

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

A STRING PLAYER'S GUIDE
TO IMPROVISATION IN WESTERN ART MUSIC

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this treatise is to assemble a performer's guide to the subjects of baroque ornamentation and free improvisation, the cadenza in the classical concerto, and the aleatoric, indeterminate and improvisatory music of the late twentieth century, for players of bowed string instruments. The result is a handbook illustrating the basic techniques of improvisation in the above genres. Primary sources were drawn from treatises and from the repertoire, in addition to contemporary books, articles, and scholarly editions, and were selected in order to present a summary of the practice of improvisation with an emphasis on those concepts that can be most readily applied by performers.

The first chapter examines ornamentation and improvisation in the Baroque Era, roughly defined as the period extending from c.1600-1750. Following the introduction, the primary ornaments and their applications are discussed using examples derived from both didactic and performance sources. A brief survey of the freer techniques of improvisation encountered in the so-called "Italian Adagio" follows. The second chapter considers the cadenza and other improvised cadential embellishments that persisted in the Classical Era, c.1770-1830. The third chapter discusses free improvisation, indeterminacy and the role of the performer in the realization of unconventional scores in the avant-garde and experimental music of the late twentieth century.

The art of improvisation has played a vital role in the development of western art music, and this treatise is intended as both an introduction and a practical guide to the subject, in the hopes of encouraging further experimentation and investigation.