

UNEQUAL NOTES

The Inégales Newsletter

Editor: John Byrt

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Editorial - More on post-baroque inequality From the annals (i) - Correspondence

Editorial

What should be the tempo relationship between allemande and courante in a baroque suite? The other day I spent some fruitless hours trying to make the old Renaissance proportions work, but I was clearly barking up the wrong tree. In the end it seemed that the simplest solution was probably the right one: the minim of the courante should equal the crotchet of the allemande. This worked pretty well but I carried on chewing over the problem.

Like a happily-married couple the allemande and courante led off dance suites for over a century. But the real Darby and Joan were the pavan and galliard, who had been the life and soul of the party a century before that. Was it possible that the two couples had something in common? In particular, was it possible that they shared the same tempo relationship? I consulted Donington. He did not help over the allemande and courante relationship but he was very useful on the pavan and galliard. It seems that that there has been some disagreement over the matter. I will let Donington continue:¹

The steps (of the Galliard) are vigorous ... it is therefore commonly described as more brisk and lively than the Pavan. This description has given rise to a misconception. Modern writers have frequently stated that the tempo of the Galliard is faster than the tempo of the Pavan; but this is not the case. The tempo normally remains the same, each of the four-time units in one bar of the

¹ Robert Donington: *The Interpretation of Early Music* (London, 1963. Rev. Edn, 1965). See chapter 37, page 330..

Pavan being the same as each of the three-time units in one bar of the Galliard: i.e. the pulse remains at the same speed as before, but in triple time.

I don't know what his evidence is, but Donington's argument for an unvaried pulse for pavan and galliard would fit in with my guess about the allemande and courante. Though newer dances took the place of old, it looks as if 17th century society clung to the old practice of starting a succession of dances with a slow 4-time dance followed by a 3-time dance with the same pulse. Maybe going from an allemande to a courante gave the 17th century man the same *frisson* as his grandfather got when a pavan led into a galliard. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

oOo

More on post-baroque inequality

On page 12 of *Unequal Notes 7* I referred to an article that I had once read, which explored the possible synchronization of triplets and dotted rhythms in Schubert and other post-baroque composers. Kenneth Mobbs' memory cells are clearly in better shape than mine and he has rung to say that the article I was looking for is Gwilym Beechey's 'Rhythmic interpretation - Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann', *Music Review* (1972) Vol 33, p. 233. He kindly sent a copy.

Beechey argues that, in the music of the afore-mentioned

composers, when and appear simultaneously the

last note of each should synchronize. Beechey and I are on similar, but not identical territory here. He believes that the above rhythms were meant to synchronize. I was pointing to rhythmic discrepancies (in *Unequal Notes 7*) in the instrumental parts of Handel or the piano parts in Schubert and Schumann songs which might imply that a simple rhythm in the voice part might have been meant to be sung unequally, or with more extreme dotting. But I move into Beechey's territory in *UN 7*, page 12.

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 *inéegale* performance. Finally I try to come to some conclusions in this highly controversial field.

The appendix includes notes on my Bach recordings and other *inéegale* performances. There is a series of conversations on *inéegales* 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 inégales*, a breakthrough?) it costs £20, 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.

Read my articles on *inéegales* in *The Musical Times* if you can

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

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

spread your net - and set your traps widely already - your comments on Schubert and Schumann suggest a lingering vocal *inégalité*, outside France, - which survived the French Revolution and Napoleon! Where will you stop?!

The idea about the scansion is an ingenious one but much inequality in vocal music occurs on melismas on one syllable where this wouldn't apply. Without wanting to demolish your theory I would say that the home territory for inégales would probably have been dance music. Have a look at Dom Bedos's instructions for the pricking of barrel-organ cylinders!

As to the question of singers being a sub-species, a lifetime of dealing with them has frequently brought me very close to defenestration, especially when working in very high buildings.

UNEQUAL NOTES - the NEWSLETTER

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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. This includes some material from **THE CASE FOR INÉGALES IN J.S.BACH**, which I produced in 1993, and which it now supercedes.

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

My first reaction on re-reading this article after a gap of 25 years was to reflect that most modern performers would studiously avoid matching such rhythms. Performers have very literal, 'Urtext' minds nowadays and the text is all. Furthermore, I think a lot of modern performers would be only too anxious to show how well they can bring out such apparent rhythmic clashes. The idea of synchronization in the Moonlight sonata is particularly strange:

In Beechey's faster examples, like the rondo of Beethoven's piano sonata in A (op. 2 no.2) one feels that a typical modern pianist would regard non-synchronization as a technical challenge to be overcome. But of course that is not the point. The point is - did the composer *intend* these mis-matches to be played. Beechey's arguments are persuasive, especially in the passages from the slow movement of the Schubert B flat sonata,² Schumann's *Novelletten*, Op. 21 and Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 111.³ All the same, he rarely produces the kind of textual discrepancies that would provide proof for his theories. His example from Haydn's Sonata in D⁴, is an important exception here .

I remember reading Beechey's article when it first appeared and I am very sympathetic to his point of view. But I am struck by the fact that, though a blockbuster of an article on triplets by Michael Collins⁵ had appeared six years previously, Beechey does not seem to have been aware of it. It so happens that this article influenced me

² D. 960 (see p. 245, ex. 13).

³ pp. 245-247, exx. 14-18.

⁴ Hob. XVI/51 (see p. 239, ex. 7).

⁵ Michael Collins: 'The Performance of Triplets in the 17th and 18th centuries' in *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 19 No 3 (1966), pp. 281-328.

a great deal, so I am anxious to make it clear how some of Collins' conclusions affect what Beechey says.

Beechey says in his opening paragraph that 'it is now readily acknowledged that [and] were intended to synchronize when they appeared simultaneously in the music of the 18th century.' Though Collins says that JS and CPE Bach both appeared to have synchronized their triplets with dotted rhythms he claims that the following theorists do not recommend synchronization:

Quantz⁶ Don't synchronize.

Agricola (on JS Bach's music)⁷ Only synchronize at fast tempi.

Löhlein⁸ Synchronize at fast tempi.

When writing about Mozart⁹ Collins seems to follow Agricola and Löhlein, advising against synchronization, unless the tempo is too fast to allow this to be done. He considers that in the *andante sostenuto* from Mozart's violin sonata (K. 296) 'we most certainly have an example where the semiquavers must be played after the third notes of the triplets.'

On the other hand he goes on to say that in this passage from the B flat piano concerto (K. 450) it would be 'almost impossible to bring in the semiquaver after the triplet since both figures are played by the same hand:'

⁶ JJ Quantz, *Essay on playing the flute*, (1752), chapter 5, paragraph 22.

⁷ Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek, ed. Fr. Nicolai (1769)

⁸ Georg Simon Löhlein, *Klavier-Schule* (Leipzig, 1779)

⁹ pp. 326-327.

Thank you very much for sending me your intensely interesting article. You ask for my views, but these would take a very long time to put down on paper, and I should prefer to discuss them with you personally... At the moment, my impression is that you are building too much on too small a foundation of evidence. And I feel that you over-use the "rhetorical questions" technique. "Does it seem likely...?" "Is it conceivable...?" - to which the unconverted reader merely replies "Yes"! I may well modify these views after a second reading and further thought. ...

PS Yes, I saw and approved of your letter in *The Times*!

More in the next issue. JB

oOo

CORRESPONDENCE

From John Johnson, Cheltenham, 12th April 96

Just a note to say how stimulating I found your latest Newsletter. I think you've struck oil with "Dots for the band" - though I believe it implies rather that it was the singers who knew what to do whereas the instrumentalists who had to be instructed - they were the ones who needed the precise instructions, not because they were a subspecies of musician, quite the reverse (*pace* Handel's defenestration of subspecies of sopranos!) but because they did not have the words. The singers did have the words and the words indicated not just where the stresses were, but the scansion - the metre, which was probably still thought of in terms of the original Latin scansion where Iambics, Trochees etc. are not just strong, weak etc. but long and short (- u u, u - etc) . There is a rich field of study here which you've opened up. I haven't done more than see the connection between your examples and long and short syllables. The big questions remain (assuming that your argument is valid for much vocal music of the period) - how much was the concept of *inégalité* applied to non-vocal [music] and outside France. Having

one of those things which refuse to be pinned down, such as what the English accent of 400 years ago sounded like.

From my own experience I know that jazz composers and arrangers use a sort of conventional notation which if played literally sounds quite wrong and which has to be interpreted by players who know the conventions. Although that's putting it the wrong way round, because the arranger doesn't want his score interpreted so much as wants a certain effect which he can only get by writing down an inaccurate approximation. He doesn't really think in terms of written notes at all - in fact, Charlie Mingus prefers not to let his musicians see a written score and plays their parts over at the piano until they have memorized them. Was it also the case with Rameau that he wrote down what he knew to be an inaccurate approximation?

And how far does the question of improvisation come into your ideas? In jazz at least the music has become impossible to notate accurately simply because its evolution didn't depend on notation and musicians were never restricted by the limits of what it was possible to get on to paper. (I remember reading of one trumpeter who was presented with a transcription of a solo he had recorded and found, after repeated attempts, that he could not play it from paper.) Does the end of the *notes inégales* convention coincide at all with the decline of improvisation?

Actually, from the jazz point of view, there is so much bound up in the concept of swing that no one has yet been able to pin-point it satisfactorily. Personally I think one has to start every time with the regular pulse underlying it all, on top of which the fractional displacement of notes takes place; however much one talks about swing being a question of variation on the basic beat, I'm still uncomfortably aware that a double bass playing four simple beats to the bar by itself can produce a good deal of swing. In fact I am quite happy to leave the speculation to you.

George Malcolm to John Byrt

October 2nd 1967

Since Collins' main territory is pre-1750 he and Beechey do not clash too much but Collins does put paid to Beechey's careless comment that 'it is now readily acknowledged that these two rhythmic patterns were intended to synchronize ... in the music of the 18th century.' Maybe it would be truer to say that synchronization was a matter for disagreement in the 18th century but that Beechey is on firmer ground with 19th-century music. Of course Collins does us a good turn when he points out that synchronization worried people like Quantz and Löhlein. But Beechey also does a good turn when he indicates that scores of repertory pieces contain passages in which performers have a choice to make. And the mathematically correct version is not always the right one.

Beechey actually refers to Schubert's songs, as I did in *Unequal Notes* 7. He, of course, is looking for rhythms involving triplets while I was looking for rhythms that were simpler in the voice part than in the accompaniment. He singles out 'Irrlicht' and 'Nebensonnen' from *Winterreise*. I certainly agree that these two have very good examples of what he was looking for, but where does this inequality

stop? In 'Nebensonnen' should the rhythm be bent to

accommodate the triplets in bar 7?

If so, does this mean that all dotted crotchet-quaver rhythms should be slightly swung? And to go further still, can the two equal quavers in bar 17, beat 3 be unequalized to match a triplet? That way madness lies!

One thing thing strikes me which might queer the pitch for Beechey and me. Is it not true that composers from Bach to Brahms have

been intrigued by the effect of juxtaposing duple and triple rhythms? I am thinking of the last movement of JS Bach's third sonata for violin and harpsichord and the first of Brahms' Balladen, Op. 10. I don't think anyone can deny that this was a preoccupation of Brahms's and it has occurred to me that it may have had an inner significance for him (could duple rhythm symbolize respectability and triple rhythm the desire to kick over the traces?). At any rate this clash of rhythms seems to have been part of the musical language of the 18th and 19th centuries and few major composers seem to have avoided it altogether. Admittedly, Beechey's examples normally deal with dotted rhythms juxtaposed with triplets but, even so, could any of these examples show a composer *deliberately* seeking a clash of rhythms?

I feel tempo is an important factor in this enquiry. The slower the tempo he chooses, the more a performer will be tempted to differentiate the duple and triple rhythms in Beechey's examples. If you take the opening of the Moonlight sonata *very* slowly, you will not find Beechey's argument very convincing. But try it at a faster tempo and you will find it begins to make sense.

I'm afraid that there is more to triplets than one would suppose, especially in baroque and pre-baroque music. Beechey never thought for a moment that triplets might not always have been played as three equal notes. But that is an important part of Michael Collins' thesis. His 1966 article opened up a completely new way of looking at triplet interpretation which goes back to the Renaissance and the proportional system. Collins considers that triplets were *not* performed equally in baroque music: indeed he considers (p. 326) that such as Türk and Leopold Mozart were 'the first to stress the even performance of triplets'. Until we have sorted out how the triplet itself was played, we cannot really be clear about how it might have synchronized with other rhythms.

Collins' theories about triplets have certainly not been widely accepted but I have found an interpretation that blends in with very well with my *inégaies* views.¹⁰

From the annals

¹⁰ See appendix VIII of my 1996 paper *Notes inégales, a European style*.

George Malcolm's use of *notes inégales* in his review of Rameau's *Zéphyre*, performed under Malcolm's direction at the Aldeburgh Festival this year. Mr. Malcolm also makes use of the convention of rhythmic inequality in his excellent recording of Rameau's complete harpsichord music, recently released.

In applying swung rhythms to French music of the period, Mr. Malcolm is using the convention in a way which has come to be approved by most students of interpretation, but whether non-French composers like Bach and Handel should be swung is a more controversial matter which is at the moment being thrashed out in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* and other learned journals.

I incline towards the view that rhythmic swinging was regularly used by 17th- and early 18th-century singers and instrumentalists, not only in the France of Couperin and Rameau, but in Italy, Germany and England as well: in the music of Corelli, Vivaldi, Bach, Purcell and Handel, for instance. I also believe that performers of this time cultivated a relaxed, unbuttoned style which has more affinity with the atmosphere of a jazz club than with that of the 20th-century concert hall.

Miles Kington to John Byrt

July 12th 1967

As you can imagine, your letter was of great interest to at least one reader of The Times, though I still stick to what I said about Bach not being a fore-runner of jazz, because I merely meant that there was no direct evolutionary link.

I would be interested to learn what kind of evidence you have found in trying to prove your theory, because I take it that the actual written and printed scores of music of the time offer no proof. At least, I know that if jazz had never been recorded and was no longer being played, it would be impossible to deduce from transcriptions of solos and jazz scores exactly how it was played. It seems to be

"The Loussier Trio are magnificent", says Mr. Mann. Not by jazz standards; his records reveal that Loussier's jazz rhythms are square and stiff, the harmony of his chords naive, his phrasing often painfully corny and the total effect faintly comic. ... So if Mr. Mann would like Loussier to keep predominantly to jazz, I would prefer him to keep entirely to Bach. What seems beyond dispute, though, is that the Frenchman's superficial attempts provide no basis for deciding whether Bach and jazz can profitably be merged. ...

Mr Mann refers to a rather more successful attempt made 30 years ago by Eddie South and Stephane Grappelly with Django Reinhardt. ... The two violinists recorded the first movement of Bach's D minor Concerto for two violins, once interpreting the written notes, once improvising on them ... It is a curious fact that jazz musicians have often detected an affinity between their music and Bach's; it is equally true that this affinity rapidly vanishes as soon as they attempt to blend the two directly...

If the spirit of Bach can be found in jazz, it is probably not fanciful to suggest that the reverse is true. It would be ridiculous to claim that Bach was somehow a forerunner of jazz, but the fact is that if jazz musicians become fascinated by Bach they do so in preference to more modern composers...

John Byrt to *The Times*

July 11th 1967

It was with great interest that I read Miles Kington's article "Affinities between Bach and Jazz" as I am engaged in trying to prove that 17th- and early 18th-century music was regularly "swung" by performers of the time. Mr. Kington writes: "It would be ridiculous to claim that Bach was somehow a forerunner of jazz". On the contrary, this is exactly what a growing number of students of Bach interpretation are beginning to suspect. "Swinging" translated into musicological jargon becomes "*notes inégales*" and readers of *The Times* will remember that William Mann referred to

A lifetime's study of *notes inégales* has put me in touch with some interesting people. I thought I would give readers of *Unequal Notes* a chance to look over my shoulder as I browse through some of my letters and press-cuttings, some of them already dog-eared and yellowing. 1967 was certainly a good year for inequality.

John Byrt to George Malcolm

May 12th 1967

After attending your excellent concert in Balliol the other Sunday I was minded to write to you on a topic which is taking up a lot of my time at the moment. That is the subject of *notes inégales*. Having performed sections from Rameau's *Les Indes Galantes* in Oxford last term I had to come to grips with the whole question. We were using an unpublished French edition by Geoffroy-Dechaume lent us by the RTF in which virtually every note of the original was transcribed in an unequal triplet rhythm. I was a bit chary to start with, but when I'd had time to read up the subject and get used to the sound of 'inequality', I soon became a firm convert.

But I didn't stop with the French. It seemed to me that if inequality applied to Rameau and Couperin there was no reason why it shouldn't apply to non-French composers like Handel and Bach, for instance, especially when writing in the French style... The enclosed article is an attempt to show that so far no one has produced a water-tight argument to prove that inequality doesn't apply to non-French music at the time of Bach.

Judging from your performance of variation 20 of the Goldbergs [in your Balliol recital the other day] and what I've heard from other people about your interpretations of other Bach works, it would seem that you are thinking roughly along the same lines as I am. For instance I gather that you do the Gigue from the 6th Partita with inequality. If so, I am delighted, for I got round to this about a month ago and was thrilled with the result.

Arthur Mendel¹¹ to John Byrt

¹¹ Editor of JS Bach's St. John Passion for *Neue Bach Gesellschaft* etc. and writer of numerous articles on Bach.

Princeton University, New Jersey
June 2, 1967

Yes, Corky (McGuinness) wrote me about you, and I am glad to have read your paper, which seems to be convincing to one who has not looked at all the 17th- and 18th-century sources for a long time.

While I am not optimistic about your and my good friend Frederick Neumann's coming to an agreement on this point, I dread seeing an endless procession of articles and communications alternately maintaining and denying the applicability of *inégalité* to music other than French. [*Alas, that is exactly what did happen*]. Would you be willing to send your paper to Neumann and have your debate in private before making it public? It seems to me just possible that more light and less heat would result. [*I didn't*]

The second paragraph on your page 6 seems to me to explain how it might have happened that German and Italian writers did not treat of *inégalité* as French writers did, but not to furnish "every reason to suppose" as on your page 7. It would certainly be dangerous to assume that the reason German and Italian writers did not discuss playing the violin upside down is that "the convention was universally understood". [*Point taken*] That and the exclamation about the Eb-major fugue-subject [48 Book 1] seem to me the only obviously weak points in your paper. (I find the fugue-subject more vivid without inequality; but partly this depends on tempo, doesn't it? ...) To claim in print, as Babitz so often does, that one way sounds so much better than another seems to me futile, since the claim is so easily answered by the equally futile "No, it doesn't".

An amusing letter, certainly, but doesn't his final point show rather a flippant approach to a serious matter? For someone who prepared the score of the Bach St. John Passion for the Bach-Gesellschaft¹² this was rather like saying 'all the science ends once I've finished my job. After that it's chaos.' Surely the way the music sounds is the most important part of the process. Subjectivity may rear its head but that's no reason to walk away from the problem. If you can be

¹² I found out recently that in the preface to his edition of the Bach St John Passion for Schirmer he quoted from the famous *inégaies* passage from Quantz's *Versuch*. So he must have been sympathetic to Babitz's cause.

scientific about palæography, or about building a harpsichord, you can be scientific about performance practice. The mood of this letter clearly shows the kind of reception Babitz was getting from the American academics who supported his research¹³. Maybe this is Babitz's fault rather than theirs - perhaps he hadn't got his act together.

JB

William Mann, Music Critic

Review in *The Times*, June 15 1967

George Malcolm did a valuable piece of pioneer work this evening at the Aldeburgh Festival when he conducted his own, new performing edition of Rameau's pastoral *Zéphrye*.

...

Mr. Malcolm has been much occupied with these problems in his work as a harpsichord recitalist; with this edition he seems to have applied his knowledge consistently and without stint to a larger though still fairly concise work involving soloists, chorus and orchestra. The results, in this carefully prepared performance, were startling and exhilarating. Melodic lines and harmony gain a new tautness from thorough ornamentation, and rhythms become wonderfully vivid when they are treated according to the French practice of *notes inégales*.

...

Miles Kington, Jazz Critic

Article in *The Times*, July 3rd 1967

William Mann's recent review in The Times of the Jacques Loussier Trio "Loussier's Swinging Bach" was a judgement from a classical viewpoint of an attempt to merge Bach and jazz, and his verdict was that, although the the experiment is interesting and even historically justifiable, a little of it goes a very long way. ...

¹³ The others who supported his research are named on page 1 of my 1996 document *Notes inégales, a European style*).