

John Byrt Memorial Concert. Andrew Daldorph's speech about Notes Inégales

Firstly, thank you to Celia for asking me to perform a few pieces in the Inégale style that John loved so much, and also thank you for the opportunity to say a few words about it.

As many of you will know, John spent his academic life researching and writing papers on the use of Inégale in the performance of Baroque music. In case you do not know, Inégale is the practise of performing written quavers or semiquavers in an unequal manner – more like in swing or Jazz music.

I use the French term “Inégale” because in the 16th - 18th centuries it was common place for composers to write music as simple note values but for them to played or sung dotted or in a swing style. It is generally accepted to perform the music of French composers such as Couperin and Charpentier in this manner. John's question was – what about the rest of Europe or was this practise simply reserved to France?

There are many explanations as to why music was performed like this - the most likely being that if everything you composed had to be written out in manuscript, then you looked for short cuts to save time. One bar with dotted note values takes considerably longer to write down than a bar of even notes. If you apply that to an oratorio such as the Messiah, with 271 pages of music and then all the orchestral parts as well, it soon becomes a massive undertaking. Often the first few bars of Handel's music were written in dotted note values and the rest in even notes – the assumption being that you just continue playing dotted rhythms without having to write everything out. The same went for ornamentation like trills and mordents.

As I am not as academically minded as John was, I simply assumed that when a composer like Bach was writing a French Suite or an Italian concerto for example, that he was imitating the style of music that he had heard somewhere on his travels.

I immediately used the same performance practise in these pieces as I had in French music itself. Sometimes people have questioned my playing in this style in quite a hostile manner and I have simply said that this just seems obvious to me to do it like that.

It also seemed obvious to John who began his epic work in the academic world to provide real evidence of the use of inequality throughout Europe in this period – culminating in his amazing book – *An Unequal Music*. The academic world can be a hard fought battle ground with some very strong views. John was deeply affected, as I am sometimes, to the hostility of his opinions, resulting in a great deal of psychological issues. It is of great credit to John that he stuck at it and completed his book with the help of some of his friends here.

He sent me a copy of the book a few years ago. To be fair, it is not an easy read. But if you know a bit about the subject as I did, what he wrote made perfect sense. A lot of the performance practise that I employ in my playing was for the first time backed up by some well researched and compelling evidence, meaning I am now much more assured in my own playing.

Perhaps I should not have been surprised by this. John and I had a lot in common really - both of us composers and arrangers, both choral and orchestral conductors, both harpsichordists and organists, both teachers and perhaps most importantly both improvisers and Jazz pianists.

So much of recent organ teaching has been of accuracy to the score and doing exactly what it says. However, as a continuo player in Baroque music, I often play from just a figured bass part and essentially improvise over it to enhance and embellish the piece. This whole area of performance practise including spontaneous use of ornaments and rhythmic decoration and filling out chords has often been ignored and criticised in recent times and is completely at odds with those who say you must do what it says on the page.

What John and I both question is – What happens if what is written on the page isn't actually a true reflection of what was being performed?

This is the crux of the matter. Nobody really knows because there were obviously no recordings made, but to simply dismiss John's ideas was harmful and I am very pleased to be here and try to keep John's belief alive.

I felt greatly honoured to be asked by John a few years ago to make some recordings of organ music in the Inégale style. I instantly became a strong friend of John's. I don't think he could believe that I essentially agreed with everything he was suggesting, even adding a few thoughts of my own to the discussion. Even better, he said he was very pleased with my recordings and would put them on

his website - although he did say I played them in a slightly quirky manner, which made me laugh.

He only had 2 bits of advice for me. Firstly – not to play too fast to enable more time for ornaments and allow hidden melodies to be heard. Secondly – remember it should be fun and always have that swing!

Anyway, I am going to play you 2 pieces in the inégale style.

The first is actually the first piece of Bach I ever learnt on the organ and is just a very short, gentle and happy little prelude.

The second has 2 movements – the first movement is in 2/2 (2 minims in a bar), so the quavers are played unequally– the second is a fugue in 4/4 where the semiquavers are swung.

I feel the music retains its structure and integrity, whilst my use of inégale and ornamentation gives it a sense of fun and excited busyness, just like a piece of highly decorated Baroque architecture.

It finishes with a Tierce de Picardie, to use another French term, meaning a minor piece finishing Major. This is another feature of Bach's music demonstrating his strong faith and suggesting that whatever trials and hardship one faces in life, there will be rewards in heaven when we get there. So I hope John is up there looking down on us with a smile on his face enjoying the fact that someone is playing Bach in an unequal manner.