

C.P.E. Bach: *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*
(Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments)

Study Guide: Summary and Examples
Chapter Two, Embellishments: The Mordent

THE MORDENT

1) The Mordent:

- Connects notes
- Fills out notes
- Gives notes brilliance

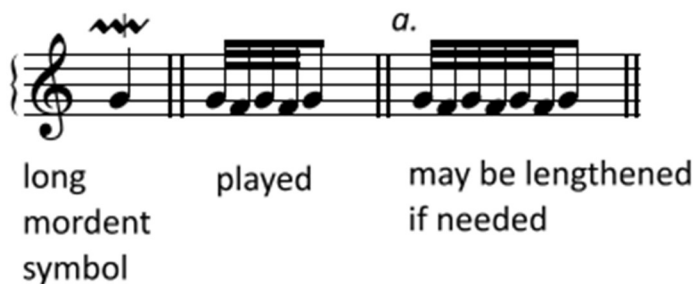
The length of the mordent:

- May be long or short
- The long mordent may be lengthened and if so, the symbol is the same

[Tab. V.] Fig. LXXII.



Tab. V Fig. LXXIII and LXIII (a)
 Figure 140 and 140 (a)



Tab. V Fig. LXXIII (b)
 Figure 140 (b)



2) The long mordent symbol is usually found over long notes (often quarters and eighths, depending on the tempo). The short mordent symbol is found over notes of all values and lengths.

3) Figure 140 (c) shows a way to play very short mordents, by playing two notes at the same time, then releasing the lower note while holding the upper note. C.P.E. says this is fine, if it is used less often than the typical articulation. This execution should only be used in passages that are not slurred.

[Tab. V.] Fig. LXXIII.

Tab. V Fig. LXXIII (c)
Figure 140 (c)

execution of a very short mordent
(hold C, release B while C still sounds)

4) The mordent:

- Is best used in ascending passages, stepwise or leaping
- Is rarely used in descending leaps
- Is never used in descending steps (*use the short trill for descending steps*)
- May appear anywhere in the composition (beginning, middle or end)

5) Uses of the mordent:

- Connects slurred notes in conjunct or disjunct motion, with and without an appoggiatura (Figure 141)
- Used most often with ascending steps, and occasionally after an appoggiatura (asterisk examples)

[Tab. V.] Fig. LXXIII.

Tab. V Fig. LXXIII
Figure 141 (1/2)

mordent used with slurred notes (ascending)
in conjunct motion

Tab. V Fig. LXXIII
Figure 141 (2/2)

mordent used with slurred notes (disjunct motion)
with an ascending step appoggiatura

Tab. V Fig. LXXIII (* 1/2)
Figure 141 (* 1/2)



mordent used after an appoggiatura

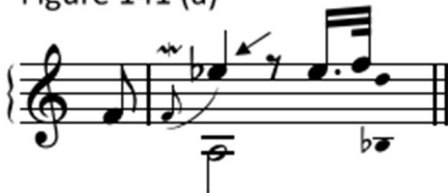
Tab. V Fig. LXXIII (* 2/2)
Figure 141 (* 2/2)



mordent used after an appoggiatura

- Example (a) shows the mordent used to connect and fill out notes
- When a mordent appears as in (a), with the appoggiatura moving to the principle note by an ascending leap, the principal tone must be long enough to allow the appoggiatura to be effective
- The mordent appears occasionally in recitatives

Tab. V Fig. LXXIII (a)
Figure 141 (a)



the principal note after an appoggiatura with a mordent should be rhythmically long

6) When a mordent follows an appoggiatura, it should be played softly (same as an undecorated note would be played softer after an appoggiatura)

7) Used to fill out notes, and in the case of syncopations, fill out and make brilliant

[Tab. V.] Fig. LXXIV.



Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (a)
Figure 142 (a)



mordent used to fill out tied note

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (b)
Figure 142 (b)



mordent used to fill out dotted note

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (c)
Figure 142 (c)



mordent used to fill out syncopated notes,
here syncopations using a single note

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (d)
Figure 142 (d)



mordent used to fill out syncopated notes,
here syncopations using different notes

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (e)
Figure 142 (e)



when mordent is used with different syncopated notes,
it is best to place it over the 2nd note of a repetition

8) Filling out with mordent at a slow tempo

- When the tempo is so slow that even long mordents do not fill out a note, they may be altered by shortening and repeating as needed as shown in examples (a) and (b)
- As with other ornaments, do not overuse this!
- As with other ornaments, make sure to leave enough time rhythmically to make the ornament distinct from the following notes (i.e. do not run them together)

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (a and a at slow tempo)

Figure 142 (a and a at slow tempo)



example (a) at a very slow tempo, the excerpt could be played as above in order to fill out the notes

Tab. V Fig. LXXIV (b and b at slow tempo)

Figure 142 (b and b at slow tempo)



example (b) at a very slow tempo, the excerpt could be played as above in order to fill out the notes

9) Used to add brilliance (most often the short mordent serves this purpose)

- Add brilliance to leaping, detached notes

10) Used in the bass (most frequently used ornament to be used in the bass)

[Tab. V.] Fig. LXXV.

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Tab. V Fig. LXXV (a)

Figure 143 (a)



mordent adds brilliance to notes with rhythmic impact

Tab. V Fig. LXXV (b)

Figure 143 (b)



mordent used to add brilliance to broken chord passages

Tab. V Fig. LXXV (c)

Figure 143 (c)



mordent used in the middle tone of full chords, either short or long mordent could be used

Tab. V Fig. LXXV (d)

Figure 143 (d)



mordent used over detached dotted notes where the dot is not held

Tab. V Fig. LXXV (e)

Figure 143 (e)



mordent used over a note followed by rests

Tab. V Fig. LXXV (f)

Figure 143 (f)



mordent used over long note preceded by shorter ones, here rising by step

Tab. V Fig. LXXVI

Figure 144



Mordents use accidentals in the same way as turns (i.e. in context), often raising the lower tone to add brilliance

Note also the fingering (to be used at a moderate tempo)

12) Fingering: use the strongest fingers when possible. A slow tempo allows for more opportunity to choose strong fingering, otherwise use normal fingering.

13) Using a mordent after a trill

- Make sure to separate the mordent from the trill so they are heard as two individual ornaments
- As the purpose is to fill out the notes, this should only be used in slower tempos
- Figure 145 shows how to separate the half note into two parts to correctly add the mordent

[Tab. VI.] Fig. LXXVII.*Tab. V Figure LXXVII*

Figure 145

Adagio



When adding a mordent after a trill, divide the note as shown to make the mordent distinct from the trill

14) Mordent vs. Short Trill

- Short trill is used for a DESCENDING 2nd ONLY (mordent is not used in this case)
- Mordent is used for an ASCENDING 2nd and in many more contexts

[Tab. VI.] Fig. LXXVIII.



Tab. V Fig. LXXVIII

Figure 146 short trill mordent



Short trill is used with descending 2nd,
mordent is used with ascending 2nd

15) Vocal ornament with similarities to a mordent:

- Singers add this arbitrary ornament in slow movements at the beginning and before fermatas and rests
- The notes are the same as a mordent and the examples below show the execution
- This can be considered a “slow mordent”, although there are very few uses aside from the cases shown

[Tab. VI.] Fig. LXXIX.



Tab. V Fig. LXXVIX

Figure 147 (1/2)



without ornament

decoration used by
singers in slow passages
before a rest

Tab. V Fig. LXXVIX
Figure 147 (2/2)



without
ornament

decoration used by
singers in slow passages
with fermatas

SOURCES

Bach, C.P.E. *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*. Translated and edited by William J. Mitchell, W.W. Norton & Company, 1949, pp. 127-132.

Bach, Karl Philipp Emanuel. *Versuch über die wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen*. Edited by Walter Niemann, C.P. Khant, Leipzig, 1925, pp. 65-69.