ORNAMENTS: THE ANSCHLAG

By Douglas Niedt

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Preface

The first thing you need to know when deciding how to play any ornament in pre-20th-century music is that there was no "common practice." The notation and execution of ornaments varied from country to country and composer to composer. Written instructions from long ago or ornament tables (even by J.S. Bach) cannot overcome the general shortcomings of musical notation. Rigid rules, no matter where they come from, go against the very nature of ornaments—they were often improvised and, therefore, are too free to be tamed into regularity or taught by the book. +

Descriptions of ornaments are only rough outlines, and many are contradictory. It's a jungle and very frustrating to try to figure out. There is simply no definitive solution to any ornament in a given situation. Therefore, be skeptical of everything I write from here on!

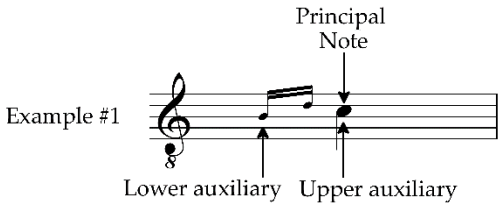
If you want a short answer to how to play an ornament, I say, "Do whatever you want. Do what makes the music sound best, and do what sounds best to you. In the end, that's what counts."

THE ANSCHLAG

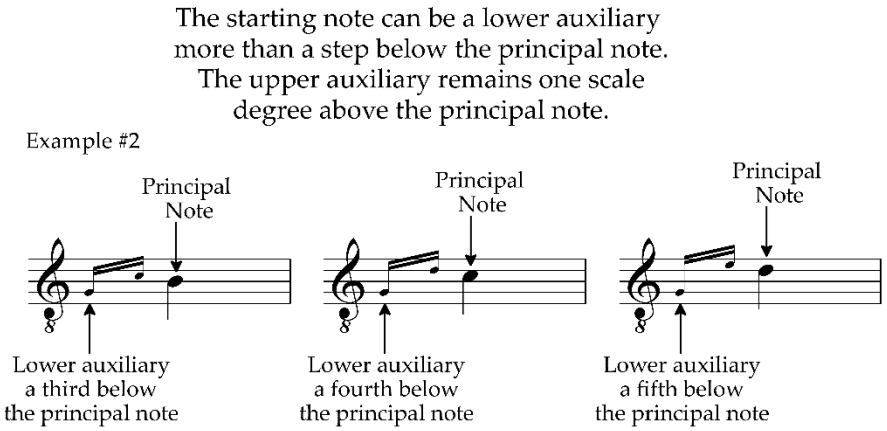
Eminent musicologist and ornamentation expert Frederick Neumann writes, "The *Anschlag*, also known as *Doppelvorschlag*, is a grace (ornament) of the German *galant* style (1720s to the 1770s). Little used outside of Germany, it had no contemporary French or Italian equivalents, and the translation, "double appoggiatura," is a modern coinage."

The Anschlag is a melodic ornament consisting of three notes. The most common form of the Anschlag starts on the lower auxiliary note a half or whole step below the principal note, then the upper auxiliary a half or whole step above the principal note, and concludes with the principal note. Example #1:

The Anschlag (Doppelvorschlag, Double Appoggiatura)



Occasionally, the starting note (lower auxiliary) can be more than a step below the principal note. However, the upper auxiliary note will still always descend stepwise to the principal note. Example #2:



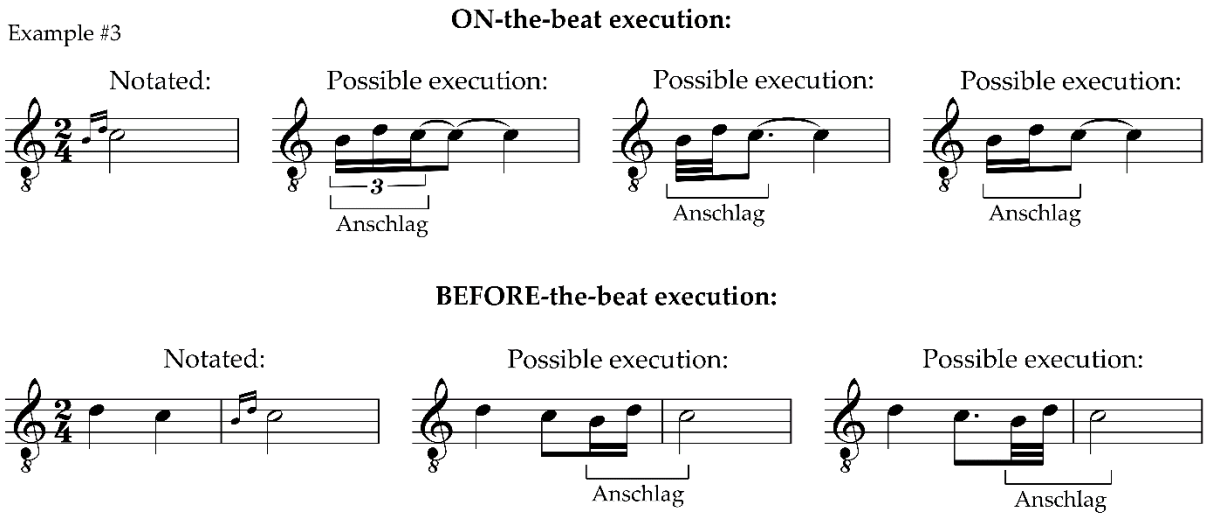
Notation of the Anschlag

Unlike other ornaments, there is no symbol for the Anschlag. Composers wrote it with grace notes or as regular notes. From the classical period onward, composers frequently used the Anschlag as a melodic figure but usually wrote it in regular notation rather than as grace notes.

How do you execute the Anschlag?

The note values of the auxiliary notes of the Anschlag and Inverted Anschlag are fast, either 16th or 32nd notes. As with other ornaments, the Anschlag and Inverted Anschlag can start ON the beat or BEFORE the beat. Example #3:

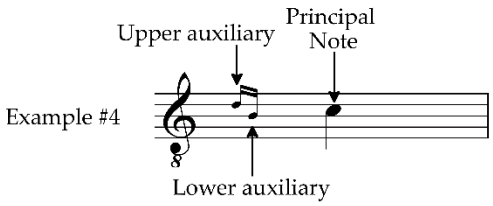
Example #3



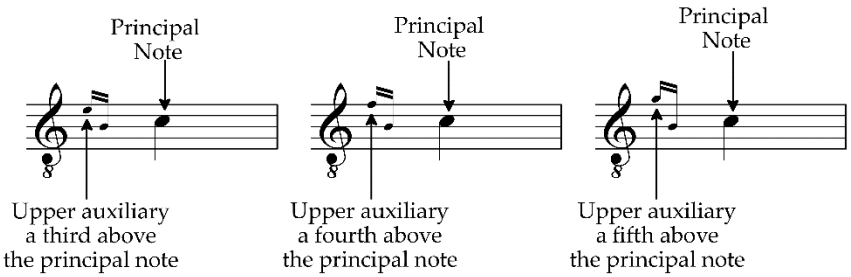
The Inverted Anschlag

The inverted Anschlag is relatively uncommon. The Inverted Anschlag begins on the upper auxiliary note a half or whole step above the principal note, then the lower auxiliary note a half or whole step below the principal note, and concludes with the principal note. As with the normal Anschlag, the starting note (this time the upper auxiliary) can be more than a scale step above the principal note. Example #4:

The Inverted Anschlag



The starting note can be an upper auxiliary more than a step above the principal note. The lower auxiliary remains one scale degree below the principal note.



The Dotted Anschlag

Although rare, you might occasionally encounter an Anschlag notated with grace notes with the first lower auxiliary note dotted. Example #5:

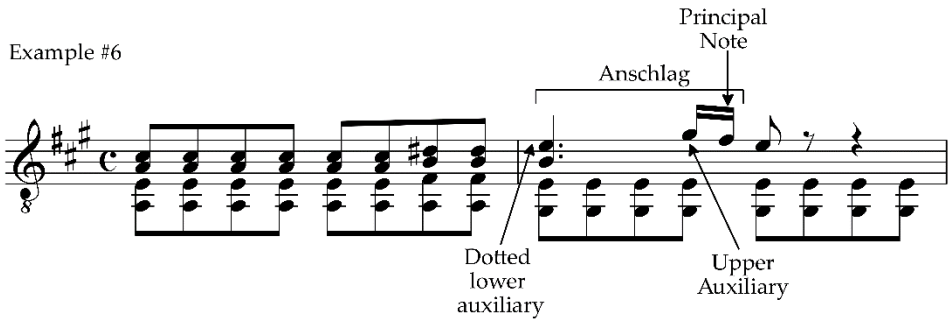
Dotted Anschlag

Example #5

The first grace note of the Anschlag (the lower auxiliary note) can also be dotted.

While rarely written with grace notes, you will frequently find the dotted auxiliary note of an Anschlag in regular large-note notation in the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and others. Example #6:

"Allegro con brio" measures 2-3 from *Piano Sonata No. 21 (Waldstein), Op. 53* (Ludwig van Beethoven)
(Transposed to the key of A major for guitar)



Further Reading

If you want to explore any of these topics in-depth (630 pages), I highly recommend one of my favorite books, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music With Special Emphasis on J.S. Bach* by Frederick Neumann.