

Expression and *Discrétion*: Froberger, Bach, and Performance

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This was the “Keynote Lecture Recital” given on November 2, 2016, for a Conference on Creativity and Performance organized by Professor David Chung at Hong Kong Baptist University. The pieces performed on that occasion are listed at the end of this file (with links to recordings) in an Appendix that also identifies the sources that are cited by abbreviations in captions for musical examples below. I have added material in brackets from a talk given October 23, 2016 for the American Musicological Society, Greater New York Chapter, in Arnhold Hall's Glass Box Theatre at the Mannes College of Music/New School University in Manhattan.

It is a great honor to have been invited to talk to you today. I am very grateful to Prof. Chung and the Hong Kong Baptist University for the opportunity to join you as you celebrate your sixtieth anniversary as a leading institution of higher learning.

I will be discussing music for harpsichord by the Baroque composers Froberger and Bach. It was during their lifetimes that the first European clavichords and harpsichords were heard in China, and also that the first substantial examples of Chinese music were heard and studied in Europe. By the eighteenth century, certain types of Baroque music were also being performed regularly in North and South America. But it must be said that the music of Froberger and Bach did not achieve global status before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By the standards of their time, however, these two German composers traveled widely. Both, moreover, drew on several distinct European traditions.

Johann Jacob Froberger spent parts of his career in France, Austria, and Italy. He also visited Spain, England, and northern Germany. His travels brought him into contact with diverse European styles of composition and performance. Johann Sebastian Bach never left Germany. But he too was open to international influences which left clear traces in his music. Musicians today can enrich their interpretations of the music of both composers by understanding its international sources and incorporating this knowledge creatively into performances.

One fundamental element of the music of both composers is their use of the very different French and Italian styles of their day. Froberger was born four hundred years ago in 1616. He probably learned the French style while growing up in the city of Stuttgart, in western Germany near the French border. He later made two trips to Rome, where he studied with the Italian composer Girolamo Frescobaldi. Many of Froberger's compositions, especially his toccatas, reflect the style of Frescobaldi. Froberger must have played his own toccatas according to instructions which Frescobaldi published for his works. But Froberger also composed suites of dances in the French style. Froberger's music in the French style includes some of the most expressive pieces ever written for keyboard instruments. The titles of some of these pieces even relate them to incidents in the composer's own life, something extremely rare in Baroque music. One piece, for example, expresses the composer's misery after being robbed by soldiers (ex. 1). Another piece is a meditation on the composer's own future death (ex. 2).

This last illustration is from the composer's own manuscript, the autograph. Most of the other manuscripts that I will show you are later copies. These reveal that younger musicians were fascinated especially by Froberger's programmatic and autobiographical pieces. The titles alone of these pieces would be remarkable for a seventeenth-century European composer. But equally notable is that the titles of these pieces call for the performer to play with *discrétion*. This French word apparently meant that the rhythm of these pieces depended on the discretion of the performer. The word is attached to about two dozen pieces by Froberger (see table below). The word *discretion* is rare in music by other composers. But it does occur in one composition by Bach, the D-major harpsichord toccata. There the word appears in its Italian form, *discrezione* (ex. 3).

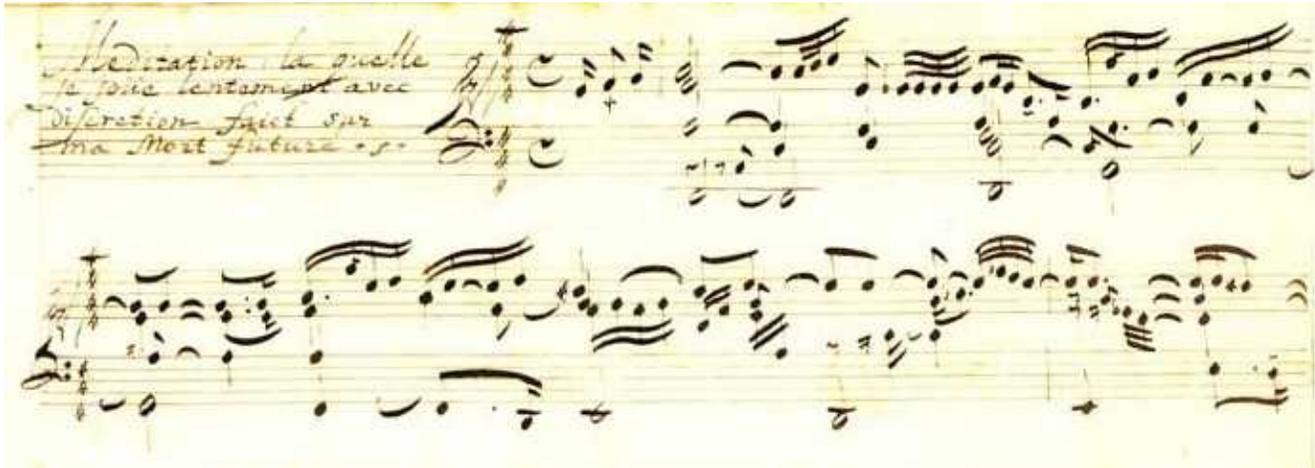
Example 1. Suite 14, “Lamentation on being robbed, played very slowly and with discretion, without observing any measure” (allemande), opening, from SA 4450 (with transcription)



Lamentation sur ce que j'ay esté volé, et se joue fort lentement, à la discretion sans observer aucune mesure

A printed musical score for the opening of Suite 14, 'Lamentation sur ce que j'ay esté volé...'. The score is arranged in four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. The first system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second system begins with a measure number '3'. The third system begins with a measure number '6'. The fourth system begins with a measure number '9'. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Example 2. Suite 20, “Meditation which is played slowly with discretion, made on my future death” (allemande), opening, from autograph manuscript, current location unknown (with transcription after SA 4450)



Meditation faite sur ma mort future, la quelle se joue lentement avec Discretion à Paris 1 May Anno 1660

This block contains a modern musical transcription of the piece. It is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The transcription is divided into four systems, with measure numbers 3, 6, and 9 indicated at the beginning of each system. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and dynamic markings like 'p' (piano). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Table 1. Pieces by Froberger with “discretion” markings

<u>Piece*</u>	<u>Source(s)**</u>	<u>Comment</u>
A11 (Election)	B	
A12 (Lamento)	B	lament for Ferdinand IV
A14 (Lamentation)	B, D, M	B adds: “sans observer aucune mesure”
A16	B	“sur le Subject d’un Chemin Montaigneux”
A17	B	“en honneur de la Duchesse de Wirtemberg”
A20 (Meditation)	B, H, S	
A27	B	“faite en passant le Rhin” (D: “Wasserfall”)
A30 (Plainte)	B, M	
A (Afligée)	S	from suite in F; only the title has been published
A (Meditation)	S	for Duchess Sibylle, in g; only the incipit has been published
G7	B	
G10	P	
G13	B, D, P	“Rusée mazarinique”
G19	D	
G20	B, P, S	S: “avec discretion” at m. 18
L (Blancrocher)	B, M	M adds: “sans observer aucune mesure”
L (Ferdinand III)	B, M, S	
L	S	tombeau, d (Friederich of Württemberg); title only published
T1, 2, 13, 14, 15, 18	B	

*Shortened form of title (if any) in parentheses. Abbreviations:

A = allemande

G = gigue (“discretion” indication in closing slow passage)

L = lament or tombeau

T = toccata

**Only sources with titles or rubrics calling for “discretion” are listed. Abbreviations:

B = Berlin SA 4450

D = D1 1-T-595

H = “Hintze” ms.

M = Min. 743

P = printed edition by Mortier after Roger (Amsterdam, ca. 1710)

S = Sotheby’s autograph (present location not publicly known)

Example 3. Johann Sebastian Bach, Toccata in D, BWV 912, passage “con discretione,” from P 289 (with transcription of mm. 111–21)



A printed musical score transcription of the 'con discretione' section of the Toccata in D, BWV 912, covering measures 111 to 121. The score is presented in two systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The tempo marking "con discretione" is placed above the first system. Measure numbers 111, 114, 117, and 119 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and trills (marked with "tr"). The second system includes the tempo marking "Presto" above the final measure.

What exactly did this word *discretion* mean for Froberger and other Baroque musicians? Today we take it for granted that many types of music should be performed with rhythmic freedom. In European classical music, we call this freedom rubato. But rubato as understood today is a product of the Romantic era, the nineteenth century. The type of rhythmic freedom appropriate to earlier music might be different.

[I will argue that “discretion” is directly related to an approach to notation that is especially prominent in Froberger’s keyboard music and which continues to the end of the Baroque, notably in works by J. S. Bach. I will also make some suggestions as to how we might use “discretion” in performing music by Froberger and Bach, particularly their toccatas and suites. Although some writers have equated “discretion” with variable tempo, in my view that was not its original meaning. Rather, it referred initially to the abandonment of the strict measurement of time, that is, of the precise counting of notes within the beat. It reflected the rise of a specifically Baroque style of written-out embellishment which, unlike earlier types of melodic and harmonic elaboration, involved the irregular division of the beat. The effort to preserve this style of embellishment in writing led Froberger and later composers to devise an elaborate type of notation which, although remarkably precise, required the performer to disregard the indicated values of certain notes. This constituted a break from notational traditions which Baroque musicians inherited from the late Renaissance. Those traditions, which remained the basis for instruction through the seventeenth century, had employed relatively few note values. Discretion required a performer’s conscious departure from the normal rules of notation while reading scores of unprecedented complexity.]

[The most comprehensive previous discussion of this subject was that by the late Howard Schott, who was the first to prepare a modern critical edition of Froberger’s keyboard music. Schott showed that musicians in seventeenth-century Europe understood the word *discretion* as having two meanings. One meaning, reflecting ordinary usage of the word in spoken French, was for a moderate style of performance that avoided extremes of tempo or dynamics. The other meaning, and the one that interests us today, received its earliest clear explanation only from the German musician Johann Mattheson.]

Mattheson seems to have been the first to discuss the idea of musical discretion in print. He did so during Bach’s lifetime. Mattheson wrote in 1739 that the word means that “one need not keep strictly to the tempo, but rather may play now slowly, now quickly according to one’s preference.” Mattheson referred specifically to Froberger’s use of this “style of writing,” as he called it (ex. 4)

[Two pieces cited by Mattheson as works by Froberger calling for discretion are not known from any other source. Schott, however, was able to cite five extant compositions by Froberger whose titles or other rubrics call explicitly for discretion in performance. Manuscript discoveries in subsequent years have added close to twenty pieces to the list (see table 1). Among these discoveries was an autograph manuscript which for the first time provided evidence that Froberger himself used the term *discretion* (see ex. 2). Unfortunately the present whereabouts of that manuscript remain unknown after its sale at auction ten years ago.]

One late manuscript copy calls explicitly for discretion at the opening of six of Froberger’s toccatas (ex. 5). But whether Froberger himself ever attached the word *discretion* to his toccatas is uncertain; it could be a later addition. Elsewhere in Froberger’s music, the call for “discretion” is better attested. It usually appears as part of a programmatic title, often, as we have seen, with a further indication that the movement is to be performed slowly. “Discretion” also seems to have been used for slow or transitional passages within a quicker or otherwise more regularly moving piece. Thus we see the words *lentement avec discrétion*, slowly and with discretion, at the end of one of Froberger’s toccatas (ex. 6). Even a dance, the gigue or jig, could likewise include a passage played “with discretion” (ex. 7).

Anfang einer Toccate von Froberger.

Anfang einer Fantaisie von eben demselben.

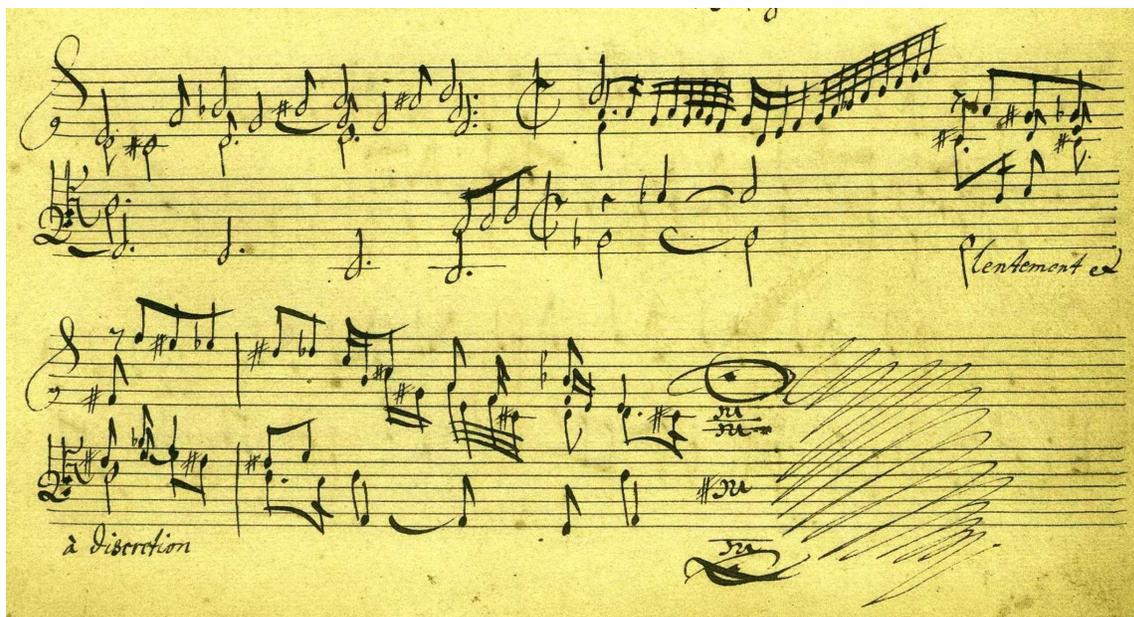
§. 96.

Man pfleget sonst bey dergleichen Sachen wol die Worte zu schreiben: ceci se joue à discretion, oder im Italienischen: con discrezione, um zu bemerken, daß man sich an den Tact gar nicht binden dürffe; sondern nach Belieben bald langsam bald geschwinde spielen möge. Ausser Froberger, der zu seinen Zeiten sehr berühmt gewesen und absonderlich in dieser Schreib: Art viel gethan hat, finden sich noch ein Paar fleißige Fantasten, im guten Verstande genommen, die ihre Styl: Früchte, vor mehr als hundert Jahren, nicht nur schlechtthin gedruckt, sondern in dem saubersten Kupffer: Stich hinterlassen haben, den man nur mit Augen sehen kan. Sie verdienen wahrlich beide, daß man ihre Nahmen nicht in Vergessenheit begraben seyn lasse.

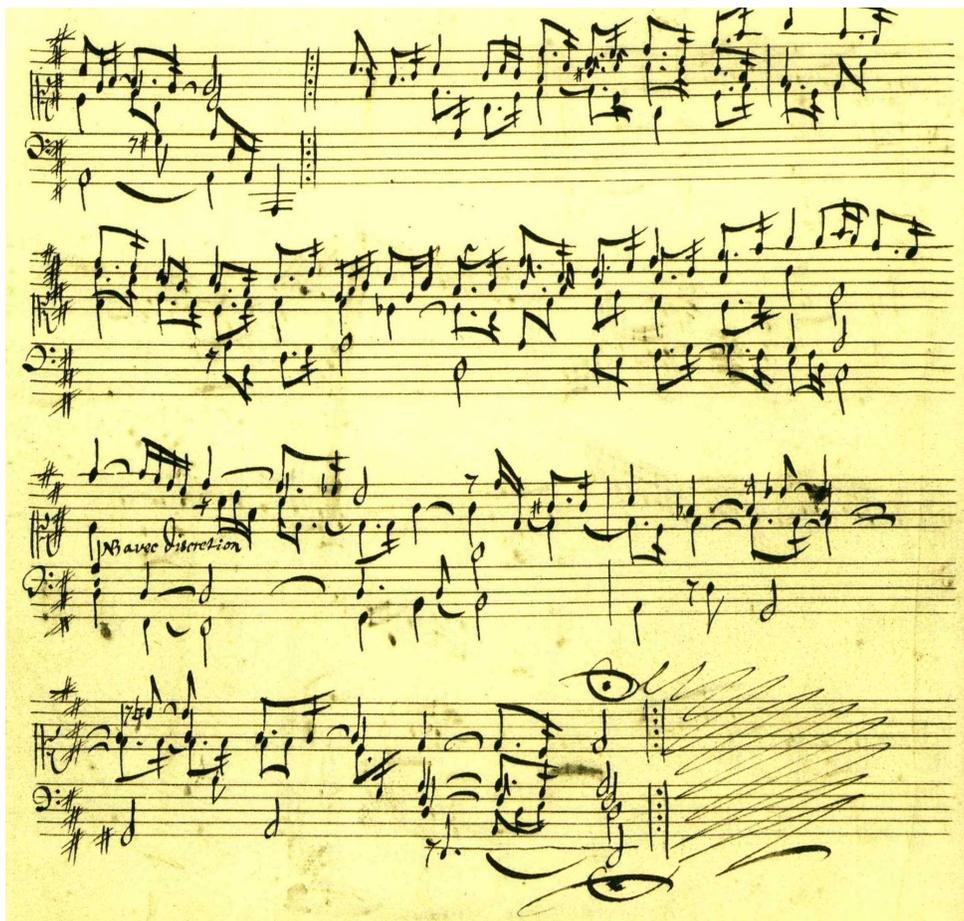
Example 5. Toccata 1, beginning, “played with discretion up to [a symbol later in the score],” from SA 4450



Example 6. Toccata 2, closing passage to be played “slowly and with discretion,” from SA 4450



Example 7. Suite 20, gigue, second half, with “discretion” marking near end, from SA 4450 (with transcription)



12

A printed transcription of the first four measures of the piece. It shows a treble and bass clef system. The treble clef part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef part provides a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

16

NB avec discrétion

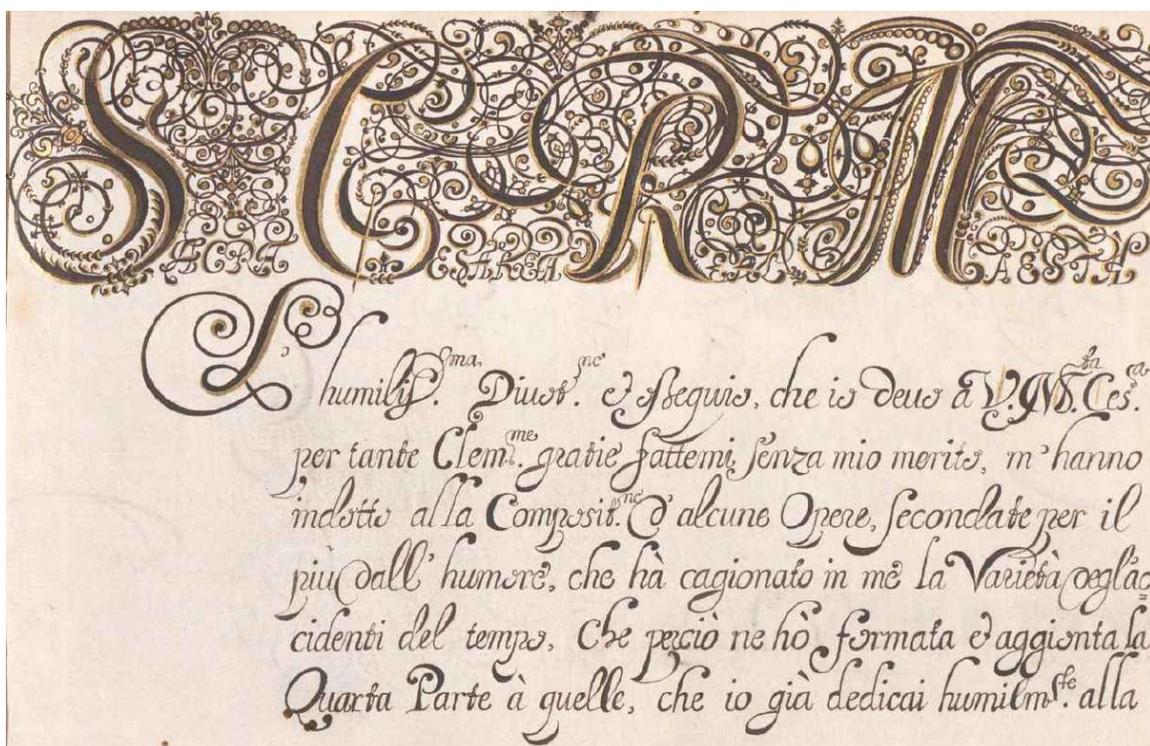
A printed transcription of measures 16, 17, and 18. The notation continues the rhythmic patterns from the previous section. A handwritten-style note "NB avec discrétion" is placed above the treble staff in measure 17. The key signature and time signature remain consistent.

19

A printed transcription of the final four measures of the piece. The music concludes with a final cadence in the treble clef and a sustained bass line. The key signature and time signature are maintained throughout.

But it is most often the opening dance of the suite, the allemande, which bears a title calling for discretion. Many of these titles are autobiographical in nature. Froberger himself wrote that his pieces represent feelings experienced in response to specific events in his own life. This statement, possibly unique for a seventeenth-century European musician, occurs in his dedication of a collection of pieces to the Austrian emperor Ferdinand III (ex. 8). The volume ends with a suite whose first movement is a lament for the emperor's son, known as Ferdinand IV (ex. 9). This Ferdinand had died two years earlier, in 1654. In Froberger's manuscript, an ascending scale at the end of the lament is illustrated by a sunburst (ex. 10). Despite its elaborate heading, Froberger's autograph contains no performance directions. But a later manuscript copy dictates slow performance with discretion (ex. 11).

Example 8. Dedication of *Libro 4* to Emperor Ferdinand III, from autograph manuscript of 1656, A Wn 18707: "Sire, The humility, devotion, and obedience that I owe to your most Caesarean majesty for those most merciful graces made to me, without my meriting them, have directed me to the composition of several works according to the various feelings [*humore*] that have been occasioned in me by the changing accidents of the times. For this reason I have added a Fourth Collection to those which I have already most humbly dedicated . . ."



Example 9. Suite 12, “Lament on the sad loss of his royal majesty Ferdinand IV, king of the Romans” (allemande), beginning, from A Wn 18707



Example 10. Suite 12, Lamento (allemande), end, from autograph manuscript of 1649, A Wn 18707



Example 11. Suite 12, “Lamentation made on the very sad death of his majesty Ferdinand IV, king of the Romans, 1654, played slowly with discretion” (allemande), beginning, from SA 4450, with transcription and analysis of mm. 1–4



By the time he composed this lament, Froberger had probably written his famous tombeau in memory of the French lute player known as Blancrocher. Froberger had been with Blancrocher in Paris in 1652 when the lutenist died after falling down a flight of stairs. The tombeau for Blancrocher bears a title similar to the one for Ferdinand IV (ex. 12). But this piece ends with a descending scale, accompanied in one manuscript by the Latin words *Requiescat in pace*: “may he rest in peace” (ex. 13).

Example 12. “Afflicted and Tombeau [sic] on the death of Mr. Blancrocher, made at Paris, played very slowly and with discretion” (Tombeau for Blancrocher), beginning, from SA 4450



Example 13. Tombeau for Blancrocher, end, from SA 4450



Nothing that I’ve said so far will be very surprising to anyone familiar with Baroque music. We take it for granted that the opening passages of toccatas should be played freely, although the fugues that follow are always performed more strictly. But when did such practices begin? What does it mean to play freely? If free performance is meant to be expressive, how exactly does it achieve that effect?

Froberger’s teacher Frescobaldi, in the revised preface to his first book of toccatas, had advised players to vary the tempo as in what the composer calls “modern madrigals.” Frescobaldi referred to a type of vocal music in which the tempo could, he says, vary “according to the emotion of the music or the meaning of the words.” That is to say that one should change the pulse of the music to reflect whatever is expressed by it, or by a poem which is being sung. Modern scholars have generally assumed that this is the same type of freedom that was used in Froberger’s pieces that call for discretion.

[This was the first of nine rules that Frescobaldi gave in 1616, coincidentally the year of Froberger’s birth. By the time Froberger was studying with him, around 1640, Frescobaldi had

reprinted the volume, adding a tenth rule. This rule made it clear that varying the tempo for expressive purposes was not confined to toccatas or other free pieces but should also be used in dances, specifically passacaglias and chaconnes. Froberger left no examples of those dances, just as Frescobaldi left no gigos or sarabandes. More to the point, however, is that Frescobaldi's music lacks the exceptionally free writing of Froberger's, as well as the programmatic and autobiographical titles.

[Frescobaldi never used the word *discretion*, and apart from that one late autograph by Froberger it seems to appear otherwise in posthumous sources. Moreover, the word appears only in relatively late compositions, insofar as we can date Froberger's works: the earliest known pieces to be played "with discretion" are apparently from the early 1650s. By then Froberger had perfected the notation used in the Tombeau for Blancrocher and the lament for Ferdinand IV. But his autograph of the latter, dated 1656, lacks the word "discretion," suggesting that he first attached the term only to a subsequent revised version.

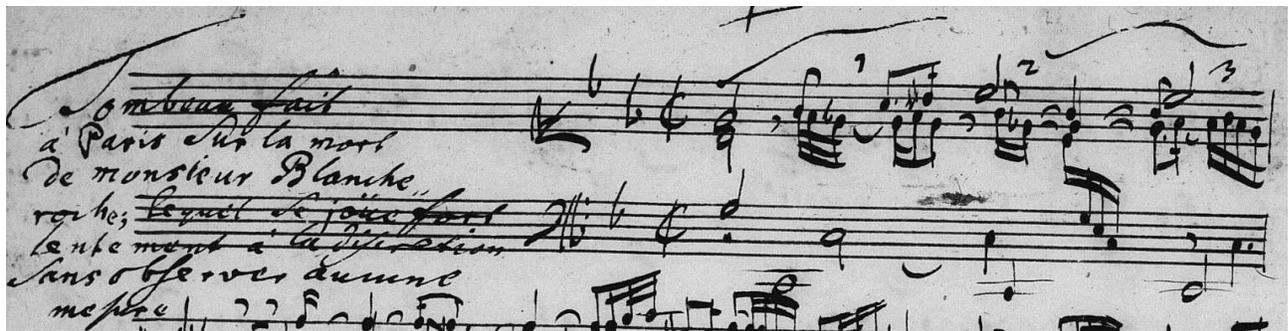
[For this reason I believe that the word *discretion* must originally have implied something other than simply varying the tempo, as in Frescobaldi's toccatas. Rebecca Cypess has recently pointed to passages in Frescobaldi's music where the regular counting or beating of time apparently needs to slow down or even stop, referring to passages such as this one from Frescobaldi's 1616 publication (ex. 14). But even here the voice leading moves primarily in half notes, with figuration in groups of eight sixteenths that constitute imitations and sequences. One might play these measures at a different tempo or with somewhat greater freedom than the ensuing passage, which uses repeated dotted figures. But one could hardly speak here of a cessation or absence of measure.

Example 14. Frescobaldi, , Toccata 7 from *Toccate e partite* (Rome, [1616]), from Rebecca Cypess, *Curious and Modern Inventions: Instrumental Music as Discovery in Galileo's Italy* (Chicago, 2016), p. 167

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Example 14, which is Toccata 7 from Frescobaldi's *Toccate e partite*. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). Measure 14 shows a sequence of half notes in the treble clef and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the bass clef. Measure 16 features a more complex rhythmic structure with sixteenth notes and dotted rhythms. Measure 17 continues the sequence with similar rhythmic patterns. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

[Yet that is precisely what is dictated by the rubrics in two manuscript copies of Froberger's music. This is expressed by the French phrase *sans observer aucune mesure*, "without observing any measure" (in ex. 15). The indication that this music should be played completely without any measurement of time, or meter, was probably an exaggeration. It suggests, however, that at a time when most music was still written in large note values that moved at a regular pace, the notation of Froberger's laments and toccatas might have been interpreted as involving a cessation of the regular counting or beating of time. Froberger's laments are stylized versions of the allemande, and, although allemandes probably were no longer danced in his day, the cessation of regular beats, corresponding with dance steps, might have seemed like a complete absence of meter.]

Example 15. "Tombeau made at Paris on the death of Mr. Blancheroche [sic], which is played very slowly and with discretion, without observing any measure" (Tombeau for Blancrocher), from Min. 743



Nevertheless Froberger, like his teacher Frescobaldi, always notated his music in the traditional manner, as if it was to be played with a steady beat. In his laments, as in his toccatas, Froberger notates what appear to be very complex, constantly changing rhythms. Despite the complicated notation, in performance this can sound relatively simple. What looks on the page like dense counterpoint and detailed rhythm is mostly embellishment: fragments of scales and arpeggios. This written-out embellishment decorates a simpler underlying progression, as shown previously in the transcription and analysis included in Example 11.

The lower system of the example shows that this music moves basically in half notes. Many of you are familiar with examples of this type of notation by later composers; some of you have probably analyzed music in the manner shown on the bottom system of this example. Bach was famous for writing out embellishments that other composers left to be improvised by the performer. In the nineteenth century, Beethoven, Chopin, and others continued to write out decoration that resembled improvised embellishment. But there are significant differences between the written-out decoration that we find in Romantic music and that of Baroque composers such as Froberger and Bach.

Froberger was among the first to write out embellishment as seen in these examples. After Froberger's death, one of his pupils wrote that only somebody who had heard him in person could play his music as he did. Yet the care with which Froberger notated his music suggests that the composer believed otherwise. Like Bach in the eighteenth century, he had a very precise idea of how this music should sound. Although we describe this type of writing as improvisational, it was as carefully composed as a strict fugue. Of course the notation cannot be interpreted literally. Froberger cannot have intended the thirty-second notes at the end of the tombeau for Blancrocher to move exactly twice as fast as the sixteenths (as in ex. 13). But the written note values cannot have been arbitrary, for otherwise Froberger would not have taken the trouble to write them so precisely.

[Working out precisely how to notate such music must have taken time and experimentation. We are told that this type of keyboard writing was borrowed from the so-called *style brisé* of French lute players. But lute tablature lacks Froberger's precise indications for the holding out of individual notes. No lute pieces that I know approach the diversity of texture and figuration found in Froberger's mature laments and toccatas. Discretion as called for in Froberger's music must have gone beyond what he had heard in the music of either Frescobaldi or the lutenists.]

Not every composer notated so many details. In Italy, expressive figuration was usually left to the performer. In France, a composer might write out all the notes but without trying to suggest the rhythm. The result was the so-called unmeasured prelude (ex. 16). Some unmeasured preludes, notably those attributed to Louis Couperin, were probably meant to sound like Froberger's toccatas. Although they look very different on paper, they incorporate the same scale fragments and broken chords. This prelude by Couperin is notated "without measure." Yet like Froberger the composer decorated an underlying framework (as shown in the analysis in ex. 16).

Whether notated precisely, as by Froberger, or imprecisely, as in an unmeasured prelude, this music gains expression through the tension between the free surface and the underlying structure. The written-out decoration strains or pulls against the framework. Ultimately the same may be true of rubato and other types of rhythmic freedom used in later music. But discretion remains distinct in certain ways.

For one thing, at least in Froberger's laments the half-note pulse remains fairly constant. This can be observed in the harmonic rhythm, the rate at which chords change. The underlying voice leading tends to move in half notes, as shown in my analyses. In performance, the actual length of these beats will vary somewhat. Yet the beats remain real. We still feel the impulses marked by the changing harmonies or voice leading. The beats are long, the tempo very slow. A considerable period of time elapses from one beat to the next. Yet the beats are not subdivided, even though most of them are full of movement in small notes.

Early Baroque musicians counted or beat time rather differently from those of today. During the period when Froberger was studying with Frescobaldi, the Roman composer Pier Francesco Valentini explained how musicians conducted: their hand went down, then up. In modern conducting, the hand is constantly in motion. Not so for European musicians of Froberger's day: the hand rests between beats. In older music, including the vocal polyphony of the Renaissance, the beats come relatively quickly and the notes move regularly. Froberger and even Bach continued to compose music that imitated this style (ex. 17).

[In older music, including the vocal polyphony of the Renaissance, the beats come relatively quickly and the notes move regularly. In the newer Baroque styles, however, the beats could move more slowly and less consistently. The significance of this is that time stands still, in a sense, within or between the slow-moving beats of a lament by Froberger or a prelude by Couperin. Present-day musicians typically subdivide such long beats, counting 1-and-2-and, and so forth, in an effort to place every small note value at its arithmetically correct time point within the measure. This cannot be what Froberger had in mind, however, and his calls for discretion must have been intended to make that explicit.]

In the newer Baroque styles the beats could move much more slowly and less consistently. They could be filled with various types of music, ranging from long sustained sounds to elaborate embellishment. In the eighteenth century, music theorists explained this type of rhythm as the combination of a free melody with a strict accompaniment. Thus Emanuel Bach, one of the sons of J. S. Bach, used the term *rubato* to describe what we see in this example (ex. 18). Today we think of rubato as a more general sort of freedom, and this works in music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But for Baroque music such rubato is deadly, because it weakens the structure of the music, which depends on the contrast between the expressive surface and the underlying pulses.

Example 16. Louis (?) Couperin, Prélude in F (G. 13), opening, from the Bauyn ms (with transcription and analysis)



A printed musical score showing a transcription and analysis of the opening of the Prélude in F. The score is arranged in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system shows the initial melodic line in the treble clef and the bass line in the bass clef. The second system shows the harmonic accompaniment in the treble clef and the bass line in the bass clef. The third system shows the continuation of the melodic line and the harmonic accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and ornaments, and is divided into measures by vertical dashed lines.

Example 17. Vocal polyphony by Palestrina (“Dum complerentur,” part 2) and imitations by Froberger (Ricercar 1), and J. S. Bach (Fugue in E, BWV 878/2, from *Well-Tempered Clavier*, pt. 2)

SECUNDA PARS.

CANTUS
ALTUS
SEXTUS (Altus II)
TENOR
QUINTUS (Tenor II)
BASSUS

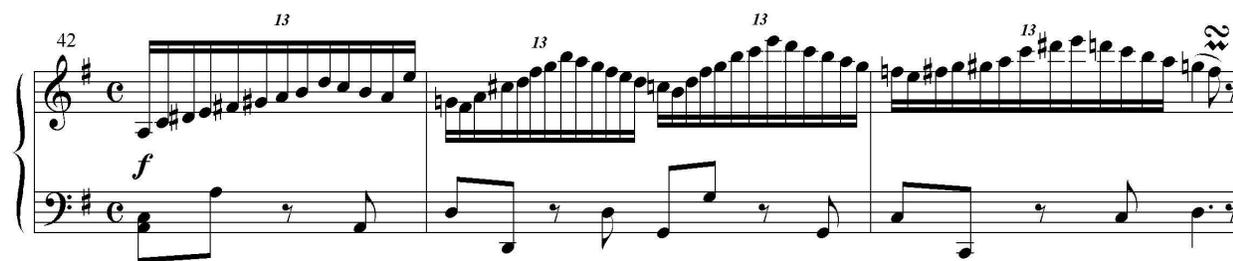
Dum er - go es - sent
Dum er - go es - sent

in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga -
in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga -
in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga -
sent in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga - ti...
sent in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga -
sent in u - num di - sci - pu - li con - gre - ga -

Ricercare
I.

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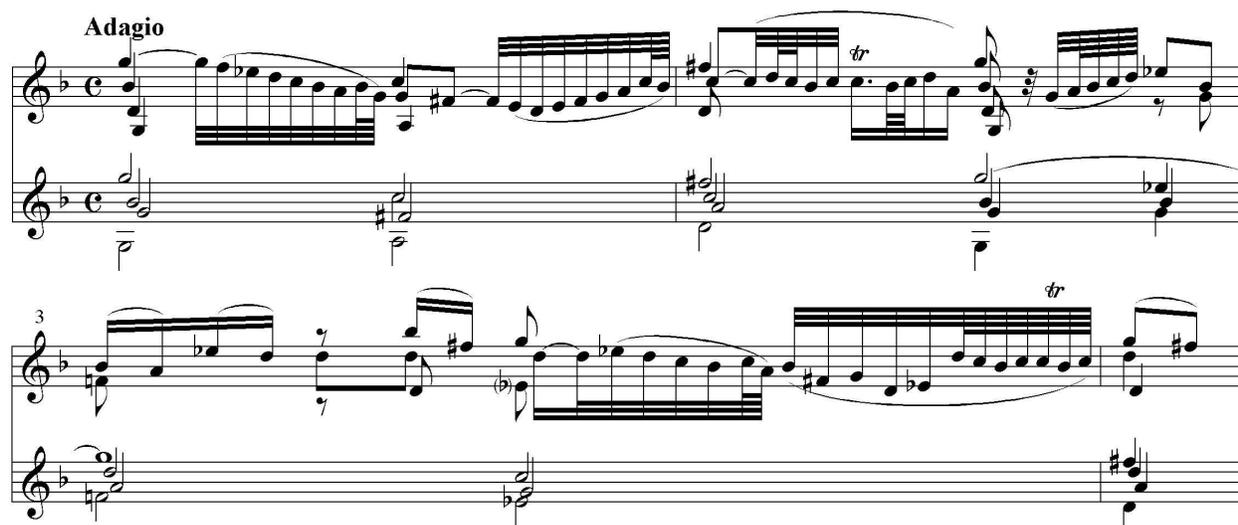
Example 18. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Sonata in G, W. 55/6, “rubato” passage in movement 1



You can't learn this style through slow practice or by counting every eighth note or sixteenth note. A Baroque specialist today would never play a Bach adagio literally as notated (ex. 19). When violinists today first learn the opening movement of Bach's first sonata for unaccompanied violin, they struggle with the notation; in order to read it, they subdivide the beat, which in fact lies on the quarter or even the half note. It may be possible to create a beautiful performance in this way; any number of modern violinists have certainly tried. But we can be confident that that is not the type of performance that Bach or his contemporaries would have heard.

As in Froberger's music, we can treat the written note values with "discretion." As I play, I am hearing the underlying progression in my mind. I allow the little notes to move to the bigger notes or chords shown on the lower system. If I were conducting or counting, I would mark the arrivals, but I would not subdivide the beats or count 1-and-2-and, as we do when practicing later types of music. Rather, I imagine that there is a regular but flexible pulse. This pulse coincides with the structural notes shown in my analysis, especially in the bass line. I don't attempt to play the smaller notes precisely in time.

Example 19. J. S. Bach, Sonata in G minor for unaccompanied violin, BWV 1001, movement 1, opening, with analysis



Many movements in Bach's dance suites have a similar structure. In Examples 20 and 21, drawn from two of Bach's most highly embellished pieces, the notation is very intricate, as in Froberger's laments. But if you practice slowly or subdivide the pulse, you lose the sense of the big beats.

Example 20. J. S. Bach, Suite in D for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1012, movement 2 (allemande), opening, with analysis

The image shows the opening of the second movement (allemande) from J.S. Bach's Suite in D for unaccompanied cello, BWV 1012. It consists of two staves. The upper staff is in C major, 3/4 time, and features a complex melodic line with many sixteenth notes and a trill (tr) in the second measure. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and single notes. A question mark (?) is placed below the first measure of the upper staff, likely indicating a point of analysis or a specific rhythmic interpretation.

Example 21. J. S. Bach, Partita no. 6 in E minor, BWV 830, movement 5 (sarabande), opening, with analysis

The image shows the opening of the fifth movement (sarabande) from J.S. Bach's Partita no. 6 in E minor, BWV 830. It is presented in three systems, each with two staves. The music is in E minor, 3/4 time. The first system shows the initial melodic and harmonic material. The second system continues the piece, featuring a trill (tr) in the upper staff. The third system begins with a fermata (5) over the first measure of the upper staff, indicating a specific analytical point. The notation is highly detailed, showing various ornaments and complex rhythmic patterns.

Example 3 is from Bach's D-major toccata. Much longer than any of Froberger's toccatas, this piece includes three strict sections. The last two of these are long fugues. The discretion marking occurs in the passage that connects the two fugues. This passage modulates dramatically from F-sharp minor back to D major. It includes several extended elaborations of single harmonies—what we would call cadenzas. One of these cadenzas is marked *presto*, suggesting an actual change of tempo.

We don't have Bach's autograph manuscript for this toccata. Therefore we don't know whether he personally used the word *discretion* or even *presto* in this piece. Elsewhere he did sometimes add verbal indications to signify changes of tempo. That, however, would be something distinct from discretion as I understand it in Froberger's music. It may be that the meaning of the word had changed by Bach's time, and that here it refers to an actual change of tempo, as explained by Mattheson, Bach's older contemporary. Yet in other types of music performers must have continued to employ discretion in the sense I have demonstrated in music by both Froberger and Bach. This type of discretion included the flexible treatment of small note values. It was essential for the intense personal expression found especially in certain slow pieces. Discretion in this sense involves a type of rhythmic freedom distinct from the rubato of later music. Paradoxically, to achieve this type of freedom one needs to understand the structure of the music and play as if bound to it.

[For eighteenth-century musicians such as J. S. Bach, this type of notation was no longer unfamiliar. Bach knew music by Froberger, but not necessarily any of his toccatas or dance movements. Bach's D-major toccata is more directly related to pieces by later German organists such as Pachelbel and Buxtehude. Thus the discretion marking in this piece does not necessarily reflect Bach's knowledge of Froberger's music.

[In addition, the "discretion" marking occurs only in a couple of very late manuscript copies. It is absent from an early version of the toccata found in a manuscript copy by Bach's older brother (ex. 22). Therefore we don't know whether Bach personally used the word *discretion* to refer to rhythmic freedom, although his contemporary Mattheson seems to have done so. Mattheson, like Bach, or at least his copyists, seems to have identified discretion primarily with music in the *stylus fantasticus*, that is, toccatas and fantasias, rather than expressive dances and laments. Only one source for Froberger's music applies the term to the latter's toccatas, and this is the late manuscript copy now in Berlin that Mattheson himself may have known (as in ex. 5).

Example 22. J. S. Bach, Toccata in D, BWV 912, mm. 109–14, from MM



[It may be, then, the term *discretion* was extended from allemandes and laments to toccatas only after Froberger's time, and perhaps only in northern Germany. There both Mattheson and the young Bach might have encountered the idea at a time when it had become familiar in the repertory of north-German organists such as Reincken and Buxtehude. Even if "discretion" had once referred specifically to the irregular performance of small note values, this may no longer have been the case when the free interpretation of notation such as Froberger's had become common knowledge. The "discretion" marking in Bach's toccata, like the discretion markings in copies of Froberger's toccatas, might have been a later addition that reflected an eighteenth-century rather than a seventeenth-century understanding of the term. Now it indeed referred more to tempo than to rhythm, like the *presto* indication also present in Bach's toccata. The free rhythm that had seemed revolutionary in Froberger's day had become routine, at least for professional players. Expressive written-out embellishment was now widely understood when it occurred in up-to-date sonatas and suites. But in the archaic genre of the toccata it had become necessary to provide hints as to where the free improvisatory passages ended and the stricter fugal sections began. By the end of the eighteenth century, the idea that time stopped during the long beats of an embellished allemande would likewise be forgotten, and Bach's as well as Froberger's pieces would be performed in ways unimagined by their composers.]

Appendix

Music performed (click on titles for recital recordings)

Toccatà 1 (in A minor)	Johann Jacob Froberger (1616–67)
Suite 12 (in C)	Froberger
Lamento sopra la dolorosa perdita della real maestà di Ferdinando IV	
Gigue	
Courante	
Sarabande	
Tombeau sur la mort de M. Blancrocher	Froberger
Toccatà BWV 912	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Sources

A Wn 18707	Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Ms. 18707 (autograph, 1656)
Bauyn ms	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Rés. Vm ⁷ 674–75
Min. 743	Vienna, Archiv der Minoritenkonvent, Ms. 743 (1st half 18th century?)
MM	Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. 40644 (the "Möller Manuscript")
P 289	Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. Bach P 289 (J. C. Westphal, 2d half 18th century)
SA 4450	Berlin, Sing-Akademie zu Berlin (on deposit at Staatsbibliothek), ms. 4450 (2d half 18th century)