

UNEQUAL NOTES

The Inégales Newsletter

Editor: John Byrt

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Editorial

'The only healthy thing music can do in our century is to stop trying to be impressive'. This acute remark by Virgil Thompson probably sums up what a lot of us feel about orthodox music - the ceremonial rig-out, the reverential hush, the hype in the record magazines. I expect this is what motivates the 'clap between movements' brigade at the proms. Anything to interrupt the oppressive religiosity of it all. Another word for 'impressive' is 'sublime' and in his article in *Authenticity and Early Music*¹ Richard Taruskin describes the history of music in the 19th century as 'the encroachment of the sublime upon the domain of the beautiful'. 20th-century composers, he says, have often rebelled against this sublimity by deliberately making their music off-hand and ironic. He considers that this phenomenon does not only concern contemporary music, arguing that many early music performances today take their style, not from a real sense of the music's period of origin, but from this very reaction against nineteenth century values that I have described. These performances, he thinks, also reflect our 20th-century lifestyle and, quoting Boris Asafiev,² he relates the current tendency towards fast tempi to our style of living

with its concentration of experience, its capricious rhythms, its cinematographic quality, its madly fast pace - the quality of this life has weaned us away from slow and leisurely contemplation.

But where does this leave *notes inégales*? Would a greater use of *inégales* in baroque music help Virgil Thompson in his retreat from the

¹ Nicholas Kenyon (ed.) *Authenticity and Early Music* (Oxford, 1988), see page 184.

² *ibid.* page 186.

'impressive'? Or would it hasten us towards new excesses of irony and tempo such as Taruskin dreads? I would like to think that *inégalité* would bring an amelioration to both sides of this argument. On the one hand, its informality and physicality should help to prick the balloon of 19th century sublimity, without causing an unwished-for deviation towards irony. On the other hand, I believe that the use of *inégaux* would slow down the tempo of our performances, encouraging us return to the pace of life that our great-grandfathers would surely have been used to. Not that I think that Bach's contemporaries spent all their time in 'slow and leisurely contemplation', but I do feel it is a shame if we use their music to reinforce our 20th-century obsession with speed.

***Inégaux* news**

My article 'Writing the unwritable' appeared in the January issue of *The Musical Times*. The core of this was my thoughts on the keyboard suites of Purcell and Croft but it also had quite a lot about Handel. I looked into the significance of the dot in baroque music. It included comments from Christopher Hogwood and Colin Tilney, which also appeared in the last issue of Unequal Notes (UN 10). **David Ponsford**, whose conversations with me made up most of UN 3, has written a reply to this article, which I hope will appear in the March *Musical Times*. So it's seconds out and may the best man win!

CORRESPONDENCE

Kenneth Mobbs, Bristol

to Joyce Harbottle, Bristol

14 December 1996

Your note in John Byrt's latest newsletter interested me, as I am due to play Beethoven op 27 no 2 (I don't like to give it its usual designation) on fortepiano at the University of Bristol at a lunchhour concert on Wed 22nd Jan (1.15 pm). Finding so many 19th century examples of apparent synchronisation of rhythms, I have been experimenting with the first movement in this way, trying to forget the usual title, emboldened by the split common time signature and the odd semiquaver before the third triplet in the first ed. (unfortunately I haven't seen the MS).

But Czerny, who studied with Beethoven from that sort of time, is quite explicit in "On the Proper Performance..."³ in stating that the semiquaver should be played after the third triplet (he doesn't say exactly how far after!). He also offers crotchet = 54 as the speed (crotchet = 60 in his complete edition of the sonatas for Simrock), and has some interesting things to say about the pedalling.

Czerny seems to be generally reliable in what he says, and after all, he is my "great-grandteacher", so I feel I ought to follow his advice.

Joyce Harbottle to

Kenneth Mobbs

20 January 1997

My main interest in rhythmic alteration lies with Bach's music - I have yet to study its application to 19th century works, so you can imagine how encouraged I feel by your letter. As I tried the first movement of Op 27 No 2 in as many ways as I could invent, only to return, dissatisfied, to the familiar, unsynchronized interpretation, my perplexity increased. Was this indeed correct, or had it been "got all wrong", maybe through bad editing of some early editions combined with mistaken readings by the Sonata's first exponents? Furthermore, Victorian drawing-rooms were infested with "piano-operators", who - especially if female - would employ the "Moonlight" epithet as an excuse for distorted rubati and other mannerisms. Would these unreliable influences still be colouring our present-day, often more informed approach? I was much relieved to discover that Czerny is specific about not synchronizing the semiquavers! I was also glad to have confirmed the correct speed of the music. I play it slightly more slowly than crotchet = 54; crotchet = 60 is a shade too fast for me. Your comment that Czerny has some "some interesting things to say about the pedalling" is most tantalising!

On 6th January I wrote to John, telling him that you had contacted me about Beethoven, and quoted your Czerny paragraph. I didn't like to tell him you hadn't seen the manuscript, though - I haven't either, said so in an unpublished part of my piece, and was rapped over the knuckles! - but thus I'll learn. (*Surely not a rap, Joyce! more a nudge. JB*)

³ Carl Czerny: *On the proper performance of all Beethoven's works for the piano*, edited and with a commentary by Paul Badura-Skoda, Universal Edition, UE 13340 eNJ.

At bar 60 I believe my Schirmer Urtext has an error in it: the bass C, two ledger lines below the stave, is missing. I would be immensely grateful if at some time you could verify for me whether this note is present in your first edition. If it is, it could be worthwhile my contacting Schirmer's to draw their attention to the omission.

It's nice to see this newsletter becoming a market place for the exchange of views between readers! JB

Inequality in Mahler?

John Johnson, Cheltenham

You might like to ponder the significance or probably total irrelevance of the enclosed, which I just happened to come across the other day. I cannot believe that Mahler (it's Symphony IV, last movement), meticulous in everything (he would have told the fiddlers which part of the bow to use and the singers which part of the diaphragm if there'd been room on the score - and he probably did, orally, when directing the Vienna Opera!) can have meant anything but 'equality' for the 'canto' and inequality for the violins and clarinets in the bar before figure 8 (see ex. 1). Yet in other places the singer joins the instrumental *inégalité*. One could balance a host of angelic arguments on these needles - but they are not intended as pins to stick in the effigies of the seekers of truth! I think the Mahler is probably a red herring - I just hope it's not a red rag to a bull!

Well, what do you know! Certainly not a red herring, John, nor a red rag. This relates rather closely to Christopher Hogwood's point in our last issue (UN 10 page 9). Hogwood was responding to my

Ex. 1: Mahler: Symphony no. 4, last movement, bars 80-98

argument that a mixture of dotted and non-dotted rhythms in Handel may imply that the non-dotted bits should be inégale. Clearly Hogwood doesn't agree with me, for he writes 'I have started to like the rather "easy" effect of each party going their own way'. Whether or not such an effect was ever aimed at by Handel, I would concede that a 'rather easy' effect is what Mahler is aiming at here, a deliberate informality where 'each party goes its own way'. This must surely be too late for inequality in symphonic music.

Could it be, however, that Mahler's heterophonic effects might have been inspired by a misunderstanding of earlier scores, such as Schumann's 'Süsser Freund' (Frauenliebe und Leben) which I examined in UN7, page 1, asking whether the singer might be expected to apply some kind of inequality? I must admit this doesn't sound very plausible. However, I do have a file on my computer headed 'modern music that is based on a misunderstanding of baroque interpretation'. When I get a moment I hope to examine large chunks of Hindemith (especially the organ sonatas, which are written in Bach-style small note-values), Villa-Lobos' Bachianas Brazilleras and a range of Stravinsky, including Dumbarton Oaks (supposed to be based on Brandenburg 3) and various pseudo-Bach movements like the middle movement of the Symphony of Psalms. To return to Taruskin, he thinks that our baroque interpretations have been influenced by Stravinsky's aesthetic but I should like to know whether he thinks Stravinsky was influenced by what he thought to be the sound of baroque music in the first place.⁴

Before throwing this whole idea out of the window, consider that there must be modern French pieces that are based on an égal interpretation of

⁴ Nicholas Kenyon (ed.): *ibid*, pp. 167-184.

early French music which scholars already agree would be erroneous (e.g. Minuet and Rigaudon from Ravel's Tombeau de Couperin?)

The bass arias in *Messiah*

Peter Tyrrell, Salisbury

I was wondering if you could give me your views on the interpretation of certain arias from *Messiah*? I am a bass and I have studied the bass arias, and would like some ideas before I sing them in public.

No. 5 Recit. 'Thus saith the Lord'

Do you think more of the dotted rhythm should be carried on in the solo part, perhaps up to bar 14, but excluding the appoggiatura figure on "dry land", bar 9? Should mainly dotted rhythm be resumed after bar 22?

I am looking at my copy of the Shaw edition and I see that I have pencilled in triplet rhythms (rather than dotting) in bars 3, 4, 8, 9, 22 to the end. e.g.

bar 3

the Lord of Hosts

This was the way we did it last time I performed the piece and I think it works very well. When the semiquaver figuration predominates, however, I used equal quavers. I agree with you that 'dry land' in bar 9 should be equal. (I have experimented with unequal semiquavers too, along the lines of Catherine's 'Rejoice greatly' on the cassette, but I don't feel the British public is ready for this yet!)

Actually I've heard people singing it in an uneven rhythm unintentionally, as that is the natural tendency of the English language. Personally, I would have thought that a dotted rhythm rather than triplets would convey the sense of majesty of "The Lord" and "the Lord of Hosts" etc. even if a slightly slower speed is used.

No. 10 Recit. 'For behold, darkness'

I feel that Handel's andante larghetto should mean "quite brisk" and this movement should be faster than the following aria (marked larghetto), yet it is usually sung slower.

I think you're right about this recit. In fact, since I believe that in baroque music a crotchet in C time went at a pretty constant speed - perhaps MM = 60 - I would take both recit and air at this speed which would make the air much slower than it is usually taken but very spooky! I've never dared to do it quite so slow in a performance!

I'm beginning to like the Andante larghetto at crotchet = 69 or thereabouts. It seems that in Baroque times an Andante suggested a fastish movement, but not so fast as an Allegro I've recently read Harnoncourt's collection of writing *The Musical Dialogue*, which has got me thinking about tempi. I find his CD of the Messiah extremely unimaginative, though! (1982 recording). Most performances of 'The people that walked' (the air) seem to end up about crotchet = 72 or more, which gives the impression of trotting or jogging in darkness. I'm trying it now at crotchet = 60 but find the speed tends to creep up to crotchet = 63, if I'm not careful. At the more usual faster speed it is just possible to sing the phrase "that dwell in the land of the shadow of death" (end of bar 35 to end of bar 39) in one breath - nearly expiring on the word 'death'! At a slower speed, I really have to take a breath in bar 38 before "of death". This can be done artistically, I think, and the long note on "death" is better supported. Another advantage of a slower speed is that certain words are easier to articulate:

that walked	that dwell
add underlining!!	

Regarding the words of the aria, "walking in darkness" must have been very familiar to people in the 18th century. One moves rather gingerly and still bumps into things! Could the wedges over some of the string notes be something more than directions to use separate bow strokes? Perhaps they suggest walking into objects, or stubbing your toe on a bed post?! Perhaps a sf would be a way of interpreting them?

Some nice thoughts here. Wedges usually meant staccato in this period so I think your idea of bumping into things is very plausible! In the Shaw edition some of the wedges are in brackets which, I think, means that they are not in the autograph. I think an sf interpretation might be going over the top though.

No. 48 Air 'The trumpet shall sound'

Most performers play the rhythm as written, which leads to an appalling "gear-change" in bar 3, and elsewhere (e.g. bars 104-105). Do you think that the dotted rhythm should be for more of or all of the first section? Should the middle section be dotted or not (bar 158 onwards)?

I believe that the dotted rhythm should be continued right through this air, including the middle section. I think you'll find that different recordings continue the dotting for different lengths, though I doubt if any goes as far as I'm recommending. The Basil Lam edition (Mackerras recording) takes it up to bar 6.

Perhaps you could refer me to similar pieces where the notation is more consistent and obvious? (Handel or other composers)

Is this because you don't believe that an air could have dotting all the way through? Well have a look at 'Where shall I seek the charming fair?' and 'Cease to beauty to be suing' from Handel's Acis and Galatea. These are two examples, taken at random, where dotted quavers are relentlessly written out to the end.

Air: No. 36 'Thou art gone up on high' In the various versions there are mixed species of rhythm (or). Does this suggest more inequality than is written?

I've never performed this version or, I believe, heard it done though Catherine Bass and I looked at the soprano version lately in the experimental sessions we held in October. In the bass version unequal quavers throughout seems to work at first sight but there are problems with bars 5 and 6 of the ritornello and similar passages in the orchestra, which would have to move into equal quavers to make it work. I'm not really happy with quaver inequality here. This is not as straightforward as 'The trumpet' or 'I know that my redeemer'. If you want to hear continued inequality working successfully in a 3 time movement, listen to 'I know that my redeemer liveth' on the Mackerras recording.

oOo

Fritz Neumann's *inégales* work reviewed

Last month I read through some of Neumann's work on *inégaies* from the 60s onwards. Much of it is collected in Frederick Neumann, *Essays in Performance Practice I* (Ann Arbor, 1982). I wanted to see if he was really the 'big bad wolf of *inégaies*' that I used to think he was. I'm afraid that the impression I gained was that, as far as *inégaies* were concerned, he did a disservice to musical scholarship, clinging on to a topic that he didn't fully understand himself and trying to bend evidence to suit his theories. On overdotting I think his achievement is more creditable, since his suspicion of the claims of Dart and even Arnold Dolmetsch in the area of 'the jerky style' may well turn out to have been justified.

Pp. 14-15 Donington's A performer's guide ... A review

Neumann refuses to accept the evidence for Italian inequality in Corrette's Flute method.⁵ Here Corrette is quite explicit about time-signatures and inequality, and one would have thought that his references to country were clear enough. But Neumann twists Corrette's words in a most misleading way. Here is an example of one of Corrette's statements:

The four-beat C or C is much used in Italian music, as in the Allemande, Adagio, Presto of sonatas and concertos. Play the quavers equal and the semiquavers in paired inequality. These are also sometimes performed equal in Allegros and Prestos of sonatas and concertos.

Neumann's response is this:

'Corrette, though mentioning the Italian origin of various meters, speaks of French, not Italian practices, and in doing so clearly spells out Italian equality as contrasted to French *inégalité*.

Neumann would have us believe that Corrette only mentions Italy here in order to indicate where the time-signature came from and then, having mentioned the types of movement in which it featured, turned to French music. But his last sentence can't possibly apply to French music for the French didn't write concertos at this time. Neumann's interpretation of these passages is perverse.

'The French *Inégaies*, Quantz and Bach' in *JAMS* vol. 18 (1965) pp 313-358.

⁵ Michel Corrette, *Methode de la Flute Traversiere*, Paris-Lyons, c 1740, p. 4.

p. 29 Neumann refers to a quotation from Loulié:

Dans quelque Mesure que ce soit particulièrement dans la Mesure à trois Temps les demy temps s'executent de deux manieres differentes, quoy que marquez de la même manière.

1. On les fait quelquefois égaux.

Cette manière s'appelle détacher les Nottes, on s'en sert dans les chants dont les sons de suivent part Degrez interrompus, *et dans toute sorte de Musique estrangere ou l'on ne pointe, jamais qu'il ne soit marqué.*

(The passage in italics was added by Loulié in the later, 1698, edition).

Neumann concludes from the italicized passage that Loulié is saying "no inequality in Italian music". But Loulié is only saying "don't play *quavers* unequally in Italian music." Similarly Neumann quotes Corrette as saying "inequality does not apply to Italian music". But what he actually says is "in any time-signature the *quavers* are played evenly in Italian music". This isn't a quibble - it makes perfect sense if you look at it from the point of view of an amateur musician of the day. Loulié isn't trying to impose a total embargo on inequality in foreign music here. He just wants to make it clear that, though in French music quavers were usually unequal, in foreign music quavers were usually equal - leaving room for possible semiquaver inequality. Inequality normally applied to notes that went four-to-a-beat.⁶ In France the beat tended to be the minim - abroad it was normally the crotchet.

'External evidence and uneven notes', *Musical Quarterly* vol. 52 no. 4 (1966)

I found this article useful for its reference (on p. 64) to an important paper by Ray McIntyre about Bach gigue. This refers to a Bonporti gigue: this exists in two styles of notation: ternary and binary. This relates to Collins' work, which I have discussed in the appendix of my 1996 book. Neumann doesn't accept McIntyre's argument, however.

⁶ John Byrt: '*Notes inégales*, some Misconceptions?' *JAMS*, Vol XX, No 3, 1967, pp 476-480 and 'Just a habit with us' in *The Musical Times* (Oct. 1995), p. 536.

'The dotted note and the so-called French style' in *Early Music* Vol 5, No 3, July 1977.

Most of this is about overdotting, which I hope to deal with in our September edition. But there is a brief reference to *notes inégales*. On page 94 (of Essays 1982) Neumann has been discussing overdotting and arguing that there is no evidence that dotting was practised beyond the 3:1 ratio called for by the normal dot of addition. Then he appears suddenly to remember *notes inégales*, which he hasn't referred to for some time. "There are some cases where prologation of the dot was actually based on a real and firmly established convention: that of *notes inégales*" he writes. Some cases! about 100 per page, I would say! This type of comment seems to me to show that Neumann had no clear vision of how *notes inégales* were applied in practice. Hefling confirms that his knowledge of the documentation was not matched by working experience of *inégales*.

'The Notes *inégales* revisited', *The Journal of Musicology*, 6 (1988), p 137.

Here Neumann considers the early sources on *notes inégales*. The most important ones are Fray Tomás de Santa María: *Arte de tañer fantasia*, Valladolid, 1565 (quoted in Donington *Interpretation* 1st ed. p. 388); Loys Bourgeois: *Le Droit Chemin de musique*, (Geneva, 1550), chapter 10, (quoted in Donington: *A Performer's Guide*, p. 255); Frescobaldi, Preface to *Toccate*, Rome, 1615-16 (*ibid.* p. 390) and Caccini, Preface to *Nuove Musiche*, (Florence, 1602), (Donington: *ibid* p. 389).

Neumann had asserted early on in the argument that *inégales* were confined to France. He then had to spent the rest of his life finding ways of disposing with inconvenient evidence like the above. Of course, he couldn't. All he could say was that these early sources did not present the 'regularity, principle and convention' of the French system.

This begged a whole lot of questions such as

- 1) doesn't a fragmentary reference to rhythmic inequality in e.g. early baroque Italy suggest that a more complete adherence to such a practice might have existed and not been recorded?
- 2) isn't a type of inequality that lacks regularity, principle or convention still of great importance to students of performance practice?
- 3) by what law should all musical practices be recorded systematically for future scholars to unearth?

More from Miles Kington

After the letter of September 12 1967 the correspondence changed character somewhat, being more orientated towards my education in jazz. But I will quote the bits that are relevant to *inégales*.

In early October 1967 we met at Oxford. Miles bought me a Duke Ellington compilation album which is still one of my favourites.

October 31 Miles sent me a pile of jazz records, including
Tristano, Parker & Gillespie.

November 5 My response:

Thanks for the records ... Though the material of the Ellington record may not match that of a Brahms symphony or a Strauss tone-poem in organisational discipline or complexity, the actual performance knocks spots off that of any symphony orchestra for sheer spontaneity and invention. The personality of the individual players comes over much more than it would in serious music - even in a string quartet or solo piano performance. And of course part of my interest in jazz comes from the conviction that this same spontaneity used to exist in 'serious' music of the Bach era ... I agree with the bit in the sleeve note [of the Tristano record] which says that the jazz musician is trying "to arrive at such control, such a combination of feeling and restraint, that one is never preoccupied with one's fingers as one plays, that one, in fact, is only barely conscious of what one is doing with one's fingers." I think I know what is meant here, and I think that it is something which serious musicians, at any rate those working in 17th and 18th century music, rarely achieve. We're all so preoccupied with the 'text' that we never get remotely relaxed enough to give way to feeling in the way that the jazz musician does. The musicologists tell us that we should ornament the music, but anything of this kind that appears, say, in a Raymond Leppard-type performance of Monteverdi, is mere beginners stuff compared with the inspired effusions of a chap like Tristano. (I went on to compare JS Bach with Louis Armstrong and CPE Bach with Tristano or Charlie Parker!) ... I like the sound of unison trumpet and sax in the Charlie Parker tracks - it reminds me of the noise of unison violins in a Bach or Vivaldi concerto.

November 7 Miles replies:

... You say the decorations of someone like Leppard sound elementary beside Tristano's inspired effusions, which of course gives me a warm glow of pride, but I suppose the answer is that Leppard is decorating something already there whereas Tristano's decorations are there for their own sake.

At least, it is this kind of feeling which must have once prompted Stravinsky to say that jazz was merely a series of arabesques and Ernest Newman to dismiss it as a bundle of tricks. The reason I don't agree with this line of thought is that jazz improvisation only seems superficial if you ask it to add up to a perfectly integrated whole; as soon as you stop wondering where it's leading to and start listening just to the way it's travelling, the process seems much more logical and impressive. [*In an earlier letter Miles had said 'I don't think jazz musicians are very often aware of the overall shape of what they play; their formal preoccupation is much more with the moment to moment evolution of a chain of melody'*].

I'm glad you feel that the personality of the players comes through so strongly, and I feel you are quite right about the analogy with the spontaneity of 18th-century music. The question is, how would you recommend today's players to recreate or create in another way the freshness of Bach's day? Jacques Loussier said on that TV programme that it was his urge to recreate Bach that led him to his approach, and that he preferred to present Bach in a twentieth century setting. I approve of his motive, but not the way he carries it out - I asked him why he didn't improvise on Bach's music as Bach would have done and he said because that was for the eighteenth century, not for today. In that case, I said, why play Bach at all? Surely Bach also is just for the eighteenth century? ...

Incidentally I once heard a pianist being interviewed on the Music Programme between concertos and he was asked if he ever improvised Mozart cadenzas. He said that it would take too much nerve and spontaneously introduced a comparison with jazz, saying that he envied jazz musicians their complete identity with the instrument they played; that they somehow *became* the instrument in a way that was almost impossible for classical musicians, which is just what you were saying about preoccupation with the text etc. ...

NEXT ISSUE

Sol Babitz: loony or luminary?

A scholar whose work is too often poo-pooed is Sol Babitz, an American violinist who published articles in the 50s and 60s encouraging the use of *inégaies* in Bach. In the next issue I shall survey his work.

More from Miles

My correspondence with Miles Kington continues - this time with some thoughts on CPE Bach and some quips about bop from the late Ronnie Scott.

NOTES INÉGALES, A EUROPEAN STYLE: I have recently completed this summary of my conclusions on *inégales*. It is a 37,000 word document with a 40,000 word appendix.

In the course of this study I examine previous *inégales* scholarship, identifying some faulty reasoning. I investigate the history of the allemande, comparing French allemandes with non-French ones, to see if there is any significant difference between them. I sift through documentary evidence for or against *inégales* from Italy, Germany and England and, using this evidence, assemble a conjectural International Metre-Inequality Table. I look into the vexed question of written dotting in the context of *inégaie* performance. Finally I try to come to some conclusions in this highly controversial field. The appendix includes notes on my Bach recordings and other *inégaie* performances. There is a series of conversations on *inégaies* with West-country performers and scholars. Included also is a facsimile of an early paper of mine on triplets and semiquavers in Bach with copious comments by the late Robert Donington. I review Donington's statements on inequality in the light of subsequent scholarship. With accompanying cassette (*Notes inégaies*, a breakthrough?) it costs £20, including postage and packing.

"He sets out his arguments here with clarity and force ... I like the consultative nature of this project." Clifford Bartlett, Early Music Review, November 1996.

BACH CASSETTE - Notes inégaies, a breakthrough? - contains recordings of 15 pieces by JS Bach, including allemandes from the suites and partitas, preludes and fugues from the 48 and two chorale preludes. On its own it costs £6, including postage and packing.

UNEQUAL NOTES -the NEWSLETTER

The Unequal Notes newsletter is a quarterly in which I include samples of my research and give news of articles, lectures and conferences on *notes inégaies*. If you would like to receive the Newsletter regularly, kindly send me an annual subscription of £2.00 payable on 1st September. Cheques made out to John Byrt please. Back numbers of UNEQUAL NOTES 50p each.

JUST OUT! *Inégalité in Purcell and Handel* for voice and harpsichord by Catherine Bass and John Byrt. Cassette: price £4. **Purcell** - Hark

how all things / Hark the ech'ing air / Bid the virtues; **Handel** - O had I
Jubal's lyre / As when the dove / Rejoice greatly.

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