfortable waltz, such as could be danced gracefully if we knew how to waltz nowadays.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Beethoven, Ludwig van, *Complete Pianoforte Sonatas*, ed. Harold Craxton, annot. by Donald Francis Tovey., 3 vols., (London: The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1989), 208.

Example 48. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no. 2, mvt. III, mm. 193-200.<sup>82</sup>



Example 49. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 14, no.2, mvt. III, mm. 217-224.<sup>83</sup>



Here Tovey appears to justify his tempo recommendation as an accommodation to the difficulty of a particular passage. However, he also has in mind the character and the expression of the work, advocating for dancing grace over a scramble. The down-up-up or strong-weak-weak rhythm of the waltz is congruent with the notated articulation in measures 191 and 193. Furthermore, this articulation links together the lyrical episode

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

and the principal theme of the movement; Beethoven uses the same articulation in measure 75. Thus, Beethoven's playful detailing of his material throughout the movement links its various sections together. The enjoyment of his humor is enhanced by a tempo that is moderate enough to recognize each witty transformation.

Although a different type of movement, the *Allegro assai* finale of Beethoven's Sonata in C major, op. 2, no. 3 (1795) likewise requires a suitably judicious tempo. As with *op. 14, no. 2*, this *Allegro assai* uses a compound meter (6/8), encompasses widely varying characters between its sections, and begins with an attractive rising line (Ex. 50). The planing chords, staccato markings, and piano dynamic rightly entice the performer toward a light execution which, coupled with eighth-note values that dominate this opening figure, tempt the performer to interpret *assai* in this case to mean 'very.'

Example 50. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 1-4.<sup>84</sup>



However, the performer is soon forced to reconsider a hasty tempo choice by the sixteenth notes in measures 8 to 18 and even more so by the bass figuration in measures 29 to 34 and measures 40 to 44 (Ex. 51). If played 'very fast,' the filigree in the right hand of measures 8-18 runs the risk of sounding facile, and the bass figure, difficult

<sup>84</sup> Ludwig van Beethoven, *Sonata, op. 2, no. 3*, in *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke*, series 16: *Sonaten für das Pianoforte*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1862).

under any circumstances because Beethoven has set it up in a way that does not accommodate the hand, starts to resemble a tremolo, if playable at all. Although the latter figure primarily fills out the functional harmony, its lowest notes contain important voice-leading material encompassing a stepwise descent through a minor third that may benefit from a more moderate tempo.

Example 51. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 30-33.<sup>85</sup>



As in Mozart's K. 332/III, the performer must also consider the relative character shifts in measures 45 and following. This section replaces the kinetic energy of measures 28-44 with rapid harmonic changes, constant register shifts, sequences, chromatic leading tones, and the use of a fairly wide range of the keyboard, deployed in a single-line linear texture (Ex. 52). Yet, this single-line texture eventually falls to the bottom of the keyboard in measure 55 where it adopts a dark, brooding character. The performer is encouraged to adopt a permissive interpretation of the term *assai* to deploy and manage the great amounts of energy and significant mood shifts embodied within these passages.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Example 52. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 43-58.<sup>86</sup>

The image displays three systems of musical notation for piano. The first system (measures 43-48) features a treble clef with a melodic line of eighth and sixteenth notes, and a bass clef with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The second system (measures 49-54) continues the melodic and accompanimental patterns. The third system (measures 55-58) shows a change in texture, with the bass clef playing a steady eighth-note accompaniment and the treble clef playing a more active melodic line. Dynamics markings include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano).

Following the utilization of these three textures, Beethoven introduces a chorale-textured subject at measure 103. Here, as he had in op. 14, no. 2, and as Mozart did in his K. 332/III, Beethoven marks a contrasting episode of a compound meter rondo marked *Allegro assai* with the term *dolce*, and as in those examples he uses several additional compositional devices to set off the middle section of op. 2, no. 3/IV (Ex. 53). He switches from an active texture, full of leaps, scalar figures, and sixteenth notes, to one resembling a chorale, with four-part harmony and broader note values. He also marks slurs over two measures at a time in contrast to the one measure or half measure slurs in measures 29-34 and like places.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

Example 53. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 102-116.<sup>87</sup>

The image displays a musical score for Example 53, consisting of two systems of piano music. The top system is in bass clef and the bottom system is in treble clef. The music features a long-toned chorale melody in the bass and slurred eighth-note pairs in the treble. A 'dolce' marking is present in the first measure of the top system.

Following measures 103-110, the long-toned chorale melody continues in the bass, with slurred eighth-note pairs in the treble occupying the spaces between each dotted quarter and reemphasizing the eighth-note pulse. The inflection of these two-note figures emphasizes the second eighth note in each beat, somewhat dampening forward motion. Beethoven continues to emphasize the weaker parts of the triplet subdivision in measures 119, 121 and other similar places with *sf* markings on the first, third, and fourth eighth notes of the measure (Ex. 54). In each case, he sets up another two-note slur, this time descending by step. The marked *sf* accents intensify the strong-weak relationship implicit in the two-note sigh figures, accomplished by striking the first part of the two-note slur more strongly. Furthermore, the *sf* accent may indicate that a slight agogic accent is possible. By slightly delaying and/or lengthening these notes, the performer not only strengthens them but also regulates the forward momentum of the passage. As in

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



Mozart's K. 332, these accents broaden what might otherwise be a forward-leaning dance figure into a rustic, grounded statement.

Example 54. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 117-120.<sup>88</sup>



Beethoven continues to rely on these compositional devices throughout this episode. Notably, the *sf* accent is recast as a pedal dominant in the transition leading back to the original material, beginning in measure 167 and continuing through measure 173 (Ex. 55). The two-note slur also makes an appearance in measures 175 and 177. At this point, the four-voice texture falls away to a single rising line that reaches the top of the keyboard in measure 179; there, an answering line begins in the bass, heralding the return of the initial material beginning in measure 181. Such unifying details, in addition to providing inflection, define the character of this chorale-like episode and carry its regulating effect across the breadth of the work.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Example 55. Beethoven, Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, mvt. IV, mm. 169-180.<sup>89</sup>

The image displays a musical score for Example 55, which is a section from Beethoven's Sonata, op. 2, no. 3, movement IV, measures 169-180. The score is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 169 through 174. In these measures, the right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and accents. Dynamic markings include *sf* (sforzando) in the right hand and *fp* (forzando piano) in the left hand. The second system contains measures 175 through 180. The right hand continues with a melodic line, and the left hand has a more active, rhythmic part. A *pp* (pianissimo) marking is present in the right hand in measure 178. The score is written in a standard musical notation with a treble and bass clef.

Taking the movement as a whole, the performer must reconcile the character of this lyrical episode with the entirety of the movement including its more brilliant and technically difficult aspects. Taken too fast, the sweet, hymn-like quality of the middle section can be trivialized, and the left-hand figure in measures 29-34 can become an unrhythmic blur. The task of the performer is to determine a tempo quick enough to carry the two-measure phrases and hymn-like structure of the *dolce* episode, but reasonable enough to keep the outer sections intelligible. Reading *assai* as “sufficiently” leads the performer toward a tempo that can handle the long phrases, retain a sense of brilliance where necessary, and do justice to artistic detail.

In these movements from Beethoven’s sonatas, there is need to reconcile the episodes and their principal themes. In each case the *dolce* marking signals a shift toward vocally-inspired lyricism in contrast to the more instrumentally-based, active refrains. Yet Beethoven has embedded similar motivic ideas in both the rondos and episodes of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

these *Allegro assai* movements. The tempo marking signals the performer that these pieces have a dual nature. Some 40 years after the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century published disagreement about the interpretation of the word, *assai* continues to bear a permissive interpretation, advising the performer to play sufficiently fast to manage both the active and the lyrical sections.

A common point among many of the pieces so far discussed in this study is that many movements marked *allegro assai* include a figuration, character shift, or other detail in the interior of the movement that does not fit the typical interpretation of intensification. In addition, the opening sections of many movements provide a clue through their movement from slower to quicker note values. The marking *assai* acts as a feasible caution to the performer of the difficulties ahead, whether in technical execution or character representation. Such cautions allow the performer to retain the vibrant character of Beethoven's op. 2, no. 3/IV without sacrificing the hymn-like breadth of the middle section. Similarly, through this reading of *assai* Beethoven's op. 14, no. 2/III retains its internal scherzo without sacrificing the song, both of Haydn's movements are afforded time for his fine witticisms to register, and Mozart's variegated characters are set in relief to the advantage of each.

## CHAPTER V

### ASSAI IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Bearing the marking *Allegro assai quasi presto*, Frédéric Chopin's Impromptu in A-flat Major, op. 29 (1837) represents usage of the term *assai* some 80 years after disagreement about its interpretation began appearing in treatises. Comparing this first impromptu with Chopin's third in G-flat major, op. 51 (1842), written five years later and marked *Vivace*, helps to illustrate Chopin's nuanced application of tempo markings. Thorough comparison of the energy levels of these two pieces, considering such aspects as energy deployment, melodic structure, harmonic rhythm, and meter, allows the conscientious performer to reconcile their *sostenuto* middle sections with the outer section of each impromptu.

As is evident in their opening measures, the op. 29 impromptu (*allegro assai, quasi presto*) has more energy than its op. 51 cousin (*allegro vivace*) (Exs. 51 and 52). The right hand of op. 29 begins with an accented trill which catapults the musical line upward. As it moves upward, Chopin marks a swell, implying growth of energy throughout the first measure (Ex. 56).<sup>90</sup> He restarts the energy in measure 2 with the same accented trill and swell figure, continuing in measures 3 and 4 with a trill followed by a

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<sup>90</sup> For a discussion of the interpretation of hairpins in this style see David Hyun-Su Kim, "The Brahmsian Hairpin," *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 36, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 46-57, accessed June 23, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncm.2012.36.1.046>.

two measure decrease in energy. Chopin continues these energy changes throughout the piece with frequent swells and diminuendos.

Example 56. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat Major, op. 29, mm. 1-6.<sup>91</sup>



In contrast, the melodically driven phrases found in op. 51 moderate its forward motion. After two measures of introduction, Chopin marks long phrases, in contrast with the shorter phrases of op. 29 (Ex. 57). Thus, despite their similar uses of range and distinctly instrumental musical lines, in op. 51, he creates an uninterrupted line and enhances the melodic line with a duet voice in the right hand starting in measure 11. In addition to differences in melodic energy, Chopin varies the harmonic rhythm between these two impromptus. Favoring more energy in op. 29, he deploys half-measure harmonic changes, whereas in the broader op. 51 he sustains energy through full-measure harmonies.

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<sup>91</sup> Frederic Chopin, *Impromptu*, op. 29, (Paris: Chez Maurice Schlesinger, 1837).

Example 57. Chopin, Impromptu in G-flat Major, op. 51, mm. 1-7.<sup>92</sup>



Chopin further distinguishes these two impromptus by their meters, intervallic content, and the relationship between the two, despite both proceeding in eighth-note triplets. Placing op. 29 in a duple meter and op. 51 in a complex meter imbues the former with more energy than the latter. Whereas in op. 29, Chopin invites caprice through short phrases with wide melodic intervals, Chopin injects the compound-meter op. 51 with sustaining neighbor tones and melodic intervals that fill out each beat of a longer phrase. Furthermore, in op. 29 Chopin beams together 2 groups of eighth-note triplets in the first group of triplets within each rising gesture, as in measures 1 and 2, allowing for the

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<sup>92</sup> Frederic Chopin, *Impromptu, op. 51*, (Paris: Chez Maurice Schlesinger, 1843).

possibility of feeling two large beats, rather than four smaller ones, and reinforcing the half-measure harmonic rhythm of his first impromptu (Ex. 56).

Due in part to the already heightened energy found at the outset of op. 29, demonstrated by its short phrases, faster harmonic rhythm, and overall caprice inherent to the musical line, Chopin's *quasi presto* indication signifies the impression of a quick movement, rather than velocity itself. In contrast to the *vivace* of op. 51, which simply directs the performer to keep the musical line lively, Chopin's *allegro assai, quasi presto* of op. 29 demands a more nuanced interpretation, namely – 'fast enough, almost quick.' Additionally, the indication *quasi presto* incites the performer to consider how differing amounts of energy impact the interpretation not only of these impromptus' outer sections, but also their middle sections, which are both marked *sostenuto*.

In the *sostenuto* of op. 29, Chopin places the bass notes on weak beats, emphasized with accent strokes, opposing the previously perceived half-note harmonic rhythm (Ex. 58). Furthermore, the wide variety of moods found in measures 51 through 82 invokes flexibility of timing. A partial survey of these includes the following: (1) measure 51 begins with a pensive F-minor statement with a hopeful turn to A-flat Major in 58; (2) the response in measure 59 includes an assertive statement of the rising figure found throughout the middle section, marked forte and *sostenuto* with an opening hairpin; (3) the sprightly shift with *leggiero* in measure 61 is quickly followed by another forte and hairpin leading to a poignant cadence in measures 64 to 66; (4) a plaintive *mezza voce* statement diminishes to piano in measure 69, inducing a more contemplative mood that is heightened by the *dolcissimo* marking in measure 71; (5) the line gathers

confidence in measures 72 and 73, marked *con forza* with accents; (6) returning to *mezza voce*, Chopin finishes this section with an increasingly melancholic statement which rises to the highest note in the piece, the d-flat<sup>3</sup> in measure 80. These swings create a relatively wide emotive space requiring care to execute and time for the musical line to shift organically from one character to another. Such shifts argue for a permissiveness in tempo afforded by Chopin's invocation of *assai*.

Example 58. Chopin, Impromptu in A-flat Major, op. 29, mm. 34-38.<sup>93</sup>



In contrast, Chopin increases the energy output in the middle section of his op. 51 by encouraging forward motion. Chopin places the same rhythmic content, eighth-note triplets, into the different context of cut time with triplet subdivisions, freeing up forward motion and allowing the left-hand melody, which is decidedly less florid than its predecessor, to proceed unencumbered. In comparison to op. 29, the middle section of op. 51 pursues a straight line from beginning to end with a steadily increasing dynamic and energy output moving from what is assumed to be *piano* in measure 49 through *forte* in measure 65 to *fortissimo* marked in measure 69.

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<sup>93</sup> Frederic Chopin, *Impromptu*, op. 29, (Paris: Chez Maurice Schlesinger, 1837).



Thus, the emotional spectrum of op. 29 encompasses a greater range of contrast than does that of op. 51, a range that may account for Chopin's use of the term *assai*. Whereas the latter impromptu requires an overall broader tempo, the heightened energy at the outset and somber energy in the middle section of the former argues for *assai* as a cautionary marking, signaling the performer to judge the tempo in the context of the whole piece. In contrast to the Viennese Classical School, whose concerns were related to smaller structural and compositional details, Chopin warns the performer to take larger shifts in energy into consideration. Although in this case it is not recommended to adopt a slow tempo at the outset of the op. 29 impromptu, the permissive tempo marking allows the performer the interpretational latitude necessary to accommodate the wide character shifts found in the *sostenuto* middle section.

Chopin invokes the term *assai* once again with regard to managing energy in his *Polonaise-Fantasy*, op. 61 (1846). Following a *forte* with ensuing *crescendo* in measure 238 Chopin marks *forte assai* at measure 242 (ex. 59) Unique thus far in this discussion in that *assai* is modifying a quality unrelated to tempo, this measure marks a point of both arrival and departure. This arrival culminates a lengthy transitional section that, beginning in measure 222, gathers energy, direction, and momentum until the primary subject of the piece bursts forth in measure 242, providing a conclusive summation for all that has come before. Though an arrival point, this material, cast in the heroic manner and supported by a powerful and active eighth-note triplet bass line, is not the ultimate climax of the piece, for it is immediately followed by a series of further dynamic intensifications.

In measure 249 *piú forte* is marked (Ex. 60), followed quickly by *fortissimo* in measure 250 and the *sempre fortissimo* in measure 254 (Ex. 61).

Example 59. Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantasy*, op. 61, mm. 236-242.<sup>94</sup>



Example 60. Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantasy*, op. 61, mm. 247-249.<sup>95</sup>



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<sup>94</sup> Frederic Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantasy*, *Op. 61*, (Paris: Brandus et Cie, 1846).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

Example 61. Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantasy*, op. 61, mm. 250-255.<sup>96</sup>



In these measures, Chopin has set up a hierarchy of dynamic shadings where *forte assai* is clearly situated between *forte* and *più forte*. The drastic textural shift from the thin-textured parallel octaves of measure 238 to the fully-harmonized melody with deep bass counterpoint of measure 242 suggests *assai* is a moderating marking. Further intensifications are necessary to underscore the rising sequence from measures 242-245 to 246-249, the wild careening through keys of measures 250-253, and the conclusive confirmation of the tonic in measure 254. Therefore, the performer must allow for an increase in energy and sound output.

Even here, appended to a dynamic marking, *assai* advocates for a moderated reading. As in many other situations considered with regard to tempo, the appended *assai* both affirms that which preceded and warns of that which is to follow. In this case,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

Chopin appears to be indicating that though this is an arrival point, he aspires to greater heights. To give this section too much power would rob the following climax of its importance.

### **Feasibility of *Assai* as Intensifier**

Though it appears that the moderating interpretation of *assai* continues into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, its usage in the works of Franz Liszt clearly interpret *assai* as an intensifier. The following examples demonstrate his association of the term *assai* with four others: *accentuato*, *espressivo*, *energico*, and *rinforzando*, which will each be examined in turn.

*Accentuato assai* appears in measure 139 of *St. Francois de Paule: marchant sur les flots* (1863) (Ex. 62), measure 3 of the first *Notturmo* from *Liebesträume* (1850) (Ex. 63), and measure 5 of the second *Notturmo* of the same set (Ex. 64). All three of these examples in slow tempi present declamatory melodies in recitative style, requiring a projected tone that is well served by the intensifying interpretation of the word *assai*. Similarly, Liszt indicates *espressivo assai* in measure 54 of the second *Consolation* (1850) (Ex. 65) as well as in measure 52 of the first *Notturmo* (Ex. 66). A limiting interpretation of *espressivo* would undercut its definitional meaning. It is more practicable to infer that these passages are to be played with heightened expression, rather than to attempt to produce a reading that is “somewhat expressive.”

Example 62. Liszt, *St. Francois de Paule: marchant sur les flots*, mm. 139-143.<sup>97</sup>

**Lento.**  
*accentato assai*  
*con somma espressione*

Example 63. Liszt, *Liebstraum, Nottorno I*, mm. 1-4.<sup>98</sup>

**Andantino espressivo assai**      *il canto accentato assai*

*dolcissimo*

*una corda*

*l'accompagnamento sempre ppe colla*

<sup>97</sup> Franz Liszt, *St. Francois de Paule: marchant sur les flots*, in *Franz Liszt: Musikalische Werke*, Serie II, Band 9, edited by José Vianna da Motta, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927).

<sup>98</sup> Franz Liszt, *Liebsträume, Nottorno 1* in *Franz Liszt Klavierwerke*, Band 6, edited by Emil von Sauer, (Leipzig: Peters, 1918).

Example 64. Liszt, *Liebstraum*, Nottorno 2, mm. 1-9.<sup>99</sup>

**Quasi Lento, abbandonandosi**

*il canto accentuato assai*

Example 65. Liszt, *Second Consolation*, mm. 51-54.<sup>100</sup>

*poco rit.*

*accentuato ed espressivo  
assai*

<sup>99</sup> Franz Liszt, *Liebesträume*, Nottorno 2 in *Franz Liszt Klavierwerke*, Band 6, edited by Emil von Sauer, (Leipzig: Peters, 1918).

<sup>100</sup> Franz Liszt, *Consolation 2* in *Franz Liszt Klavierwerke*, Band 5, edited by Emil von Sauer, (Leipzig: Peters, 1913-7).

Example 66. Liszt, *Liebstraum*, *Nottorno I*, mm. 52-56.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, in the Sonata in B Minor (1854), Liszt applies the term *assai* to the descriptors *energico* and *rinforzando* respectively. In measure 73, an exciting passage deploying four-octave unisons, accents, strokes, *crescendo*, and an overall rising line is marked *sempre staccato ed energico assai* (Ex. 67). This is completely at odds with a ‘somewhat energetic’ interpretation. Later, at the climax of the *Andante sostenuto* section, Liszt marks *rinforz. assai* in measure 393 (Ex. 68), beginning a two-measure long fortissimo hemiola that arrives at *fff* in measure 395. This is unmistakably a passage of increasing intensity which is buoyed by an intensifying interpretation of *assai*.

Example 67. Liszt, Sonata in B Minor, mm. 72-76.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Franz Liszt, *Liebesträume*, *Nottorno I* in *Franz Liszt Klavierwerke*, Band 6, edited by Emil von Sauer, (Leipzig: Peters, 1918).

<sup>102</sup> Franz Liszt, *Sonata in B minor* in *Franz Liszt: Musikalische Werke*, Serie II, Band 8, edited by José Vianna da Motta, (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1924).

Example 68. Liszt, Sonata in B Minor, mm. 392-398.<sup>103</sup>

The musical score for Liszt's Sonata in B Minor, measures 392-398, is presented in two systems. The upper system features a treble clef staff with a complex, chromatic passage marked with an '8' and a dynamic of 'rinforz. assai'. The lower system features a bass clef staff with a similar texture, marked with an '8' and 'poco rallent.'. The piece concludes with a 'dolce' section featuring a descending scale in the bass clef staff.

Thus, the disparate understanding of the term *assai* is seen to continue into the Romantic Era, with Chopin and Liszt applying it with opposite purposes. Yet, the customary interpretation of *assai* today is as an intensifier only. Perhaps the incomparable influence of Liszt helped to establish this primary interpretation. Continued research into the usage of the two interpretations during the Romantic Era would help to document the gradual prevalence of one universal understanding of *assai* as an intensifier, while keeping open the possibility of discovering instances in which the alternative reading could reveal unsuspected aspects of the design and expressive content of many familiar and unfamiliar works.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

*Assai* retained two meanings longer than is commonly assumed. Though the discrepant understanding began as far back as the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, even such influential musicians of that era as Marpurg and Rousseau did not have the final word in defining a primary, accepted interpretation for *assai*; the disagreement continues through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, with even such leading Romantic composers as Chopin and Liszt differing widely in their usage of the term. Examples drawn from various cultures and eras, addressing a wide variety of executions, characters, and situations in which *assai* appears to convey some sort of warning, all point to this.

Effectively executing certain passages, be they the fast triplets and tremolos found in the Beethoven examples above or the ornamentation found in Scarlatti, Agricola, and C. P. E. Bach, is not a matter of dexterity alone. The way these events are managed affects the way sound occurs in time creating musical landscapes that project or elicit an affect or emotion. For example, mercurial ornamentation in an otherwise steady and unwavering piece sends a mixed message. Though it is undeniable that the performer must make interpretive decisions limited by personal prowess, such decisions are best underpinned by a deep understanding of the musical text and its communicative goals. It has been shown here that, frequently, the musical text and the executional concerns point to *assai* as a moderating word.

In another musical context, the need to reconcile disparate characters within one piece or across a body of work plays a role in determining an appropriate interpretation of *assai*. For example, the comparative study of Beethoven's scherzos uncovers elements that advocate for a slower tempo in the one marked *allegro assai* than in those marked simply *allegro*. Similarly, the disparate characters encompassed within Mozart and Beethoven fast movements containing a *dolce* middle section suggest that *assai* could be perceived as a hint from the composer, advising the performer to be aware that an event further along in the piece may greatly affect the choice of tempo, and that basing a decision only on the information found at the beginning of the piece is likely to create an untenable situation later.

Although a survey of dictionaries and treatises points to a mid-18<sup>th</sup> century shift toward an intensifying definition for the word *assai*, substantial musical evidence indicates that the term continued to be used in a moderating fashion long after that. The examples here, chosen to illustrate this point, are far from exhaustive. Nevertheless, they support a case for reconsidering the modern assumption that *assai* simply means 'very.' It has been shown that musical contexts involving ornamentation, relative brilliance, meter, and structure point the performer toward a holistic understanding of a piece of music. Specific features within a work, considered as aspects of a whole and coupled with comparative study across various bodies of work, can serve as guides to the performer seeking an appropriate interpretation of the multivalent term *assai* on a case-by-case basis.

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## APPENDIX A

### LETTERS OF PERMISSION FOR THE REPRINTING OF MUSICAL MATERIALS

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#### Request to reproduce C. P. E. Bach Scans in a dissertation

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Paul Corneilson, Ph.D.

On 2017-01-29 20:21, Adam Lefever Hughes wrote:

Dear Mr. Corneilson:

My name is Adam Hughes and I'm a Doctoral Candidate at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I'm writing a dissertation examining the interpretation of assai over a variety of composers' solo keyboard works, including those of C. P. E. Bach. I got your name from a classmate of mine, André Duvall, who had made a similar request.

As part of this study, my work requires that I include scans of appropriate sections of the pieces I am analyzing in order to fully illustrate my arguments. I would appreciate the opportunity to include scans from the edition of C. P. E. Bach's works being produced by the Packard Humanities Institute as I am a great admirer of it.

Therefore, I write in hopes that I may be granted permission to reproduce in part Wq. 63/5 (Ser. 1, Vol. 3), Wq. 62/1 (Ser. 1, Vol. 5.1), Wq. 57/6 (Ser. 1, Vol. 4.1), Wq. 55/2 (Ser. 1, Vol. 4.1), and Wq. 58/4 (Ser. 1, Vol. 4.2).

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The title of my dissertation is: Assai as a Moderating Term: Feasibility of the Permissive Interpretation of Assai Investigated through Contemporaneous Dictionaries and Treatises and Comparative Study of Selected Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Keyboard Music.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. You may contact me at [adamuse@gmail.com](mailto:adamuse@gmail.com) or by phone at (717) 413-6187. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,  
Adam Lefever Hughes

**Winter@henle.de** <Winter@henle.de>  
To: adamuse@gmail.com  
Cc: Seiffert@henle.de

Mon, Mar 20, 2017 at 3:56 AM

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Best regards,

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