

Harpsichord & *fortepiano*

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UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: BACH, FORKEL, *SCHNELLEN*, AND KEYBOARD TOUCH

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Introduction

In reading eighteenth-century accounts of keyboard technique, one expects to find certain inconsistencies. Regarding clavichord playing, some notable variations occur on the matter of finger retraction and the related issue of *schellen* (a special form of *détaché*). In modern studies, the retraction technique is most often approached from J.N. Forkel's peculiar and oft-quoted presentation in his biography of J.S. Bach.¹ This author seems in certain particulars to present a very strange approach to keyboard (and specifically clavichord) technique. His commentary, often taken at face value, requires of today's reader a sense of its historical context. It is therefore a useful focus for addressing what that context may have been: the thrust of the present article. (The discussion is not concerned with whether Bach's playing is accurately described by Forkel; the point is what relation Forkel's commentary bears to clavichord technique in the eighteenth century.) Forkel naturally leads one to J.J. Quantz's comments on keyboard playing in his 1752 flute treatise, since Forkel derives much of his commentary from that source.²

Another obvious reference is Forkel's pupil Friedrich Griepenkerl, who published an extensive account of Forkel's "Bach" technique in the preface to his edition of the *Chromatic Fantasia & Fugue* (1819).³ While considering 18th-century treatises, I will

take note as well of the article by Menno van Delft in which he discusses the *Schneller* and *schellen* technique.⁴ To begin, we will look briefly at the background issue of *schellen*; then compare Forkel's account to those of Quantz, Griepenkerl, and other authorities. I offer certain conclusions more in the hope of elucidating the questions than giving final answers.

Schnellen

Beginning with C.P.E. Bach's treatise in 1753, German writers on keyboard playing seem unanimous in seeing the technique of finger retraction as assisting what seems to be a special effect *musically*: "snapping" a note via a swift, inward withdrawal of the finger as required by several ornaments, notably the *Schneller* itself (with its "*geschmelt*" upper auxiliary note) and the snapped termination of a trill.⁵ Termed *schellen*, the same technique was used also in detached passagework. These effects were associated most particularly with the clavichord. Van Delft traces *schellen* from Quantz's usage (which he considers to be the same described by C.P.E. Bach and others) through to Forkel, and with brief allusion to Forkel's pupil Friedrich Griepenkerl.

Although C.P.E. Bach alludes to the technique many times in his treatise, it is Ernst Wilhelm Wolf who gives the clearest period description, in his now well-known preface to a collection of clavier pieces

(1785).⁶ This compact account of many matters pertaining to notation and the clavichord was first brought to general attention in 1987 by Christopher Hogwood, who rightly called it a “supplement to C.P.E. Bach’s treatise.” Wolf is quite specific on many points treated vaguely or not at all by his contemporaries. He sees *schnellen* as a particular effect, not any kind of standard approach to, or release of, the keys. He places use of *schnellen* in context among other touches and articulations, to the following effects.

1) Wolf differentiates *détaché* from “normal” articulation (by which he seems to mean “ordinary movement,” the near-connection of successive tones) and says that it is best produced when one strikes with the pressure of a stiff finger “and then immediately draws the finger back towards the player so that it slides off the front, and the key quickly springs back up” (p. 146).⁷ The resulting tone he describes as sounding like “ṭnt!” (note the exclamation mark: the sound is accentual and distinct) as opposed to the “ṭt” of the usual release. Wolf remarks famously that his contemporaries tended to play runs in a brilliant, *détaché* style, unless a slur prohibited it (p. 145).⁸

Wolf’s further remarks establish that:

- 2) The effect is also, as usual, associated with certain ornaments (p. 146).
- 3) Cantabile is not associated with the *schnellen* effect: in a “singable melody... there would be no *détaché* or slide-off” (p. 148).
- 4) Non-melodic bass accompaniments are eligible for this style of playing, apparently in imitation of cello-like continuo playing--a rare application to slower note values (pp. 147-48).

5) Amid comments on some particular movements of his own compositions, a “natural touch” (“ordinary movement”) is differentiated from *détaché* and slurring (p. 153), and by obvious implication from the somewhat special technique and effect of *schnellen*.

Without significantly departing from his contemporaries’ descriptions except in providing more detail, Wolf makes it absolutely clear that *schnellen* is not the normal clavichord technique, in the sense of being generally applied.⁹

C.P.E. Bach discusses *schnellen* in the same terms as Wolf, although with much less detail. He sees in it a useful technique for certain ornaments, brilliant scales, and repeated notes.

I should add, based on my experience and others’ with a wide variety of clavichords, originals and reproductions, that the “ṭnt!” is more apparent on some instruments than others: a point which is mechanically inevitable, as the effect depends on the string tension of the individual instrument. Indeed, unless rendered carefully, *schnellen* can cause rattling of the keys’ guide blades in the rack, or other noise. The required finger action is less aggressive than the treatises’ rather extreme phraseology suggests; and there is only a narrow gap between producing the “ṭnt!” as opposed to overstepping into action noise. It is no wonder that C.P.E. Bach says that the snapping technique requires much practice.

There is another major writer to be heard from, from whom we learn that *schnellen* was not universally beloved. Daniel Gottlob Türk, in his treatise of 1789, writes as voluminously as C.P.E. Bach and often as specifically as Wolf. His book emphasizes the clavichord, and it is therefore particularly notable that he does

not discuss *schnellen* as a technique except regarding two ornaments, the *Pralltriller* and the *Schneller* itself. He uses the verb *abheben* --to lift--in regard to the ordinary raising of a finger from the key.¹⁰

Türk may well have found the *schnellen* technique, as applied to passagework, to be vulgar or at least too frequently abused by poor performance. Above all, he seems to have found it (by implication at least) to be lacking in nuances. Consider his rarely quoted remarks about dynamics in *détaché*:

“With tones that are to be detached, one lifts the finger from the key when almost half the duration of the written note is over, and pauses during the remaining time. That detached tones can also be played softly [*schwach*], I should hardly need remark; nonetheless, one hears from some players all detached tones, entirely contrary to the right expression, played strongly without [dynamic] differentiation.”¹¹

Van Delft suggests (p. 194), apparently based on Türk’s limited presentation of *schnellen*, that he represents a new trend toward an increasingly legato playing style; but his book (presumably years in the making) was published only four years after Wolf’s collection of pieces. May the two authors not represent distinctly different concurrent tendencies?

Forkel and Quantz

Forkel’s remarks on J.S. Bach’s keyboard technique are often specific to the clavichord, but relevant also (as he says) to the fortepiano and organ, and by implication to the harpsichord. His comments have been quoted so frequently that they have perhaps reached the level of a droned-through

catechism for many players and students. In fact, there are several questionable aspects to this famous commentary, whose core is generally recognized as a re-ordered and embellished paraphrase of a paragraph by Quantz. The latter’s famous passage is on harpsichord playing generally, with reference at the end to Bach’s use of a specific technique.) Forkel makes a curious presentation, for instance, redirecting some of Quantz’s harpsichord-specific points to clavichord technique. Although he states that he is limiting discussion to single-note passages and the associated approach, his account can easily be read as presenting a general description of playing technique; the result stands in odd contrast to earlier keyboard tutors.

To begin with Forkel’s own statement and its parallels in Quantz, we will take Forkel’s account in order; Quantz places the various points in a quite different sequence.¹²

Forkel clearly knew Quantz’s treatise, as he quotes from it with acknowledgment elsewhere in his book, but he does not acknowledge the extensive paraphrasing in his chapter on clavier playing. Borrowing from the older text commences almost at the start of his own account, with the remark, somewhat elaborated from Quantz’s original, that different players produce different sounds from the same instrument, and that the reason must lie in the variations of touch. Forkel equates clarity of keyboard touch and articulation on single tones with clear speaking of single words by an orator. He then quotes C.P.E. Bach’s well-known comment regarding the ideal basic touch that is neither too legato nor too detached, but “the middle course” (a near-connection, often termed elsewhere “ordinary movement”). Forkel says that it is surprising that C.P.E. Bach did not go on to describe the technique that assures that

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middle course, which allows the highest distinctness. He sets out to describe it himself, limiting the subject to single tones (in passage work, as becomes evident): this is the one matter treated by Quantz in direct commentary about J.S. Bach.

Forkel describes Bach as having played with a compact hand, the fingers close to the keys and curved so that their tips form a line. (The latter point appears in very similar terms in Quantz.) In this style of playing, the fingers, moving only their first joints, sound the keys with barely perceptible motions. Then, "The power [of the compact hand] imparted to the keys, or the amount of pressure, must be maintained with equal strength, in such a way that the finger is not lifted straight upward from the key, but rather through a gradual withdrawal of the finger tips toward the palm of the hand, glides off [*abgleitet*] on the front part of the key" (p.13/432). (Not, apparently, as it is so often conveyed, slipping literally off the front edge, but gliding off the surface of the front area of the key: the natural key head, for instance.) This comment is a close paraphrase of Quantz, who puts it as drawing the fingertips "back toward you, to the foremost part of the key, until they glide [*abgleiten*] from the key" (p. 232/260). This technique is nominally that of *schnellen*, but with the significant difference that the latter concerns very sharp detachment and Forkel is describing a touch for C.P.E. Bach's "middle course."

Quantz makes it clear that this procedure is limited to single tones heard in passage work; he clearly takes the more normal manner of key release to be that of raising the fingers (see the fuller quotation below); the finger retraction is not applied to all musical textures. Forkel makes no such limitation. He goes on: "During the transition from one key to another, this

gliding off [*Abgleiten*] causes the amount of strength or pressure, by which the first tone has been maintained, to be transferred [*geworfen*] with the greatest speed to the next finger, so that now both tones are neither detached nor can sound together" (p. 13/432).

The tones are neither separated nor overlapping (no parallel in Quantz). The idea seems to be that with the weight transfer from one finger to another, overlapping is avoided and, with the rapid succession of motions, detachment is also avoided because the tones sound in such quick succession. Thus, Forkel equates a given motion with a given articulation; he stands at the head of a long modern tradition of making such wholesale attributions.

The close hand position and the finger retraction technique, says Forkel, obviate the awkward "chopping, thumping, and stumbling" that occur otherwise when the fingers are extended or not properly curved, and he again relates the advantage specifically to brilliant passage work: "The drawing in of the fingertips and the consequent swift carryover of the strength of one finger to the next following, brings the highest level of clarity in attack [*Anschlage*] to the single tones, so that each passage rendered in this way sounds brilliant [*glänzend*], rolling and round, just as if each tone were a pearl" (p. 13/432). Here he closely paraphrases Quantz, who makes all of these points but in a slightly different order. Curve all yours fingers, says Quantz in effect, so you will not stumble in passage work. Quantz only then reaches the issue of finger retraction, used for one specific case—again, he clearly takes the normal playing procedure to be raising the fingers upon release: "One must, however, when playing running notes [*laufenden Noten*], not again

immediately lift [*aufheben*] the fingers; rather, draw their tips back toward you, to the foremost part of the key, until they glide [*abgleiten*] from the key. In this way the running passages are brought out most clearly. I appeal herewith to the example of the greatest of all keyboard players, who practiced and taught thus" (p. 232/260). Quantz's index of course identifies this player as J.S. Bach. There is no mention of snappy key return, merely of finger retraction. He seems merely to be talking about technical ease and musical clarity.

Forkel's discussion goes on with supportive detail, still based on Quantz: "Through the gliding of the fingertips upon the keys with a uniform amount of pressure the string is left enough time to vibrate; the tone thereby becomes not only more beautiful, but also lengthened [in duration], and we are thereby placed in the position, even upon an instrument so weak in tone as the clavichord is, to know singing and connected [*zusammen-hängend*] playing" (p. 13 / 432-33).

Forkel here joins together two separate remarks from Quantz, who does not relate "gliding" to the string vibrations. Thus Quantz: "[good touch depends on] whether one, with each individual finger, strikes with the same strength and force, and with the right weight; whether one gives the strings their proper time, so that they can make their vibrations unhindered; or whether one presses down the fingers altogether too sluggishly and does not give them, by means of a snap [*Schneller*], a certain strength, so that the strings, in order to sustain the tone longer, can be set into longer-lasting vibration" (p. 231/259). This last observation appears in Quantz's text well ahead of, and apart from, the later description of the special technique for

passage work. Again, the word *Schneller* does not occur in connection with the technique for passage work, and Quantz never uses the word "*schnellen*."

Quantz's comments are directed, not to finely graded technique, but merely to practical aspects of efficient harpsichord playing. Plectra made from actual quill can admit of some dynamic variation, responding more fully to a firm touch, particularly when the quills are somewhat worn. Further, if the quilling has become irregular, a decisive, "snappy" touch is needed to overcome the irregularities from one note to another (weaker vs. stronger quills; plucks delayed by out-of-regulation plectra). I would suggest that Quantz speaks of the snapping attack only in a generic sense, in opposition to "sluggish" playing (which leaves the timing of plucks, and hence of the music, quite awry). In fact, his use of the word "*Schneller*" refers only to a sharp, "snappy" downward attack in *lowering* the keys rather than a snappy manner of release: he is merely advising the novice to "play with a snap" ("*durch einen Schneller*") to ensure that the quills (likely not always in perfect regulation) clear the strings and make them resound fully. Anyone who has ever had to perform on an out-of-regulation harpsichord will know what Quantz is talking about. There is no mention of snappy key *return*, either in this connection, nor later in regard to negotiation of "running passages."

In short, Quantz does not appear to have invented the term or concept of *schnellen* as described by subsequent writers. Clearly, Forkel himself does not see Quantz as describing the strongly detached *schnellen*, for he adopts Quantz's phrasing to describe (as Forkel himself clearly states) the near-connection of "ordinary movement."

Forkel, rather perversely, applies his

paraphrase of Quantz to the clavichord, an instrument whose touch is intimately and directly involved with tonal duration. He recombines the aspect of making harpsichord (now clavichord) strings sustain with the supposed influence of the “gliding” touch prolonging the tone on the clavichord. What helps clavichord strings to sustain, however, is the maintenance of a firm, steady, full pressure on the strings, as if one is about to press further for *Bebung* or “*Tragen der Töne*.” This alteration, and Quantz’s use of the word *Schneller* (avoided by Forkel, with good reason), create certain confusions, as will be discussed below.

Again, Forkel appears to present finger retraction as the basic touch, in that he does not discuss other particulars and seems to generalize regarding what he does describe; therefore he gives the appearance of summing up a generally applicable technique. Quantz, in contrast, presents retraction very specifically as a technique limited to clean negotiation of brilliant passage work. It is understandable that, given later use of the term, Quantz should appear to be discussing the technique of *schnellen* (as Mr. van Delft believes), but (as just explained) that is likely not the case. From Forkel’s text, one gets the impression that he found in Quantz his best solid reference and over-generalized from it—not a unique instance in his book. Quantz is in line with later writers in regarding retraction is a special technique, although not one so specialized as they describe.

Fingering

If not *schnellen*, then, what was Quantz talking about? It is significant that he may well have had in mind the negotiation of scales and passage work by using old-fashioned finger crossing, a fingering style

certainly used by Bach, whose playing Quantz cites. As anyone experienced with finger-crossing techniques is aware, playing with finger retraction and the near-connection (“structured legato”) of “ordinary movement” allows an easily controlled, clear, and even performance when, for example, (right hand) 3 crosses over 2 (descending) and 4 (ascending) in scalar motion. Retraction seems to have been a solution to getting out of your own way playing scalar finger crossings: the technique is described as long ago as 1565, in the treatise on clavichord playing by Tomás de Sancta María.¹³ Quantz appears to be saying essentially the same thing.

C.P.E. Bach recognizes “old fashioned” finger crossing as perfectly valid and even advantageous in general and does not associate it with the special effect of *schnellen*. Indeed, finger crossings in many contexts allow a full connection from one note to another, as Bach remarks. Both thumb-based turning and finger crossing, he says, “must be so used, that all tones are able to hang together well. For that reason, in tonalities with few or no accidentals, the crossing of the third finger over the fourth and of the second over the thumb are better and more useful to avoid all possible division” than thumb turnings.¹⁴ This kind of smooth passage can only be done by some form of finger withdrawal, although Bach does not bother to describe the technique of crossing. But the retraction technique does not by any means necessitate the sharp, “snapped” effect associated with *schnellen*.

Slow Retraction?

One way and another, all of the authors cited thus far except Forkel make it clear that finger retraction, whether snapped or ordinary, was never the generic technique

suggested by (at least a casual reading of) Forkel's account; and their views are supported by other authorities of the time. It is Forkel who sounds the single most confusing tone on the subject. By a flatly literal reading of his commentary, the reader can come away believing that a slow pulling along the playing surface of the keys was a standard keyboard technique, certainly for the clavichord. If Forkel actually intended that meaning, he is unique among the period commentators. His account leaves out just enough specific detail to admit considerable uncertainty. Is he truly referring to a continuous, perhaps slow dragging of the curved fingertip palmward along the surface of the key? He once (see above) refers to the retraction motion as "gradual" ("*allmähliges*") and a later remark (already cited) also suggests a leisurely movement: "Through the gliding of the fingertips upon the keys with a uniform amount of pressure the string is left enough time to vibrate." This slow retraction is mentioned by no other author—not even Quantz, from whom Forkel borrows so liberally.

Van Delft comments, "Whenever Philipp Emanuel Bach mentions *schnellen* he does so with ultra-fast finger movement in mind. It seems that Forkel and Grienpenkerl apply this same finger movement also in a slower or more cantabile context. Note the word 'gradually' in the second Forkel quotation" (p. 196). On the next page this point has expanded to *schnellen* as being "a more general playing technique that was also used for normal or longer notes" (p. 197).

With all respect to Mr. van Delft, the very concept of *schnellen* is far removed from "normal or longer notes" and from cantabile (cf. for instance E.W. Wolf; although Wolf does mention one exception: *schnellen* for cello-like bass accompaniments); but that matter is a terminological issue only.

I certainly agree that a milder form of retraction must often have been used for finger withdrawal (as I believe Quantz describes); but I suggest 1) that it is a finger-crossing technique much older than *schnellen*, not (as van Delft seems to imply) perhaps derived from it; and 2) that Forkel uses "*allmähliges*" merely to avoid misunderstanding. Doubtless aware of *schnellen*, he is perhaps indicating its absence from his discussion by implying, "not a snap, but with sufficient short contact that the strings have time to vibrate"—in short, the ordinary kind of withdrawal that enables finger crossing.

It should be mentioned that a weighted finger dragging along much of the playing surface offers, like the brisk *schnellen* technique itself, certain disadvantages, apart from general clumsiness.¹) Such an extended pull, if light enough to continue, does not communicate the fullest support to the tangent and vibrating strings, and hence does not really assist the tone to sustain at its best. Indeed, any irregularity in the contact could compromise the pressure and hence the tone. 2) Depending of course upon the particular clavichord, the motion easily draws various noises both from the key surface and from the likely amplification of those noises through the key and tangent into the strings and soundboard. Again, it is not sliding that helps to sustain the tone, but a firm touch. 18th-century players were well aware of the differences caused by full v. light key contact. Varying solidity of sustained key contact is mentioned by E.W. Wolf as influencing the actual duration of a note on the clavichord and was, from his account, a variation that was actively exploited (Wolf, p.153). 3) The notion of dragging fingers along the key surfaces while rendering (or attempting to render), say, a five-part fugue, or passages replete

with chords or broken octaves, reaches the (literally) untenable.

Apart from perhaps signalling that *schnellen* is not involved, Forkel ignores the technique, pursuing instead C.P.E. Bach's "middle road." However, he discusses no other techniques nor approaches to any variety of musical textures. As remarked above, his description lapses into such a sense of the general that ordinary lifting of the fingers, to say nothing of the variety of 18th-century keyboard techniques, is lost.

Forkel Explained (?)

The reader turns with relief to Forkel's disciple Griepenkerl, who goes into much detail to explain, in his own way, what Forkel was trying to say--or perhaps what he thought Forkel was saying. In any case, according to Griepenkerl, his account describes his instructor's technique precisely.

Griepenkerl, like the 18th-century writers, gives no impression of slow pulling. He mentions rapid, palmward retraction and appears upon close reading to be describing an *elliptical* motion with only brief travel along the key itself: quite different from either an up-and-down motion or a long-distance pull. (As far as Forkel's description goes, the elliptical motion just described ties in perfectly with his description of Bach's minimal finger motion.) Griepenkerl states that the finger actively playing a note should be *held in place* upon the key, supporting whatever degree of hand or arm weight is suitable. The succeeding finger waits expectantly, poised above its key to a maximum of a quarter-inch. (Again, the remark agrees with Forkel's statement that Bach's fingers "rose very little from the keys, hardly more than in a trill" [pp. 13-14 / 433].) As it descends, the other finger pulls

in and the hand or arm weight is transferred to the new note. If the reader will make the trial of transferring such a weighty touch between two fingers (perhaps adjacent fingers, to start), with the finger action commencing some quarter-inch above the playing surfaces and each finger rapidly drawing in and returning to that slightly off-the-key position during the changes of finger, an overall elliptical motion (descent plus return) will be found to be the most efficient, if not inevitable, movement that results. The fingertip's contact with the key surface covers a very short distance, around an eighth of an inch (4 mm).

This technique is indeed very effective. It provides a solid foundation for good tone production, in that the tangent's string contact is firmly supported.¹⁵ (Cf. Wolf and C.P.E. Bach regarding firm key contact through a stiff finger.) The finger action is of course most natural to scales and other instances where the hand deals with only a single line. But even when the retraction itself is obviated by whatever musical textures the hand must encompass (e.g., sustained arpeggio tones), the clinging, weighted touch remains completely relevant. Unfortunately, Griepenkerl does not describe such variations.

Naturally, clavichord actions vary considerably in perceived weight resistance (string tension and action response) and Griepenkerl appropriately mentions that hand or arm weight is to be utilised according to need.¹⁶

As in other matters, Griepenkerl shows himself highly conservative on the subject of fingering. Indeed, he sees finger crossing as inevitably necessary to Bach's works; one feels certain (or would hope) that since C.P.E. Bach recommended it and Griepenkerl asserts it, that Forkel felt the same. The touch that Griepenkerl

describes (again, clearly not the *schnellen* technique) is of course suited to crossings, and he recommends that the player “should accustom himself to the manner of fingering learned by C.Ph.E. Bach from his father, according to which the best fingers are those with which a passage can be executed most comfortably. One should place the thumb and little finger as often as it is useful and necessary on the shorter upper keys, one should put each shorter finger under the longer, and each longer finger over the shorter, in spite of the one-sided rules of many of the newer theorists” (p. 52). The relation to finger crossing, left out of Forkel’s account, is thus confirmed by Griepenkerl.

Griepenkerl associates finger withdrawal with generic keyboard playing and grades of *détaché*, ordinary movement, and even legato, perhaps because he regards finger crossing as an inevitable requirement of Bach’s keyboard music. In this, he goes well beyond Forkel’s statement.

Conclusions and Questions

Does Griepenkerl accurately reflect Forkel’s teaching? Or has he modified it? Forkel’s account, too easily sounding like an espousal of a single, generic approach, appears even to be somewhat contradicted by his (nominal) disciple. Possibly he taught the technique more accurately to Griepenkerl than he could manage to put it down on paper. Certainly Griepenkerl brings the technique back into something like the mainstream of 18th-century treatment of the subject: a quick, brief finger retraction, weight in the touch, and so forth. The main difference is that, as with Forkel, the retracting touch is no longer one of several. And unlike Forkel’s stated intent (of limiting his discussion to linear passagework), Griepenkerl applies the

technique broadside (as Forkel seems to imply anyway): he mentions its use “with every finger of each hand...nearer as well as further away [that is, transferring weight etc. from any one digit to any other], and in all the various possible changes of strengths and weaknesses, quicker and slower, of pushing and slurring” (p. 50).

Neither Forkel nor Griepenkerl are discussing *schnellen*, certainly not in Wolf’s and C.P.E. Bach’s terms.

As to *schnellen* as described by Wolf, it does not appear necessarily to have been in general use. Taste diverged then, as now, and Türk implies that it certainly varied in this regard. Although we perhaps tend to think today of *schnellen* in terms of finger withdrawal, it is conceivable that its sharp snapping aspect so differentiated it, in contemporary players’ thinking, from the finger crossing aspect that no further comment was felt necessary. (The snapping technique is certainly more difficult.) Perhaps it was for them a distinction with a large difference? Today, the several roles of the *appoggiatura* in undifferentiated notation spring to mind as a rough parallel.

Quantz’s discussion is not firm evidence (if evidence at all; certainly not through terminology) for attributing use of the full, snapping *schnellen* technique to J.S. Bach. Given the basics found elsewhere in his discussion of keyboard playing, it is far more likely that he is speaking of the “get-out-of-your-own-way” aspect of playing scalar passages cleanly. His use of the word “*Schneller*” in such a context could well be quite misleading.

Could it be that C.P.E. Bach adopted the term from Quantz’s casual use (“be sure to be firm in getting the keys down”), giving it a different and more specific meaning? Forkel is the sole writer to suggest a lingering pull over the key surface,

and this seems likely to be an indication, “not *schnellen*.” But this interpretation is of course only a possibility. The normal quitting of a key, in clavichord or other keyboard playing, was by raising the finger. Even among the (few but major) authors considered here, this point is implied or stated by Quantz, C.P.E. Bach, Wolf, and Türk. Forkel and Griepenkerl are the only exceptions.

What we can draw from all these commentaries regarding J.S. Bach’s playing is, of course, questionable, although the efficiency of the quiet hand and aligned fingers (found in most treatises anyway) would seem likely. Again, Quantz’s account of finger retraction runs parallel to Bach’s known use of finger crossing.

We are left, among other questions, wondering how much diversity there was among 18th-century approaches to the clavichord (cf. Wolf vs. Türk regarding *schnellen*). If Forkel and Griepenkerl are describing a practice that centered itself in a generally applicable elliptical (surely not dragging?) finger motion, that style must have stood in opposition to a (probably more mainstream) approach (cf. Wolf and Türk) that contrasted finger retraction with lifted fingers, with or without the snapping effects of *schnellen*. Period accounts of performance practice are generally best understood in their larger context and Forkel’s statement is an egregious example. One could wish that E.W. Wolf had been the inter-generational reporter on J.S. Bach’s full manner of playing.

Thus, Forkel’s statement, even once elucidated by Griepenkerl, raises useful questions. The questions alone may broaden one’s concept of playing the clavichord. But *schnellen*, too often avoided by modern players, does not perhaps

require overemphasis; and students and players should not rely on Forkel as a sole or primary guide. Context is, as ever, all-important.

I gratefully thank Elaine Fuller for looking through the source materials and making several incisive suggestions as to their implications; Douglas Hollick for several insightful comments on playing technique (see Endnote 15); and Paul Irvin for several very helpful observations on the presentation.

All translations are by the author, made as literal as possible, with the exception of the translations of E.W. Wolf and Fr. Griepenkerl. Page references are given in the text to the standard English translations of Forkel and Quantz, and to the article by Menno van Delft.

- ¹ Johann Nicolaus Forkel, Chapter 3 of *Über Johann Sebastian Bachs Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig: 1802), p. 11-18. An English translation forms Part VI of Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, *The Bach Reader*, rev. and enlarged by Christoph Wolff (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), p. 431-436. The English quoted in the present article is translated by the author directly from the original German. Page references to Forkel given in the text refer to the 1802 edition. For ease of reference, page numbers are also given for the *New Bach Reader* version. I should mention that the 1998 *NBR* unfortunately omits a number of interesting passages (found in the earlier edition) that relate to J.S. Bach and the clavichord.
- ² Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Berlin, 1752): Chapter 17, Section 6, Paragraph 18 (p. 231-32). The English quoted in the present article is translated by the author directly from the original German. Page references to Quantz given in the text refer to the 1752 edition. For ease of reference, page numbers are also given for the translation by Edward R. Reilly, *On Playing the Flute* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1966), p. 259-60.
- ³ Miklos Spanyi, "Johann Sebastian Bach's Clavichord Technique described by Grienpenkerl" (*Clavichord International* IV/2 [November, 2000]:47-52. Translation of Grienpenkerl's text by John Collins. All page references to Grienpenkerl in the present article refer to this translation.
- ⁴ Menno van Delft, in "Schnellen: A Quintessential Articulation Technique in Eighteenth-Century Keyboard Playing," in Christopher Hogwood, *The Keyboard in Baroque Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2009):187-97. All page references to van Delft in the present text refer to this article.
- ⁵ C.P.E. Bach's comments on the *schnellen* technique are summarized by van Delft, p. 188-92.
- ⁶ Christopher Hogwood, "A Supplement to C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch*: E.W. Wolf's *Anleitung* of 1785," in *C.P.E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen L. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988):133-158. Page references to Wolf given in the present article refer to this publication.
- ⁷ Christopher Hogwood, "A Supplement to C.P.E. Bach's *Versuch*: E.W. Wolf's *Anleitung* of 1785," in *C.P.E. Bach Studies*, ed. Stephen L. Clark (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988):133-158. Page references to Wolf given in the present article refer to this publication.
- ⁸ Curiously, editor Hogwood reads this differentiation in terms of "the dead effect of the tangent simply blocking the sound (a lazy 't't') and the small grunt produced by an energized release ('t'nt')." p. 138. This notion recalls A.J. Hipkins' comments in the first edition of *Grove's Dictionary* to the effect that blocking is an inescapable aspect of the clavichord's tone! See A.J. Hipkins, "Clavichord," in George Grove, ed., *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: MacMillan, 1879), p. 367, col. 1.
- ⁹ Most of Wolf's comments quoted above, plus those on ornaments, are very usefully assembled by van Delft, p. 193-94.
- ¹⁰ Daniel Gottlob Türk, *Klavierschule* (Leipzig and Halle, 1789, p. 341, 342 (Chapter 6, paragraphs 21, 22).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 354 (Chapter 6, Sec. 3, para. 36).
12 Numbering the individual remarks taken from Quantz by Forkel as 1-8 in Quantz's own ordering, Forkel's rearrangement emerges in the sequence 1, 2, 7, 6, 5, 3, 4, 8.
- ¹³ Tomás de Sancta María, "Libro llamado arte de tañer fantasia," translated by Barbara Sachs and Barry Ife in Sachs and Ife, *Anthology of Early Keyboard Methods* (Cambridge: Gamut, 1981), p. 17.
- ¹⁴ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu Spielen* (Berlin:1753), Chapter 1, para. 64, p. 34-35. Translation by the present author.
- ¹⁵ The touch is also useful on the organ, as organist and keyboard player Douglas Hollick has confirmed to me. The clavichord was, of course, the standard practice instrument for organists of the period.
16 Although clavichord touch is nominally shallow and light, the newcomer quickly realizes that supporting the tone of several string courses at once or in rapid succession can require, certainly in eighteenth-century *bundfrei* instruments, a certain strength and "grip."