

- The *Musical Times*, July 1995 Review of Stephen Hefling's *Rhythmic alteration in 17th- and 18th-century music* pp. 358-9.
- The *Musical Times*, October 1995 'Just a habit with us' p. 536.
- The *Musical Times*, to appear shortly: 'Notes *inéga*les, the English scene'.

**Dr John Byrt, 4 Melbourne Cottages, Tiverton, Devon,
EX16 5LE
Tel: (01884) 256806**

UNEQUAL NOTES

*The Inéga*les Newsletter

Editor: John Byrt

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Editorial

Since taking up my research again I have always studied *inéga*les in close connection with tempo. The use of *inéga*les certainly slows the tempo down but in my work on allemandes I have tried to find a crotchet *tactus* which makes sense in allemandes and which might extend to other music in C time. Crotchet = 60 seems right for most allemandes, or at least within five points either way. Equal semiquavers sound dull and lifeless at this tempo. At a typical modern tempo, however, (e.g. crotchet = 90) equal semiquavers sound strong and lively while *inéga*les sound frenetic and over-the-top. In my scenario allemandes and other German music in C time would stay at this tempo (unless marked Presto etc.) at which unequal semiquavers sound relaxed and pliable. I am also coming to believe that musicians of this period would have been used to a fairly narrow scale of values for each note. For example: nowadays a crotchet can be anywhere from MM 45 to 200; in those days a crotchet in C time might be confined to, say, 55-75. If I am right, how much more secure life must have been! Problems over tempo changes must have been much less acute.

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Unequal Bach in Taunton

St Mary's Church, Taunton, Saturday February 10, 1996
soloist: Colin Booth
Somerset County Orchestra
conductor: John Byrt

An *inéale* performance of JS Bach's harpsichord concerto in f took place in Taunton in February. For this concert we had a band of strings in the disposition 4.4.3.3.1 The leader, Trevor Gill, the principal second violin, Adrian Taylor and the bass player were professionals, with bags of experience in London orchestras. The bass player, Ron Prentice, has had a long career in music which includes much experience in jazz - he has played for Humphrey Lyttleton and many other big jazz names. His reaction to *inéale* Bach was to say 'It doesn't seem right' but he did it. I lent him some 'Unequal Notes' newsletters: he returned them saying 'Couldn't understand much of it' but certainly entered into the spirit of the occasion.

We did every movement unequal. The tempi were roughly

- I. crotchet = 64
- II. quaver = 80
- III. dotted crotchet = 48 (quaver = 145)

This meant that the quaver of I and III were almost the same. Compare the tempi in George Malcolm's recording with Yehudi Menuhin's group:

- I. crotchet = 84
- II. quaver = 58
- III. dotted crotchet = 72

Once one had found the right tempo for each movement there were two main interpretative problems. The first was getting a strong but springy pulse on the first beat of the bar. I can remember my piano teacher telling me to do this years ago and I imagine this is part of an ages-old tradition. Do piano teachers say this nowadays? I seem to remember that Christopher Hogwood went for a heavy accent on the first beat of the bar when he started the Academy. It sounded rather

The other day I heard London Baroque give a concert in the Minehead area. The line-up was Manze, Schaller, Gwilt, Medlam and Charlston. I was very impressed by their commitment and how even a Handel trio sonata was performed with a great emotional head of steam. The pulse was emphasized all right: Medlam *pounded* on his cello. But if a sharp attack was required the violins played off the string in the middle of the bow. Only the harpsichord could give a 'click' at the beginning of a note: in the combination of harpsichord and cello at the start of the Pachelbel canon the harpsichord gave the click and the cello provided the sostenuto. An interesting effect.

UNEQUAL NOTES - the NEWSLETTER

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THE CASE FOR INÉGALES IN J.S.BACH

My paper deals with the scholarly background to the *inéales* controversy and explains the case for rhythmic inequality in JS Bach's music. It includes a facsimile of an early paper of mine on triplets and semiquavers in Bach with copious comments by the late Robert Donington. With accompanying cassette (*Notes inégales*, a breakthrough?) it costs £15, including postage and packing.

BACH CASSETTE - Notes inégales, 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. It costs £6, including postage and packing.

My articles on *inéales*:

'Frühlingssehnsucht' when the composer may have intended a more natural, lilting rhythm.

PS I cannot resist mentioning here an impressive instance of apparent latter-day inequality that I have been aware of for many years. It comes from the first of Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* for clarinet and piano. Here a melody is played on the piano and echoed on the clarinet. The piano version of the melody has its stems linked to triplet figuration in such a way that the player seems obliged to play it *inéga*le!

In practice, pianists usually try to fudge this passage so as to make the melody sound more or less *égale* while appearing to play the accompanying figure in something like triplets! This is what Hacker and Burnett do on their recording and so do Michael Collins and Catherine Stott.

A memorable concert

peculiar and they seem to have dropped it now. But would it have worked with a more secular mood - and, of course, *inéga*les? Did it work with us on Feb 10? I'm not sure.

The second interpretative problem was getting the strings to bow the *inéga*les properly. It's to do with keeping the bow moving and in contact with the string. The fiddles seem to have got the hang fairly quickly but the cellos tended to stop the bow each time, exaggerating the inequality. In fact they were having the same problem as Bacilly,¹ who in 1668 wrote

...these notes must be dotted with such restraint that it is not obvious (except in certain places which require this manner of [jerky] performance).

Certain passages seemed to benefit particularly from our interpretation. The dramatic cadences (I, bar 4 and III, bar 8) became much more forceful though Colin had feared in rehearsal that a slow tempo would make them boring. I tried to persuade him that a slow tempo would be OK and I must say it worked splendidly in performance. I also felt that our rendering favoured the falling phrases which are featured in both fast movements:

a)

b)

These seemed to take on a kind of reckless abandon which I found most pleasing. I think it's got something to do with the fact that the treble and bass parts at the time are widely separated. (I wonder how many people notice this motivic correspondence between the outer movements?) Also improved by a slower tempo were the repeated quaver triads in the last movement which became rather spooky:

¹ See Bénigne de Bacilly: *L'Art de bien chanter* (Paris, 1668), as translated in Donington: *Interpretation*, ch. 45, para 581a.

Colin played with great sympathy and came up with some lovely cadenzas. He gave a masterly rendering of the middle movement, which is really a solo anyhow. The *inégalité* was exactly as I would have wished.

Apart from Colin's ensuing comments I've had very little feedback since the concert, positively or negatively. Trevor (the leader) rang me up later, praised me for the rest of the concert but said 'I don't go along with the Bach - I'm a purist'. This was one in the eye, but then I am coming to expect this. In spite of this Trevor had been the one who in rehearsal helped to crack the problem of how to bow *inégalement*, keeping his bow firmly on the string and underplaying the inequality, while extracting plenty of gaiety from the music. He leads the Royal Philharmonic Pops Orchestra, which could have something to do with it. Perhaps he felt guilty at having got so much fun out of the experience. Or perhaps he got a whiff of the 'crossover' feeling that bugs us all.

Pencil marks in the parts proved that someone else had done the first movement *inégalement* before us. It was rather like finding a cigarette packet deep in a rarely-explored cave. Bravo for them, but I wonder if they went any further with their exploration. Very likely not. Probably this was yet another case of '*inégalement* by default'² People who use *inégalement* only when forced to by the presence of triplets³ are giving up the search when the trail is hottest. If the combination of duple and triple rhythms helps to reveal the composer's *inégalement* intentions in a certain piece, why not try *inégalement* when triplets *don't* appear?

Colin Booth's comments

This was the first time for several years that I had played under John Byrt's direction, and the first since we had begun to share thoughts about *notes inégales*. The main object of the exercise was to try "swinging" the F minor Bach concerto. It was a shame, I thought, not to extend the treatment to the Handel Concerto Grosso (Op. 6 no. 9) [which was also in the programme]. I must compliment the

² See chapter 6, p. 53.

³ Like Richard Jones in JS Bach: *Inventions and Sinfonias*, ed. Richard Jones (London, 1974) p. 5.

A particularly interesting case is 'Aufenthalt' (*Schwanengesang*). In the first and last verses the singer sings short phrases that are echoed in the pianist's left hand. OK, some of the rhythms are not exact. OK, when this music returns at the end *with the same words* the singer's part had dotted rhythms where even rhythms were there before. But in the third stanza the pianist's left hand doubles the voice and we have *three* discrepancies of rhythm. Can we believe in all these irritating non-correspondences?⁹

Songs with a continuous triplet accompaniment would seem to be serious contenders for inequality. If they were by baroque composers an *inégalement* interpretation would certainly be accepted. How about the posthumous 'Frühlingssehnsucht' (*Schwanengesang*) where the rhythm of the voice part seems to cry out to be altered to

This would clarify places like bar 44 where we have three styles of notation all clamouring for rationalization.

The idea that baroque-style inequality was alive and well in the time of Schubert and Schumann is not that strange, considering that somehow or other it survived to flourish again in New Orleans in the 1900s. I am particularly impressed to find that Handel's practice of giving the voice a simpler (and therefore unequal) version of the melody being played by the band (or accompanist) seems to have been carried on into the 19th century. It is indeed a sobering thought that all the care we put in to performing the rhythms of this Lieder repertoire exact may be misplaced, not to mention the hours singers spend trying to remember which set of rhythms belongs to which verse of 'Aufenthalt', or practising prim equal quavers in

⁹ There are similar discrepancies in 'Die Stadt' (bars 9 and 29). But the same problems existed in baroque music - see Bach Organ sonata no. 4, third movement, bar 90, where triplets, dotted notation and *inégalement* notation coincide.

discrepancies of this kind had been found in Schubert. I suspect that what was concerned was mainly whether we should make triplets synchronize with dotted rhythms, as we do in Bach and Handel. Prime targets for this enquiry would be 'Wasserfluth' from *Winterreise* but there are also parts of the famous 'Lindenbaum' which raise this issue (in the e minor sections).⁸

However I wanted to see if mismatches of the kind I found in Schumann also occurred in Schubert.

The discrepancies in Schumann came when the piano doubled the voice and then their rhythms divided. Schubert seemed to do this less often but instead he sometimes has the piano *echo* the voice part, and not always accurately. What about the end of 'Ungeduld' from *Schöne Müllerin*?

Or the introduction to 'Der greise Kopf' from *Winterreise* where the piano *pre-echoes* the voice?

⁸ See also 'Die Stadt' (*Schwanengesang*), 'Lob der Thränen' and 'Frühlingsglaube'.

sensitive playing of the orchestra (they used modern instruments) having played with far smaller ensembles in the past with a less successful balance. This restraint combined with a good acoustic to let the harpsichord sing out through the orchestral textures.

John and I had consulted in advance and agreed (quite easily) on speeds which were much slower than conventionally used, and on almost wholesale use of inequality. In rehearsal the strings were adept at picking up what, for them, was a quite alien concept. John stuck to the usual approach when introducing this to modern players for the first time: that is, a rather unsubtle conversion of a two-note "equal" rhythm (in this case pairs of semiquavers) into a triplet rhythm. It worked surprisingly well, however, although John and I agreed that it was rather heavy-handed, compared with what we would have aimed for, had we been working with a small group of baroque specialists.

The first movement, taken at about crotchet = 60 (rather than the usual 72 or more) felt very comfortable, and we "swung" the semiquavers, which would have been too jocular at a faster tempo. The solo passages are virtually all written in triplets, and "swinging" the remaining notes seemed to produce a natural musical continuity, rather than reducing variety, as some might have expected.

The middle movement we played *andante*, with a crotchet pulse only a little slower than that of the opening movement. Again the solo line breaks into triplets before long, and I used inequality throughout, combined with a free approach to note-groups in the solo line. One member of the audience, who was otherwise appreciative, revealed afterwards that he preferred this movement "straight". Since he knew the work well, the fact that he did not reject the performance of the outer movements was gratifying!

The finale caused more re-thinks than the preceding movements. In the end we brazened it out with a tempo where the crotchet's value was hardly faster than in the opening movement. (In fact the time signature is 3/8 and I suspect that Bach may have meant a rather brisk tempo). Inequality on pairs of semiquavers was again used: this was a bolder step than before, since this movement is in triple time, with no other triplet passages. However the movement, which is

normally over almost before it has begun, occupied a decent space and became more substantial. Indeed the whole concerto, performed in this way, did not (we felt) lack liveliness, yet gained in clarity, rhythmic energy, and several minutes in performance time!

Dots for the band, *inéga*les for the singers?

I have lately come upon a kind of shorthand in which dotted notation is used for instruments while singers are given even notes, which are obviously intended to be performed *inéga*le. It would appear that singers were considered a subspecies of musician who did not need very precise notation.⁴ Handel's Brockes Passion contains a number of examples of this practice. It was written in 1716 to a text that was also set by Keiser, Telemann and Mattheson and all four versions were performed in Hamburg in 1719 under Mattheson's direction. JS Bach used some of the Brockes material in his St John Passion some years later. Here is an extract from the opening chorus where the instrumental bass part is dotted throughout but the vocal bass part is written in even notes. It is clear that the even and dotted rhythms should synchronize. In practice I expect singers and players would have united at something like a triplet rhythm.⁵ In the second part of the chorus even the dotted notation of the orchestra gives way to even notes.

A similar case is the tenor aria, no. 44. Here once again the orchestra have clear written-out dotting while the singer's part is written in even notation which is obviously meant to be performed *inéga*le. This time it is the semiquavers which need to be unequal. This discrepancy becomes clear at bar 19 where the singer has the orchestral motif from bars 5 & 6 without dots, and it is immediately imitated by the orchestra with dots (bar 20)!

⁴ I have talked about this procedure of Handel's with Clifford Bartlett, who said he had met it before but always regarded it as a kind of shorthand, not connecting it with *notes inégales*.

⁵ There are many other cases of suspected *inéga*les in the Brockes Passion. See also the duet 'From this dread scene' from *Judas Maccabaeus* (compare orchestra at bar 5 with voice at bar 15) and the chorus 'Egypt was glad when they departed' (bar 30-end) from *Israel in Egypt*.

Incidentally, in the postlude, which quotes from the first song, bar 8 of the song is for the first time given an exaggeratedly dotted rendering. Does this prove anything?

Now my blood was up I moved on to Schumann's Eichendorff Liederkreis, which was in the same volume. Yes, in no. 3, which I have recently performed with Grace Dives, the rhythms had seemed rather chaotic, though at the singer's entry it is she who has dots and not the pianist. But wait, at bars 34 and 38 both singer *and* pianist have dots. Indeed whenever this theme appears the dotting certainly has a Handelian chaos about it. Surely Schumann couldn't intend it all to be?

I leafed through a number of songs that were clearly not candidates. But then I chanced upon no 6: 'Es rauschen die Wipfel'. Everything seemed in apple-pie order and then I chanced on bar 23:

A repeat of 'Seit ich ihn gesehen' and 'Süsser Freund'! Except that this time the dynamic was *forte* and the mood was passionate. Not at all the place for a delicately misplaced anticipatory note. And the piano has the more exact notation - involving a treble-dotted crotchet and a demisemiquaver compared with the mere double-dotted crotchet and semiquaver of the singer! I found another example of the same thing at bar 15 of no. 9: 'Wehmuth'.

By now I was ready for more and I knew from reading an article many years ago (which I have yet to locate) that rhythmic

the piano had the double-dotted crotchet and semiquaver while the voice had the simpler version:

This was a very good start. There were other mismatches - only slightly less impressive - in bars 10 and 26:

Once again it was the piano that had the more explicit rhythm, the voice seemed to be written *inégale*. The slow, recitative-like movements seemed to lead to this kind of writing so I turned to no. 6: 'Süsser Freund'. Immediately I remembered. This is the movement with the really amazing mismatch right at the beginning, in bar 2:

The same thing happens in bars 5, 12, 15, 45 and 48. Each time the *piano* has the more explicit rhythm. Of course each time Baker and Isepp perform these two anacruses beautifully NOT together! Is this *really* what Schumann wanted? Of course, if this had been Handel then one of the four instances would have a different notation to show how haphazard it all was.

In the soprano recitative (no. 60) the singer once again has a simplified notation with no dotted semiquavers at all, while the orchestra have continuous written-out dotting. Inevitable discrepancies in rhythm result, e.g. bar 24, 29 and 30. Semiquaver inequality throughout suggested.

Example (bar 24)

In the soprano aria (no 68) the continuo has dotted semiquaver figuration which is not matched in the singer's part. In the B section (esp. bars 19 and 20) the singer takes up in even semiquavers an arpeggio idea which appeared a number of times in the A section, but always in dotted notes. I would claim that continuous *inégaes* should be used as a matter of course in these movements, and not only in these movements!

Handel gets up to similar tricks in *Israel in Egypt*. In the second part of the chorus 'Egypt was glad when they departed' the instrumental parts doubling the voice parts are consistently written in dotted notation while the voice parts are in even notation.⁶ In the chorus 'But as for his people' (no. 10) there there is a grand confusion of quaver and semiquaver anacruses. Is the sharper notation always in the band parts? It is in 23 instances. Only in bars 24, 41 and 125 does it stray into the vocal parts. (If you believe that Handel 'wrote

⁶ Preston and Christophers all break firmly into dotted rhythms at bar 30.

what he wanted', how do you instruct your singers to perform bar 125?).

I quote these examples, not because I feel that *inégaies* should be used in such movements alone but because I feel that they make a good argument for the general use of inequality in Handel's music. Just to show that this discrepancy between band notation and singers' notation was not confined to Handel, here is an example from Stephen Hefling's recent book. He catches the French opera composer Monteclair doing something similar.⁷

Example

Here it is plain that the singer is not entrusted with any written dotted semiquavers, even when moving in parallel with the instruments, who move in dotted semiquavers all the time. But Clearly the singer is expected to sing *inégaie* all the time.

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A duet from *Israel in Egypt*

One recording of *Israel in Egypt* actually uses *inégaies* in the alto and tenor duet 'Thou in thy mercy' (no. 32). This is the Simon Preston recording with the ECO and the choir of Christ Church Oxford, now I believe deleted. In this duet, sung by James Bowman and Ian Partridge, the quavers are played unequally and the rhythms accommodated to the rhythms. The

⁷ Stephen Hefling: *Rhythmic alteration in 17th- and 18th century music* (New York, 1993), page 34, ex. 2-11.

rhythms are either done literally or turned into something approaching . No doubt Preston was led towards *inégaies* by the fact that there are rhythmic discrepancies between the vocal and instrumental parts. The opening phrase in the violins has some dots which do not appear in the vocal parts. Once again it is the instruments that have the more precisely notated parts.

Gardiner does not use *inégaies* here, however, though he does make his singers copy the violin dotting in their opening bar. Thus it is the earlier recording that uses *inégaies* and not the later one(s), suggesting that non-French *inégaies* are less fashionable than they were. Does this mean that Frederick Neumann's long campaign was successful?

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Inequality and Romantic song

One morning lately I tuned in to Radio 3 to hear Janet Baker singing *Frauenliebe und Leben* on an old Saga recording with Martin Isepp that I possess and used to listen to with much pleasure. I suddenly remembered the rhythmic anomalies that I had noticed years ago and I rummaged for my score. Could it be that text actually invited inequality just like the Handel passages that I had been studying? In my Handel research I had found that, when there was a discrepancy, the instrumental parts were nearly always more rhythmically exact than the vocal parts. It would be truly amazing if in the Schumann passages it was always the piano that had the more rhythmically explicit version, and that the singer was left with the more approximate notation. Was this the case? Was the sharper notation always in the accompaniment?

I remembered that there were some extraordinary passages in the opening song in which rhythms in voice and piano spectacularly failed to match. Yes, there they were - in bars 14 and 30 - and, yes,