

THE NEWSLETTER

I plan to send this leaflet out quarterly and I hope each issue will contain letters, reports and some scholarly work. Please write to me! If you would like to receive the Newsletter regularly, kindly send an annual subscription of £2.00 payable on 1st September. Cheques made out to John Byrt please.

BACH INEGALE CASSETTE

I shall be happy to send copies of my BACH INEGALE cassette to any who are interested. It contains *inégaies* performances of Bach allemandes, various preludes and fuges from the 48 and the C major invention plus the triplet version. There are also two chorale preludes from the *Orgelbüchlein*. Please send £6.00 which will include postage and packing.

INEGALES TODAY

Please write to me if you have heard non-French music played inegale or if you have done so yourself

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To: Dr John Byrt,

I am interested in receiving the following :-

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UNEQUAL NOTES

The inégaies Newsletter

No.1

June 1994

Greetings!

This is my way of keeping in touch with the many people I've talked to in the past about *inégaies* and of reaching out to many others who I'm sure would like to know what it's all about. My particular interest, of course, is rhythmic inequality in baroque music outside France (where most of the evidence comes from). Was there any? Should there be any (in our modern performances)? and is there already? You can help me build up a picture of current practice. Have you heard anyone playing Bach, Handel or Purcell *inégaie* ? Have you played Bach, Handel or Purcell *inégaie*? It is all grist to the mill.

BACH INEGALE DAY

The immediate pretext for this first issue is a BACH INEGALE day at East Devon College, Tiverton, on 15th May 1994. Twenty-eight people attended. In the morning I talked about my Bach research and played examples on the harpsichord. In the afternoon we sang and played movements from Cantata 21. Particularly convincing were the strings of semiquavers on the word "Seele" in the first chorus. Sung *inégaie* these were very powerful and not at all frivolous, as one might expect. A few vocal exercises at the beginning had proved that singing unequal scales is certainly no harder than singing equal ones. Rather the reverse.

Reactions to the day have been positive. Catherine and Geoff Bass, who sang the duet from the cantata, sat straight down to the piano when they got back and found that inequality made easy passages they had found difficult before. Geoff wrote later saying that the rubato on my cassette (now available - see below) "detracted from the easy rhythm and flow" of the music. Yes, Geoff, I regret there is so much rubato on the tape: I am tending more and more to avoid it. Rosemary Berry wrote that inequality "makes an enormous difference to the pieces and generally benefits them". Previous notions that Bach was too "serious" or "stolid" for *inégaies* seemed to disappear during the session.

MY RESEARCH

I picked up the threads of my *inégaies* research about two years ago after a 25 year gap. I took care to read the considerable amount of work written during this time and was pleased to find that I had acquired some allies. I am working on an expanded version of my 1993 paper: an extract from it concludes this newsletter. I have also recorded a cassette of *inégaie* Bach on the

harpsichord which may be obtained from my home address. The paper and the cassette go together but though the cassettes are ready the paper will need a couple more months to finish in its new form.

The paper contains a resumé of *inégaless* scholarship since Arnold Dolmetsch, a reiteration of the arguments in the *inégaless* debate (appended to this newsletter) and original research on rhythm in Bach's allemandes and other movements in 4/4 time. The cassette contains *inégaless* versions of allemandes from suites and partitas, movements from the 48, the C major invention (with triplet version) and two preludes from the *Orgelbüchlein*.

When I started this research in the 1960s, I had some very fruitful correspondence with other scholars in the field. Robert Donington annotated an unpublished article of mine and used my research in his second book (*Performer's Guide to Baroque Music*, 1973). I also have letters from Arthur Mendel, Michael Collins and Stanley Sadie on the subject. George Malcolm, who broke new ground when he recorded Ramcau's Harpsichord music *inégaless* in 1967, has taken a great interest in my work and Hugh Keyte has brought his wide scholarship to bear on the subject.

Since I resumed this research I have once again found help and support in many places. Peter Allsop has shared his knowledge of 17th century Italian music. At the Ernest Read school where I teach every year, Stephen Wilkinson and Andrew Charity have taken time to look at my work (and, more important, to listen to it!). Here are excerpts from letters they wrote to me subsequently.

The early version of the cassette that they listened to also included on Side B four excerpts of Bach played *égale*, viz.

French suite 1 - allemande	by Thurston Dart (clavichord)
Allemandes from Partitas 3 & 4	by Kenneth Gilbert (harpsichord)
and chorale prelude:	
Das alte Jahr (<i>Orgelbüchlein</i>)	by Piet Kee (<i>organ</i>)

From Stephen Wilkinson, 7th October 1993:

"Illuminating. perhaps. to drop in on the music of this earlier and - one imagines rightly or wrongly - less speed-harried age, played in the manner its own practitioners prescribed. Certainly with inégalité there comes over something of relish rather than rush, of fancy rather than frenzy. I noted your comment that it was particularly appropriate to "slow" movements. I don't know if you count the Allemandes as "slow" - perhaps not - but I found your expansive and leisurely playing of these. especially the Couperin and the 3rd Partita. very convincing: likewise the "triplet" version of the C major Invention and - surprisingly charming - the E flat Fugue[48 Book I]. Also, I think, the D minor Fugue [48 Book II].

On one hearing I think I still need to be pulled over the line about one or two of the others. However, as someone clearly not insusceptible to your

"[the statement that the Italians write their music in its true values] ... is contradicted by the weight of international evidence ... and it appears to be either thoughtlessly exaggerated or incompletely expressed."

Do Corrette's repeated references to semiquaver *inégaless* cancel out the ambiguity in Couperin's famous remark? It would suit my case to think so. Nevertheless there are three further points that may affect this issue:

- Late 17th century Italian movements often have no semiquavers at all, or only a few, e.g. the allemanda from Corelli's Op 5, No 8. Supposing Couperin's knowledge of Italian music were confined to pieces like these, he could well write "Italians ... write music as they have conceived it".
- It may be that playing *inégaless* grew in popularity in Italy between 1717, when Couperin wrote, and c. 1740, when Corrette wrote his flute tutor.
- When Couperin made his comment he was referring to the different ways that the French and Italians treated quavers. And there was certainly a firm distinction between the two practices in this respect. But it would appear that as far as semiquavers were concerned, the two countries behaved in exactly the same way: semiquaver inequality in 4/4 was normal in both France and Italy. So Couperin's attention would naturally focus on the quaver.

I hope I have shown in these paragraphs that there is overwhelming evidence for *inegaless* outside France and that the notion has been receiving scholarly support for a considerable time. The question of where the Italians might have deployed their unequal semiquavers I shall leave for another occasion. The rest of this paper focusses, rather, on German music, particularly the allemande and music in the allemande style. The close relationship between French and German dance music in the 17th and early 18th century raises some intriguing problems of performance practice.

The fun began when you tried to play other people's music. For instance, French musicians, when faced with a piece of Italian music, were in danger of trying to unequalize the quavers. One dreads to think what crimes must have been committed if French cellists tried to play a typical running bass like this *inégale*:



Corelli, Op. 6 no. 3,
mvt. 1712

So Loulié, Corrette, Couperin and Rousseau (see Part III, p. 1) were telling their readers: "Frenchmen, beware! Never unequalize the quavers in Italian music!" But of course this didn't mean that there was no inequality at the semiquaver level.

The French 3-time : a special case

One important exception to the "four to the beat" rule is French music in 3-time. The French cultivated a special kind of "lazy" inequality in 3-time which operated at the quaver level. It is typified in this *Musette en rondeau* by Rameau:



Rameau, Musette en rondeau.
Pièces de clav. 1724

This "leisurely" inequality is a hallmark of French baroque music. It is distinct from the faster "four to the beat" kind which I hope to prove was in use throughout Europe at the time. It is this kind of style that Purcell and Handel adopt frequently when they wish to incorporate the fashionable "French style". And it is these 3/4 movements that modern editors have so far seized on for the application of *inéga*les. Well known examples are, "I know that my redeemer liveth" and "The trumpet shall sound" from *Messiah*.

Once again there was a marked difference between French and Italian practice. Loulié and his colleagues were anxious to prevent French violinists from unequalizing passages in Italian music like this one by Corelli:



Corelli concerto grosso
Op. 6, no. 3, 2nd mvt, 1712

But equality of quavers did not prelude inequality at the semiquaver level, which is mentioned by Corrette above.

Couperin's comment

I am quite clear in my mind that Neumann misunderstood his Loulié, Corrette and Rousseau quotations. The Couperin one, however, still gives me trouble. One the face of it, it docs scem to be a denial that the Italians ever used *inéga*les. The quotation gave Donington trouble too, for he wrote:

ideas and instinctively sympathetic to your enthusiasm, I tentatively offer one or two quite unscholarly comments. Listening straight through your tape one hears consecutively more inégales than one would in listening to the Suites or collections from which these examples are drawn. The ending of a preceding and/or beginning of a following movement not played inégale could, I believe, by contrast heighten the effect of your examples The inclusion of non-inégale playing by you might also help to allay the suspicion that your enthusiasm might even run to an inégale Flight of the Bumble Bee!

One conceivable reserve on my side might arise from my instinctive response to inégalité as something graceful. free, perhaps childlike, natural, uninhibited, maybe rhapsodic and by implication secular. Difficult to say whether it convincingly applies to the more solemn Choral Preludes such as "Das alte Jahr"! I've no objection at all to hearing you play it on the harpsichord but your performance on the organ would make a comparison with Kee's more "scientific". Do the contemporary authorities differentiate sacred secular. organ harpsichord styles?"

Stephen Wilkinson MBE is one of our leading choral directors. He was for many years conductor of the BBC Northern Singers.

In my reply to Stephen I acknowledged his comment that too much *inégalité* becomes wearisome but I pointed out that, since my research was specifically on Bach movements in 4/4 time, my cassctte was bound to lack contrast. In a suite of dances, each dance would be in a different time-signature and at a different tempo. As for a possible difference in style between sacred and secular music, in Donington's *Interpretation* (ch. II, section 5) there are some useful quotes. Quantz and Kirnberger speak of a distinction between sacred and secular music while Tosi (1742) says that such distinctions had become blurred by 1723. As far as *inéga*les are concerned, the jury is still out.

From Andrew Charity, 28th December 1993:

"This protest, a little as devil's advocate, springs up because for all the apparent textural and rhythmic gains in inégales as illustrated on the tape, I can't help finding the effect very limited, and I can't say I've ever "seen" Bach's music apparently straitjacketed thus, even over a short span. I do find Kenneth Gilbert's reflective style works, if only because, just as you think it might be in danger of disappearing up its own 32nd notes, or whatever, Bach rescues with a modulation or other event to steer us beguilingly on. Dart seems to seize the architecture, but his arioso line leaves a lot to be desired (I speak as a fan of Dart the man and scholar, at least). Piet Kee is just too slow. The old year should be an old man dragging his feet - so the rhythmic undertone from the accompaniment should be unmistakable. not a mere harmonic backdrop for the solo line

which. let's face it, has plenty of opportunity for rubato between the "beats".

Inégales are a joy to play. To this listener. as a listener, however, they sound somewhat routine-making (even with all the licence) and I feel it has become composer's and players' music. Gilbert invites the listener to enjoy both composition and playing. I speak as I find - why should we be subject to this particular rhythmic monotone? In [the prelude in (' from the 48 Book II] there is much toccata-like energy to be had from an égale version. and much rhythmic energy/momentum too: I find at present the inégale version tiresome, leaving me with only a sense of process to admire.

You may find all this academically woolly, but even your excellent playing has not brought me nearer to Bach, to whose music I have listened these many long years - and one other point. I am not very well up in the whole 18th century idea of "figures" - beyond some of Bach's habitual ones (his "joy" motif. the "cross", etc). But this way of hearing a melodic line is the thing - the inégales seems to draw attention to themselves and not much else. Now this may just be the novelty of them ... !"

Andrew Charity is a freelance conductor, recitalist, composer and teacher. He has recently directed performances of his own scores at RADA.

In replying to Andrew I tried to tackle his obvious problem over the sound of inegales. Here is an extract from my letter:

"I'm sorry to hear that inégales upset your lifetime relationship with Bach's music! I fear it will affect others in this way. I assure you that my love of Bach égale was just as deep but then there is something in my nature that enjoys questioning established beliefs - perhaps my Methodist upbringing? But it does seem to me that in the past we have listened to Bach in the same way that we listen to Beethoven and Brahms etc. and they are not the same thing at all. The developing piano encouraged performers to use long-line phrasing and nuances which were impossible in Bach's day. And symphonic thought led us to think in terms of increase and decrease of tension, climax, change of mood, etc. which can so easily be superimposed on baroque music retrospectively. This is very easy to do when we play Bach on the piano but I think we do it even when we use the harpsichord. Sometimes we kid ourselves that the harpsichord is conveying pianistic nuances, but it can't and it shouldn't be asked to.

Bach's audiences listened to music in a more casual way than we do. Music in those days was still a craft - like wood-carving or silversmithing - capable of tremendous artistry but unable yet to challenge literature, poetry, drama or philosophy on an intellectual level. By Beethoven's death the situation had changed. Music had taken its place in academe. But Bach's audience had

In spite of the confusion over the date of his flute tutor, (New Grove gives 1735, c.1742 and c.1753!) it is clear that he wrote too late to be an authority in the performance of Bach's allemande style pieces. All the same, one wonders whose sonatas and concertos Corrette was referring to in his remarks. Vivaldi's latest published concertos date from around 1730 and his latest published sonatas around 1740. Marcello's concertos and sonatas were published between c. 1708 and c. 1734; Tartini's and Locatelli's between c. 1728 and 1763. Further speculation must wait for another occasion but one thing is clear: Corrette's comments make extremely hollow any assertion that no inequality was ever used outside France.

Two Problems

The extraordinary tangle that *inégales* research has got into is caused by two problems. One is our problem and one is their problem - "they" being the European baroque around 1700. Our problem is partly caused by theirs.

Our problem

This has been outlined in the past few pages. Some French sources say that in Italian or foreign music the quavers must be played equal. Modern scholars have taken this to mean that there was no inequality in Italian or foreign music. But they overlook the possibility of semiquaver quality and Michel Corrette makes it quite clear in a number of passages that semiquaver inequality was normal in non-French music around the 1730s and 40s.

Their problem

The difference between the French style and the Italian style in the early 18th century preoccupied many musicians, including François Couperin and Quantz. The two races wrote different kinds of music but they also used different styles of notation. The French, conservative by nature, still followed the old Renaissance practice in which the minim was the beat. The Italians, on the other hand, had long been treating the crotchet as the beat.

This distinction between French and Italian practice complicated the application of *inégales* somewhat. Around 1700, if there were unequal notes in a piece, this usually operated at the note value that went four to a beat. Montéclair provides good evidence for this.

The notes of which four go to the beat are intended to be uneven, the first a little longer than the second.

M. de Montéclair, *Nouvelle method pour apprendre la musique*,
Paris 1709.

"Four to the beat" seems clear enough, but it meant something different according to which side the alps you were.

To the French

"four to the beat" meant quavers in 4/2, 3/2, 2/2
semiquavers in 4/4 especially allemandes

To the Italians

"four to the beat" meant semiquavers in 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4
(I include only the most commonly used time signatures here)

This was by far the best evidence for inequality outside France that had been discovered so far. Though the Italians did not apparently make much use of quaver inequality, it seems that around 1740 semiquaver inequality was alive and well in Italy, and in Germany and England too.

Unequal semiquavers! A bizarre idea in the 60s when even quaver inequality was still unacceptable to many. Today semiquaver inequality in French allemandes is a matter of course (see Part III, p. 6). But in the late 60s the idea was not yet widely accepted. Arnold Dolmetsch's doubts about Couperin's intentions over allemandes must have still carried much weight and Dart did not advocate *inégaux* in allemandes. The idea that in Italian or "foreign" music the inequality, though absent in the quavers, might have passed to the semiquavers was a novel one. But this is what was implied by the new evidence from Michel Corrette.

Neumann did not seem to be aware of this new evidence, though, when he published his 1965 article. Not surprisingly, when this article did appear Donington was quick to respond. In his communication to *JAMS* XIX No. 1 (1966) he questions Neumann's conclusions, naturally referring to the above passages from Corrette that he quoted in his book. In my communication to *JAMS* XX No. 3 (1967) I also quote liberally from Donington's book, hinting that Neumann is not taking enough trouble to ascertain whether quavers or semiquavers are being referred to in his sources.

More evidence from Michel Corrette was revealed by David Fuller in *New Grove*, (*notes inégales* article p. 424). It came from *L'école d'Orphée* of 1738:

"(♢ metre is) much in use in Italian music ... The quavers are played equal and second semiquavers are hurried."

Fuller carries on in his own words:

"A similar rule (i.e. specifying unequal semiquavers) was given for 3/8 time, and Handel, Giovanni Bononcini, Pepusch, Alessandro Scarlatti and Porpora were cited for examples. At the same time the French 3 with unequal quavers was distinguished from the Italian 3/4 with unequal semiquavers."

Elsewhere in *New Grove* Fuller writes about Corrette's career and reputation. (M. Corrette article) His account of Corrette's work is not consistently impressive: he describes him as providing

an extra-ordinarily broad view of ordinary light music (my italics) in France during the 18th century. He was well known as a teacher, though his reputation was not always favourable. Unsympathetic people called his pupils "anachorètes" (âmes de Corrette)

Against this one should place the fact that he introduces an element not found in other tutors: that is, a differentiation between "up-market" and "down-market" practice. His comment that semiquavers are *inégaux* in dance music but "sometimes performed equal in the Allegros and Prestos of sonatas and concertos" is particularly useful: one is not used to being given this kind of information in such works. I feel that this touch adds to Corrette's trustworthiness as a source on performing practice.

still not learnt to listen to music in this intense, analytical way. Their ears were more naive, their response to music was more physical, less spiritual - more rhythmic and less poetic. So when we listen to Bach today we need to throw off our latterly acquired sophistication and go back to the Garden of Eden - to uneat the apple of 19th century musical thought! ... "

I blush at my purple prose now - it is so easy to get carried away on this topic! There follows something much more down-to-earth: part of my current paper which I hope will be finished shortly.

PART II. MISCONCEPTIONS?

In this section I shall go back over the inegales controversy that began in the late '60s and is still unresolved. The subject is a very complex one and I shall try to explain the arguments on both sides, putting my own case as fairly as I can. I hope the reader will listen to the tape critically and regard it as a vital part of my argument.

Neumann's 1965 Paper

Frederick Neumann's article "The French Inégales. Quantz and Bach" sounded the battle-cry of orthodoxy. It was the start of a guerre des inégales of which this paper is only the latest sally. Neumann claimed that the references to inégales in the Quantz flute tutor do not refer to the German style at all and therefore cannot be applied to Bach. He also had various French authors stating that inégales were not used in Italian music. This led to a lively correspondence in the pages of JAMS, in which Robert Donington played an important part². Before his readers got totally saturated with the topic, the editor arranged a "Schlussterzett" (a sly reference to Rosenkavalier) consisting of a round of objections to Neumann's case from Michael Collins, Sol Babitz and myself (JAMS XX. No. 3, 1967, pp 473-85).

This seems like ancient history now and yet the issues are still very much with us. No one who is not familiar with the arguments that flew back and forth at this time can really grasp the amazing ramifications of the subject, so let me go over the salient points.

Here are four passages quoted by Neumann in his 1965 paper:

1. "In each metre ... the half-beats are performed in two different ways.
(i) ... equally ... when the sounds move by leap, and in all foreign music where you never unequalize them except where marked."
Loulié, Elements ou Principes de Musique, Paris 1696.
2. "In each bar the quavers (croches) are played equal in Italian music."
Corrette, Methode pour ... le violoncelle, Paris 1741.
3. "We write differently from the way we play ... On the other hand the Italians write their music in the true values in which they have conceived it. For instance we dot several quavers moving by step, and yet we write them equal. It is just a habit with us. and yet we carry on doing it."
F. Couperin, L'art de toucher le clavecin, Paris 1717.
4. "In Italian music all quavers are always of equal length unless they are expre marked as dotted. By contrast in French music quavers are equal only in 4/4 time."
Rousseau, Dictionnaire de Musique. Paris 1768

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1. *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XVII, (1965), pp. 313-358.
 2. Robert Donington, Communication in JAMS XX no. 1 (1966), pp 112-114 and "A Problem of Inequality", *Musical Quarterly* Vol. LIII, No. 4 (Oct 1967), pp 503-517.

Do these authors indeed state that rhythmic inequality was not practised outside France? Neumann thought so, though all four quotations specify a particular note-value which may or may not be unequalized. Quotations 2 and 4 state specifically that it is quavers that must be played equal in Italian music, though they may be unequal in French music. In the Loulié quotation musical examples in the original text make it clear that "half-beats" means "quavers". Even Couperin's ambiguous quotation mentions quavers in passing.

I would claim that Neumann makes a mistake of logic here. His authors say:

The French played their quavers unequal.
The Italians played their quavers equal.

Neumann's conclusion is:

The Italians did not use rhythmic inequality.

But he overlooks the possibility of *semiquaver* inequality!

Evidence from Donington

Neumann's article appeared in 1965. Robert Donington's masterly book *The Interpretation of Early Music* had come out in London in 1963. On page 394 was printed a long excerpt from Michel Corrette's *Methode de la Flute Traversiere*, Paris-Lyons, c. 1740. Here are the relevant passages:

"The four-time C or Ċ is much used in Italian music, as in the Allemande, Adagio, Presto of sonatas and concertos. It is necessary to perform the quavers equal and to make unequal the semiquavers two by two. These are also sometimes performed equal in Allegros and Prestos of sonatas and concertos...

"the 2/4 or 2/8 is the 2-time of the Italians. This metre is often used in the Allegros and Prestos of sonatas and concertos. The quavers must be performed equal, and the semiquavers made unequal; they are also sometimes performed equal in sonatas."

Corrette's interest in foreign music extended beyond Italy:

"The 6/4 is a time of two uneven beats ... The English compose many Vaudevilles, and Country dances in this metre ... These airs ought to be played in a noble manner, marking the crotchets well; and making the quavers unequal two by two. This metre is very little found in Italian music
.... "

"The 12/8 is found in Italian, German, French and English music, in 4-time Jigs. The quavers must be performed equal and the semiquavers made unequal."