

UNEQUAL NOTES

The swinging newsletter

Editor: John Byrt

No. 13

September 1997

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Editorial

When messing about on the harpsichord, I sometimes swap around between inequality and equality to see if I can get any insights about the difference between the two styles. If I've been doing a lot of 'straight' playing, swapping to inequality gives a wonderful sense of freedom. It is like changing (on a hot day) from a suit and tie into a T-shirt and shorts. The licence of the unequal quavers within the secure bounds of the regular pulse puts me entirely at ease. And yet before long the limitations of this style start to impinge and it in turn begins to cramp. Then it is equality, coupled with a more flexible tempo and legato phrasing, that liberates me. Now I can enjoy the freedom of the interpreter, using the composer's text as my plaything, mixing my ideas and emotions with his and putting my own stamp on the music.

These two types of freedom are distinct. Inequality offers a physical informality within a secure environment (what our teenagers look for in a rave) while the freedom of equality is a more intellectual freedom, which can only exist if the power of the dance beat is bled out of the music.

An *inégal* by any other name ...

I've not ceased looking for a substitute for the hard to decline, question-begging, but above all misleadingly Gallic *notes inégales*. 'Rhythmic inequality' is a real yawn. 'Swing' has seemed the closest, though to some it would make the jazz connection too strong for comfort and I risk lose some valuable support among jazz-haters. When I submitted an article on inequality to the Musical Times in 1967, the then editor, Stanley Sadie, told me to tone down my references to jazz, which I did. (In the end, that article got published in an American journal). What did they call

inequality in Couperin's day? 'Pointer' seems the most common among period French authors, translating as 'dotting'. But doesn't this create a dilemma of its own? Bacilly expresses the dilemma when he talks about 'dotting which is not marked'. Mary Burwell's lute tutor has a chapter in which "the humouring of a lesson" is discussed: but inequality is only part of this. I'm quite sure that we must steer clear of 'rubato', though I note that back in 1968 Howard Ferguson described inequality as 'this type of rubato'.

For years I have had a firm notion that the equivalent in jazz to the inequality of baroque music was called 'swinging'. But I have been looking the word up in various dictionaries. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary gives the noun 'Swing' in its addenda as 'An easy rhythmic pulse' and 'Swinging' as 'In jazz music: lively, go-ahead, superlatively good' also *transferred* [meaning, used in other contexts] 1955. For the verb 'Swing' it gives: 'to play music with a buoyant beat 1933. Then I went to Grove for the real wisdom. But the 'Swing' entry did not mention inequality at all. It defined swing as 'a quality attributed to jazz performance' and 'conflict between a fixed pulse and the wide variety of accent and rubato that a jazz performer plays against it.' Then it referred you to the 'jazz' entry. But this had no reference to inequality either. At that point I remembered a tape of jigs and reels that someone had lent me. So I looked under 'Ireland'. In the 'hornpipe' section I read that 'they have a decidedly pointed rhythm'. So writers on Irish folk music use the term that goes back to Bacilly!

I looked through various jazz books and in one I found that the the simple drumming style of the New Orleans and the Dixieland / Chicago styles (which were all crotchets) is followed by this new beat on the hi-hat:

$$\pm \sqrt{\approx} \quad \pm \sqrt{\approx}$$

which heralded the so-called Swing Era. At last I had found a dotted beat that seems to confirm my link between the word swing and the idea of inequality but it still leaves unmentioned the undoubted fact that melodic inequality was normal from at the very beginnings of jazz. From his very first 1925 recordings Louis Armstrong and his Hot Five and Hot Seven played music that was a continuous stream of inequality.

So, in spite of all these complications, I've put 'swinging' at the top of this newsletter to see if it provokes anybody to a reply.

Handel in Wantage

The Ernest Read Musical Association is well known for its Childrens' Concerts in London but for many years it has also supported Summer Schools, lately at Wantage in Oxfordshire. This course has always offered two orchestras and a choir and 15 years ago I was asked to start a Listeners' Course, which would study some of the music being rehearsed by the orchestras. This formula has been very successful and numbers have reached 18. Last year I addressed a seminar on inequality and this year inequality hit Wantage in earnest. At the beginning of the week Catherine Bass and I performed some of our Purcell and Handel arias to a small but very attentive audience and that evening I started to rehearse a choir of about 50 volunteer singers in choruses from Handel's *Messiah*. I selected the following for the unequal treatment:

And the glory of the Lord
 And he shall purify
 Rejoice, rejoice
 His yoke is easy
 The Lord gave the word

I know that my redeemer (this is in what I call 'careless' notation - much of the inequality is already indicated in dotted notes)

Instead of giving an inadequate demonstration in my threadbare voice, as I sometimes try to do, I was able to ask Catherine to pattern a phrase and then to get the choir to copy it - the most successful method there is. One line of 'And he shall purify' from Catherine and they were off - there was no stopping them. I didn't even have to mention the problem of too much dotting.

The next day I rehearsed with a volunteer orchestra of strings (6.6.3.4.1) + 2 oboes and bassoon. No problem with the unequal quavers of 'And the glory' and 'I know that my redeemer' but we did have difficulty with the unequal semiquavers in 'Rejoice, rejoice'. Of course we were using modern instruments and bows. After the concert some of the players explained what the problems were. They had tried to simulate baroque bows by grasping the bow a little way up from the nut but this made it very awkward to change strings. "We played near the point on the fingerboard using a stirring motion like stirring coffee", one of them said. What self-sacrifice! They realized that baroque bows were necessary to do the thing

properly. "Gut strings have a deader sound but the sound carries on longer". In spite of all this the result was surprisingly good. We stirred a lot of real coffee that week, especially in the refectory where I was given the low-down on how to play an unequal 'Rejoice, rejoice' by **Kerry Watson, Vicky Sherlock, Liz Parker and Mike Johnson.**

In the informal performance the choir revelled in the inequality, sometimes doing it when they weren't supposed to. 'The Lord gave the word' went with a real bang, especially when I said I wanted them to sound like a gallery choir. In this number the semiquaver inequality doesn't sound so much like Italian-style melismas as like an allemande or march transferred from instruments to choir. One could treat Croft's 'Trumpet overture' as a possible model.¹ The inequality is shared out liberally to all parts. There are lot of repeated notes but since they are semiquavers I think this wouldn't affect the inequality. I took it at a leisurely $\pm = 65$ whereas 'Rejoice, rejoice' went much faster at $\pm = 86$.

This occasion gave me a further opportunity to look into the relationship between inequality and tempo. I found it illuminating to compare the tempi that Catherine and I took in our Purcell and Handel with the tempi of Christie's 'Air' and 'Rondeau' from his 1989 *Fairy Queen* recording. Here are our tempi

Hark the echoing air	Unequal semiquavers	$\pm = 78$
Bid the virtues	Unequal semiquavers	$\pm = 55$
Hark how all things	Unequal quavers	$\pm = 100$
O had I Jubal's lyre	Unequal semiquavers	$\pm = 78$
As when the dove	Unequal semiquavers	$\pm = 100$
Rejoice, rejoice	Unequal semiquavers	$\pm = 86$

For comparison

Christie: air Unequal quavers $\circ = 86$
 Tilney: Purcell allemande (Suite 3) Unequal semiquavers $\pm = 60$ [$\otimes = 120$]

This helps one to find an effective tempo range for inequality:

Fast $\oplus$ op $\otimes$ $\iota v \epsilon \theta$. $\pm = 86$ [$\otimes = 172$] Christie's FQ Air & Catherine's 'Rejoice'

¹ William Croft: Complete harpsichord works (London, 1982), vol. 2, no. 18.

Medium	⊗ 1vεθ.	± = 100	'Hark how all things'
Slow	⊕ 1vεθ.	± = 55	'Bid the virtues'
	⊗ 1vεθ.	± = 86	Christie's Rondeau

One would suspect that the Italians (and those writing in the Italian style) kept to the faster end of the scale.

Yo Tomita, a new correspondent

In Newsletter 12 I mentioned that another speaker at the Birmingham Conference on May 31st 1997 was **Yo Tomita** of the Queen's University, Belfast. He is working on the sources of Bach's 48, Book 2 and I enjoyed his paper on Bach's errors and changes of mind. Since the conference we have corresponded and here are passages from our letters.

JB June 6th 1997

Dear Yo, here is the document you asked for² + the cassette that goes with it. It was a pleasure to meet you the other day and to hear you speak. Your Bach work seems very crucial to me - how did you manage to corner the market in this important area? Clearly you are a man of determination.

YT June 13th 1997

It was a very exciting conference for me ... for I have never thought of applying inequality in modern performance that I have been familiar with. I was a pianist until 12 years ago, and although I do listen to the performance on the harpsichord, I never went sufficiently deep into the issues such as notes inégales. In the morning of the 2nd day of the conference, I played most of the pieces from WTC II at Stephen [Daw's] house (while everyone is still sleeping), and some of them seem acceptable (musically) to my sense.

It seems to me at present that, because this is a 'lost tradition', there are hardly any clues to reconstruct exact performing styles, let alone the way to adjust the levels of our perception to the mind of those living in the 18th century. There seems another problem in a different level in that inequality is potentially such a subtle, expressive idea with great variety of rhythmic characters. This I noticed by playing a piece in both very sharp dotted

² *Notes inégales - a European style*, (Tiverton, 1996).

rhythm and more mild one. Therefore the problem is even more complicated to track down the precise execution. Currently, in my view, the only reliable means to evaluate its effectiveness seems to be our own aesthetic judgement, quite contrary to what we need to do. So I am very interested to see how you are approaching it and find a solution to it.

My view of inequality of J.S. Bach has been influenced by my past experience with the source materials, and I still think that his notation is precise, especially if it is a published version. I also think that your suggestion of "Ich folge dir gleichfalls mit freudigen Schritten"³ in dotted rhythm is convincing, not only because this does not contradict my hypothesis of notational matters (as the Passions were not published) but also because the *Affekt* of the piece is now more expressive...

[I sent Yo a copy of my Newsletter 12 and asked his opinion on the section on triplets and demisemiquavers in the appendix of my 1996 book (page 52). I also referred him to the article by Michael Collins on which I had based this chapter.⁴ What did he think of Collins' interpretation of the F sharp minor prelude from WTC Book II and my extension of this theory?]

YT June 27

I was in the USA until two days ago and I am surprised to find your newsletter waiting for me, which I read with great interest ... I went to the library and read the article by Michael Collins that you referred to. I did not like him at all when he referred to Bach's later version as 'Kirnberger's version'. Actually Kirnberger's version stemmed from Bach's London autograph of '48', and Kirnberger did not introduce different rendering from Bach's. By this time in 1966, Bach's autograph was well-known to the world, thanks to the article by Walter Emery.⁵ This is nothing more, to me personally at least, than Bach's usual way of spelling out unambiguously in his fair copies. So what we can see in Altnickol's version is a faithful reproduction of Bach's earlier version.

³ From the St John Passion. Yo is referring to the impromptu performance that took place on the Sunday morning. The singer was Charlotte Jones and her friend Sue (second name?) ably played the flute part on the violin.

⁴ Michael Collins: 'The Performance of Triplets in the 17th and 18th centuries' in *JAMS* vol. 19 No 3 (1966), pp. 281-328.

⁵ *Music and Letters*, 1953.

I am not fully convinced by Collins' suggestion of the resolution of the triplets in his article, page 312.

If we are to apply unequal rendering of triplets, I believe one of many resolutions would be the following:

This is a fairly careless, mechanical conversion of a triplet into a $\partial \mid$ figure ... I strongly believe, however, that Bach did not mean the way suggested by Collins or myself in the above example ... simply because he could have written it [like this] if he had wanted to. So the 'unequal' rendering should still leave a flavour of 'triplet'. It is my current view that ... rendering rhythm 'unequal' is to do with effective, expressive articulation of particular motives or figures associated with specific Affekt in music, such as swing and flow, so that the hidden melodic lines will come out to the surface of execution. Taking a further example from WTC II, I think the Prelude in C minor (BWV 871/1) would be worked out well, simply because the 4-note motive $\langle \partial \approx \partial \approx \partial \approx \partial \approx$ can be divided into different groups e.g. $\langle \textcircled{\partial} \mid =. \mid \partial. \mid =. \mid \partial. \mid =. \mid \partial. \mid =. \mid$.

These lovely notes are only made possible because Yo has presented me a complimentary copy of his Bach Musicological font! In the past I had to write any musical symbols on to my typescript which was very messy and time-consuming and I would sometimes forget to do it. Now I

have two new fonts which I can use by holding down the Alt key and typing out four-figure numbers on the numeric keypad on the right. I used to have terrible trouble with the alla breve time-signature. Now all I have to

do is press Alt 0162 and, lo and behold: ' !

or if you like your time-signatures a bit clapped out : ¢ !

or if you like them psychologically disturbed ♣ !

Will wonders never cease?

JB August 6th

I was delighted to receive your letter and the font that you enclosed will be extremely useful. Many thanks for that.

I was interested to read what you say about the Collins article. I don't think many people know of this paper and, although you disagree with his use of the term 'Kirnberger version', I feel that his relation of duple and triple rhythms is important. You regard the discrepancies between the London autograph and Altnickol as 'Bach's usual way of spelling out unambiguously in his fair copies'. Does this mean that you regard a written triplet in Bach as having an implicit rhythm that can be more accurately notated with demisemiquavers? You certainly appear to think that Bach expected the three notes of a triplet to be played in some kind of inequality. Though you reject Collins' use of binary notation (and your own) - and I do too - you write that "the 'unequal' rendering should still leave a flavour of 'triplet'" which I do too. If I interpret your views correctly, it would seem that you must be very close to my own feelings on this matter.

Overdotting in the 90s

I know I have a go at Neumann from time to time but there is one issue on which I find myself agreeing with him: overdotting. He disapproves of the 'jerky' French overture style that was championed by Dolmetsch and Dart and is still very much with us.⁶ I suppose it all sprang from the passage in

⁶ Frederick Neumann: 'The dotted note and the so-called French style' in *Early Music* Vol 5, No 3, July 1977, see pp. 75-76..

Dolmetsch's book.⁷ But where does Dolmetsch get this notion from? Quantz and CPE Bach! neither of whom one would regard as totally at home in the 'splendid style'. It does seem an incredibly long way from Quantz's galant phrases to a Handel overture. And such violent overdotting! I then turned to the relevant passage in Dart⁸ :

The conventional lengthening of the dotted note and the shortening of the complementary note was in very widespread use over a great length of time, and ignorance of the fact is one of the gravest defects of present-day performances of old music. It is a fashion that lasted from the early years of the 17th century down to the last years of the nineteenth and it still survives in the march-playing of a good military band though it has become obsolete among orchestral players and pianists.

I think Dart is right up to a point, and the reference to the military band is very apt. But he seems to accept Dolmetsch's jerky ideas over French overtures without a murmur. I've been looking at his edition of Purcell's *Dido* (with Margaret Laurie) and he seems to think that any dotted note is eligible for overdotting. Lam does in his *Messiah* too. I would allow for the kind of overdotting that results from inequality, but it would have to involve the note value that is unequal. In the opening of Bach's 1st, 3rd and 4th orchestral suites I would overdot the dotted quavers, but only to bring the ensuing semiquavers in line with the running semiquavers in the other parts, which I would of course play unequal. Why do people not play these overtures unequal?

Neumann is too rigid about these French overtures, however. He leaves no room for what I call 'careless notation', instead he tries to enforce a consistency among baroque composers which performers of this music know is not borne out by the evidence. He only believed what he saw in print (positivism) and exposed himself far too little to the sound of the music and the experience of those who play it.

Neumann denied that any French source mentioned 'lengthening of the dot'⁹. But this is untrue. Hotteterre explains it:

⁷ Arnold Dolmetsch: *The interpretation of the music of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, (London, 1915; new edn. 1946, rev. 1969), p. 62.

⁸ Thurston Dart: *The Interpretation of Music* (London, 1954, 7th edn. 1967), p. 81.

⁹ Frederick Neumann: 'Facts and fiction about overdotting' in *Musical Quarterly* vol. 63 (1977) pp. 155-185. See *Essays in Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor, 1982) p. 113.

In movements where the quavers are unequal the dot after the crotchet is equivalent to a dotted quaver, so that the quaver following a dotted crotchet is always short ¹⁰

so the written phrase $\pm . \quad \otimes \pm$

will be played $\pm _ \sqrt{\square} \approx \pm$

Stephen Hefling quotes other sources which convey the same message.¹¹

Neumann refers to *notes inégales*, but argues that this practice cannot lead to overdotting since it is only *mild*.¹²

In the February issue of *Early Music* two scholars attacked the problem of overdotting, with particular reference to the overture from Bach's B minor partita (BWV 831) - notated in demisemis - and the C minor version of the same piece (BWV 831a) - notated in semis. I should like to concentrate on 'Bach's French overtures and the politics of overdotting' by Matthew Dirst.

Hefling (and others) have argued that the B minor version was an 'explicit' version of the C minor one, which had been written in the French manner. Neumann, however, considered that 'Bach changed his mind'. Dirst sides with Neumann against Hefling. Yes, Bach did change his mind, he argues: the two overtures were different kinds of overture. He shows convincingly that Bach's earlier overtures (up to 1730) tended to use even semiquavers which his later overtures, probably influenced by Bach's visits to Dresden, contain demisemiquaver *tirades*. Hence the phrase 'the politics of overdotting' present in his title. I should like to make the obvious point that the semiquavers in the early overtures (Dirst makes a comparison with the

¹⁰ Jacques Hotteterre-le-Romain: *Methode pour la musette* (Paris, 1737), p. 35.

¹¹ Stephen Hefling: *Rhythmic alteration in 17th- and 18th-century Music* (New York, 1993). See my review in *The Musical Times*, (July, 1995), pp. 358-59.

¹² Neumann Essays, p. 138.

opening of orchestral suite no. 1, BWV 1066) should, perhaps, be unequal. If so, the music would be more rhythmic than Dirst seems to think. It would sound like an allemande and the semiquavers would hardly be 'flowing' (see p. 39).

Quantz's *Solfeggi* - part 2

When describing an allemande by Blockwis (p. 71) Quantz writes 'unequal aber nicht als Punkte' (unequal but not as if dotted). Here he is making a distinction that Bacilly makes back in the 1660s, showing that in those days a dot indicated a nuance, as well as time.¹³

Quantz's treatment of triplets in *Solfeggi* is illuminating. He appears to want them played equal and I find his request for the third note of a quaver triplet to be played louder than the first as puzzling as Fontijn does. I feel that Quantz confuses the issue by referring to three-note groups in 9/8 as triplets, however, and perhaps Fontijn should not have discussed these two passages at the same time. In 9/8 quavers were always equal. Quantz's demand for real triplets to be played equal, however, relates to work I did some years ago on triplets and to a discussion that came up in this very newsletter.¹⁴

One of the points arising from the debate between myself and David Ponsford in *The Musical Times* (January and April 1997) is the question of whether leaping or disjunct semiquavers were played unequal in the late baroque. I argued that they weren't (though it was different with quavers) but I must confess that a re-examination of *Solfeggi* has made me wonder whether Quantz did sometimes observe such a distinction. He does seem to use the syllables

ti ti

more on leaping semiquavers than on conjunct ones. The extract that got me wondering was this one:

Glösch p 4

¹³ Bénigne de Bacilly: *L'art de bien chanter* (Paris, 1668), p. 232. See my 'Writing the unwritable', *Musical Times* (January, 1997).

¹⁴ Unequal notes 8. See also my *Notes inégales - a European style*: appendix page lii.

If two or more 'tis' always mean equal, does Quantz here switch for inequality to equality and back? An even clearer case can be seen in the allegro from a duet by T[elemann]. on page 49. Here equal performance of leaping semiquavers is backed up by the word 'egal'.

Telemann p 49

In a duet by W.F. Bach a falling arpeggio has continuous 'di dis' by it. Since 'di' seems to be used by Quantz as a softer alternative to 'ti', this may also indicate equality.

On the other hand, there are numerous cases where Quantz indicates unequal performance of leaping semiquavers.

3 examples on p 52

an in the vivace from Telemann's Duetto à la française (page 89) inequality seems to be called for even in leaping quavers.

A similar problem is repeated notes. In the Versuch Quantz exempts from inequality notes that are repeated. If 'ti, ti, ti' does indeed indicate equality, then Quantz is consistent on this point.

Trio by Graun, p. 73.

Behind the interpretation of such documents as this one lies a string of logical problems. If at one point Quantz says: play this passage unequally, what does this mean for the rest of the music in the book? Must we assume that everything is *egal* unless marked *unequal*? Or if he mentions *egal* is the reverse true? Fontijn writes 'there are fewer [indications of 'egal' than of 'inegal'] presumably because to assume that notes are equal is easier than to assume that they are unequal'. I think this is not really the point. More to the point is how often these expressions needed to be used in a teaching situation. When Quantz writes

Die 16tel werden unequal vorgetragen als die geschwindest (p. 38) or
Diese Noten werden ungleich, als die geschwindesten vorgetragen ... (p. 47)

he seems to be explaining the principle of inequality or reminding the pupil of it. This implies a certain lack of experience in the student. When Quantz qualifies these words as: 'sehr ungleich', 'ganz egal', it implies that the pupil has matured to the stage when finer points are being dealt with. When he mentions 'egal' of triplets this suggests that he might be warning against the habit of playing them unequal which was apparently current during the baroque.

As for the difference between 'unequal' and 'ungleich', Fontijn gives some attention to this. She finds that 'ungleich' usually appears within a whole sentence while 'unequal' can be used on its own. This suggests to me that 'unequal' was really a technical term, while 'ungleich' was a word that belonged more in the German vernacular.

NOTES INÉGALES, A EUROPEAN STYLE: The 1996 summary of my conclusions on *inégaux* is continuously brought up to date. It is a 37,000 word document with a 40,000 word appendix. "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 inégaux, 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 inégales*. 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.

***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.

Bach *inégal*. Extracts from Cantatas 21 and 140. Cassette: price £3. These are recordings made for academic purposes of experimental performances using inequality. They are intended to show the effect that inequality has on vocal runs and divisions and particularly on tempo.

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