

Historical examples of musical stereotypes, or: Aesthetic judgments are never just about the music

Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529), *Il libro del cortegiano* (The Book of the Courtesan, 1528): the best music features a “noble simplicity”

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-85), *Livre des mélanges* (Book of Miscellanies, 1560): appreciation of music is a sure sign of a person’s good breeding and proper cultivation, marking someone as a “man of worth.”

Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773), *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (Essay on Playing the Flute, 1752):

Negative descriptions used by Quantz	In reference to
“common and insipid” ¹	Ruining a “sublime, majestic, and vigorous air” through overuse of “poorly introduced appoggiaturas”
“the notes are executed indistinctly, obscurely, unintelligibly, without articulation, feebly, sluggishly, tediously, sleepily, coarsely, and dryly; if all the notes are slurred or attacked indiscriminately” ²	Poor execution in general
Executing “heavily, anxiously, tediously, or precipitately and blunderingly” ³	Passage-work
“immoderate haste” ⁴	Ruining the “agreeableness” of a movement in an allegro tempo
“indifference and negligence, barrenness of invention, disregard of listeners, excessive artificiality” ⁵	Cadenzas
“ignorance, or a corrupt taste” ⁶	Causes of improper rhythmic execution ⁷
“the excessive praise that has become an unfortunate custom in music, perhaps because some fantastic dunces among Italian singers, with all their crass ignorance, demand it almost as an obligation to their very names” ⁸	Flattery from friends after a performance
“a coarse, forced disposition” ⁹	Composure that should be avoided during execution

Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *A General History of Music*, Volume I, Section 3. (1788-1801):

Although tone—or rather, as it must be called at this juncture, sound—is only the means by which music is made perceptible, in primitive, uncultivated nations it is generally taken for the thing itself. Indeed they consider every individual sound to be music. Consider pure sound in its various modifications: loud, soft, sharp and rough, gentle, dark, muffled, thick, thin, and so on. Furthermore, consider how in these various modifications sound is capable of affecting the hearing, and therefore the feelings of human beings. Then there is little reason to be surprised that the pleasure sound can already stimulate in itself may come to be considered a pleasure that arises from actual music. In his primal condition man is a passive creature; his soul has not yet been put into action. Sense impressions are thus still the only impressions that he can receive; he is not yet capable of other impressions, in which his intellect first must make a comparison, and derive from the observation of a proportion or a symmetry a feeling of pleasure. These sense impressions must be all the more intense and stirring the less the intellect is cultivated, and capable itself of being engaged.

This explains why we find in all wild and uncivilized nations such great pleasure taken in the clamor of noisy instruments—in drums, for example, and rattles, in blaring trumpets, and extremely loud, ferocious shrieks. Nature has established a wholly unmediated union between the heart and the hearing of human beings; all passions are communicated through their proper tones, which stir in the heart of the hearer the very passional sensation from which they resulted. This relation of unmediated perception between tone, hearing, and the heart is the same in all peoples, the most savage as well as the most civilized, with this one difference: the more savage the people, the more it remains merely sensuous and poor in mental representations, the more powerful are its sensations and its organs of sense. Thus in the primal state the pure tone, taken for itself alone as an expression of the passions, must be crude and vigorous, and entirely in keeping with the power of these sense organs.

¹ Quantz, Chapter 8, section 19.

² Quantz, Chapter 11, section 21.

³ Quantz, Chapter 11, section 21.

⁴⁴ Quantz, Chapter 12, section 11. In section 12, he offers as an example of “immoderate haste” the rushing of notes that occur after a rest on a downbeat in an allegro tempo.

⁵ Quantz, Chapter 15, section 18. Errors in cadenzas happen even in those by “very able musicians, as a result of an unpleasant state of mind, or too much vivacity, or from indifference and negligence, barrenness of invention, disregard of listeners, excessive artificiality, or other more intangible reasons.”

⁶ Quantz, Chapter 11, section 11.

⁷ Quantz describes this kind of rhythmic execution as: “they [players] often give the following note something of the time that belongs to the preceding.”

⁸ Quantz, Chapter 16, section 33.

⁹ Quantz, Chapter 11, section 13.