

Unequal music: the long and short of it

Prof. Steve Goss

Tonebase Livestream 18th February 2022

www.stephengoss.net

Unequal music: the long and short of it

- A discussion of notes inégales, dotted rhythms, triplets, synchronisation, and other deceptive rhythmic notation in 18th and 19th century music.
- Are we treating notation too literarily?
- Do modern day performers fully appreciate the notation conventions of previous eras?

Overview

- Part 1 – Baroque
- Part 2 – Classical and Romantic

Rhythm and Bach: did Bach really mean that?

- Inequality – the long and short of it
- The trouble with triplets

Inequality

BWV 826, Sinfonia



Argerich

Grave. Adagio

etc.

5

Inequality

BWV 826, Sinfonia



Schiff

etc.

Grave. Adagio


5

The Double Dot

invented by Leopold Mozart in 1769

(a)  unavailable

(b)  unidiomatic

(c)  standard approximation

The Double Dot

Cello Suite v in C minor, BWV 1011 (from the manuscript by Anna Magdalena Bach)



Lute Suite in G minor, BWV 995

Musical notation for Lute Suite in G minor, BWV 995, measure 17. The notation is on a single staff with a treble clef. It shows a melodic line with a slur over the first four notes, followed by a double-dotted quarter note. A vertical box highlights the double-dotted quarter note and the following eighth note. Below the main staff, there is a smaller staff showing a continuation of the melodic line.

BWV 996, Courante



Vieaux

A musical score for the Courante in G major, BWV 996 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written for two staves in treble clef, 3/4 time signature, and G major. The first staff contains the melody, and the second staff contains the bass line. The piece begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The bass line starts with a quarter note G2, followed by a quarter note A2, and a quarter note B2. The piece concludes with a final chord of G major.

BWV 996, Courante



Shibe

A musical score for the Courante in G major, BWV 996 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written for two staves in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a prominent bass line in the left hand. The piece concludes with a final chord in G major.

Tuplets and Flourishes

How can a quintuplet be notated?



unavailable (in Bach's time it had not yet been proposed)



"Smooth" option: sums incorrectly to the ♪



"Jagged" option: sums correctly to the ♪

Examples of triplets and flourishes

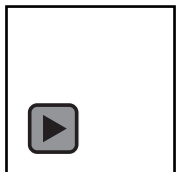
Haydn, Piano Sonata in G minor, Hob. XVI:44: i. Moderato, mm. 13-14

The musical score shows two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It contains three measures. The first measure has a quintuplet of eighth notes. The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes, a quarter note, and a trill. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes, a quarter note, and a trill. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains three measures of piano accompaniment, primarily consisting of chords and eighth notes.



Schiff

Examples of triplets and flourishes



Lute Suite in E major, BWV 1006a: Prelude, mm. 134–6

Musical notation showing a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, marked with a bracket and the number 3. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and single notes.

Violin Sonata I in G minor, BWV 1001: Adagio, mm. 1–2 (original key signature)

Musical notation showing two nine-note flourishes, each marked with a bracket and the number 9, and the word *ad libitum* above them. The word *Adagio* is written above the first measure.

Examples of triplets and flourishes

Suite in E minor, BWV 996: Sarabande

Excerpts from the treble line according to two different copyists (ornaments omitted)

Walther

10






Gerber



Triplets

How can a triplet be notated?

- (a)  common but not the only possibility: it is most likely to be used in groups of two or more and at slower tempi
- (b)  used occasionally as an approximation for a triplet
- (c)  used occasionally as an approximation for a triplet

Examples of triplets



Zacharias

Scarlatti, Sonata, K454: mm. 19–21 from two manuscripts by the same copyist (Booth 2010: 97)

Venice

19

Musical score for the Venice manuscript, measures 19-21. The score is in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 19 features a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass clef. A slur spans across measures 19 and 20. Measure 20 continues the melodic line in the treble clef. Measure 21 concludes with a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef.

Parma

Musical score for the Parma manuscript, measures 19-21. The score is in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 19 features a triplet of eighth notes in the treble clef and a triplet of eighth notes in the bass clef. A slur spans across measures 19 and 20. Measure 20 continues the melodic line in the treble clef. Measure 21 concludes with a quarter note in the treble clef and a quarter note in the bass clef.

Examples of triplets

Lute Suite in C minor, BWV 997 (transposed to A minor): Gigue, mm. 13–15

Musical notation for the Gigue from the Lute Suite in C minor, BWV 997 (transposed to A minor), measures 13–15. The notation shows a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes with slurs. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' above a bracket in measure 15.

Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E♭, BWV 998 (transposed to D): Allegro, mm. 53–56

Musical notation for the Allegro section of the Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E♭, BWV 998 (transposed to D), measures 53–56. The notation shows a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 3/4 time signature. The melody features sixteenth-note runs and a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' above a bracket in measure 55.

Examples of triplets

Lute Suite in E minor, BWV 996: Courante, mm. 17-18

The image displays a musical score for the Courante from the Lute Suite in E minor, BWV 996, specifically measures 17 and 18. The score is written in E minor (one sharp) and 3/4 time. Measure 17 begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by eighth notes A4 and B4, and a quarter note C5. The bass line consists of a half note E3. Measure 18 features a series of six eighth-note triplets in the treble clef, each marked with a '3' and a slur. The notes for these triplets are G4, A4, and B4. The bass line for measure 18 consists of a half note E3. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format.

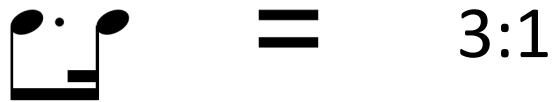
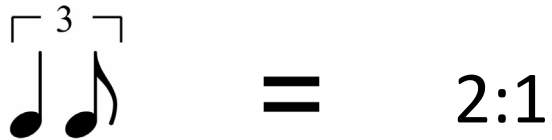
Rhythm and Bach: did Bach really mean that?

“The fact is, the power of Bach’s mind and the deceptive precision of his notation can be terribly intimidating. In the face of his meticulous texts, it is easy to obsess over a question which can never be answered: what did Bach himself want? Since Bach wrote his music down expecting others to play it—sometimes that same day—a better question to ask is this: How might a well-informed musician of Bach’s time have reacted to this notation? Of course, different musicians surely had different reactions, and so therefore may we.”

Jonathan Leathwood (2017)

Affekt and rhythm

If it ain't got that swing...



Django and Swing

Swing 42, solo extract



Swing 42, swing clicks 50, 59, 66, 75

Django and Swing

Swing 42, solo extract

Swing 42, swing clicks 50, 59, 66, 75



Notes inégales



Bream

Prelude d-moll

Livre de pieces pour la guitarrre dédié au roy, f. 5

R. de Visée
(1659?-1733?)

8

4

8

7

8

Notes inégales



North

Prelude d-moll

Livre de pieces pour la guitarrre dédié au roy, f. 5

R. de Visée
(1659?-1733?)

8

4

8

7

8

Notes inégales

Segovia

Sor — 24 Easy Studies, Op. 35

Allegretto.

N° 22

The musical score for 'Notes inégales' (No. 22) is presented in four staves. It is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'. The piece begins with a piano (p) dynamic. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, such as eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed in groups of four. Fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) are indicated above the notes to guide the performer. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Notes inégales



Llobet

Sor — 24 Easy Studies, Op. 35

Allegretto.

N° 22

Schubert and Mertz: Affekt and rhythm

If it ain't got that swing...



2:1



3:1

Schubert – Wasserflut from Die Winterreise

71

6. Wasserflut.

26. *Langsam.*

p

Man - che Trän aus mei - nen Au - gen ist ge - fal - len in - den Schnee:

pp

sei - ne kal - ten Flocken sau - gen dur - stig ein das hei - ße Weh, —

Fischer-Dieskau & Moore



Schubert – Manuscript of Wasserflut from Die Winterreise

C. Wasserflut.

Larghetto

1. Man, so spring aus
2. Wenn du nicht kommst

meinem Augen ist es kaltes in dem Schnee und ein kaltes
meinem Herzen das was für dich geht dein Adieu! Soll ich mich nicht

T.H. 5106.

Fischer-Dieskau &
Brendel



Schubert – Aufenthalt from Schwanengesang

*Andante scherzoso
Voc. -*

Aufenthalt. All. Viv. -

Lustig und froh

Lustig und froh, lustig und froh

Nacht

Nacht

Schubert – Aufenthalt from Schwanengesang

188

5.

Aufenthalt.

Reclitab.

Nicht zu geschwind, doch kräftig.

49.

Rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der Wald, star-ren-der

Fels mein Auf-ent-halt, rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der

This system contains the first two staves of the piano accompaniment. The right hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the left hand provides a steady bass line. The lyrics are split across the two staves.



Padmore & Lewis

Wald, — star-ren-der Fels mein Auf-ent-halt.

Wie sich die Wel-le an Wel-le reiht,

Edition Peters 9028

This system contains the vocal line and the piano accompaniment for the second system. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The lyrics are split across the two systems.

Schubert/Liszt/Mertz – Aufenthalt



Smits

7

AUFENTHALT

SCHUBERT
arr: J.K. MERTZ

Nicht zu geschwind doch kräftig

p *dim.*
molto marcato la melodia
[CVII]
più cresc. *loco*
sotto voce *sempre agitato*

188

5. Aufenthalt.

Reclat.

Nicht zu geschwind, doch kräftig.

49. *p* *dim.*
Rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der Wald, star-ren-der
Fels mein Auf-ent-halt, rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der

Schubert/Liszt/Mertz – Aufenthalt

Leisner



7

AUFENTHALT

SCHUBERT
arr: J.K. MERTZ

Nicht zu geschwind doch kräftig

p *dim.*
molto marcato la melodia
[CVII]
più cresc. *fp*
loco
sotto voce *v* *sempre agitato*

188

5. Aufenthalt.

Reclatub.

Nicht zu geschwind, doch kräftig.

p *dim.*
fp
v
Rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der Wald, star-ren-der
Fels mein Auf-ent-halt, rau-schen-der Strom, brau-sen-der

Mertz – Nocturne Op.4 No.2



Petrenko

W
4

GUITARE.

Andantino.

NOTTURNO II.

dolce

cresc.

1ª

2ª

p

p

Mertz – Nocturne Op.4 No.2

Salvoni



4

GUITARE.

Andantino.

NOTTURNO II.

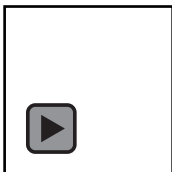
The image shows a page of musical notation for guitar. It features three staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Andantino.' The piece is titled 'NOTTURNO II.' The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The second staff continues the melody and includes a 'dolce' marking. The third staff features first and second endings, marked '1^a' and '2^a', and concludes with a double bar line. The overall style is characteristic of 19th-century guitar music.

Schubert and Mertz: Affekt and rhythm

If it ain't got that swing...

- Brown (1999) and Booth (2010) both show examples of synchronisation carrying on well into the 19th Century.
- Türk (1789) describes a rich variety of approaches to rhythmic synchronisation in the 18th Century that seems flexible and dependent on Affekt.
- It seems likely that there was a rich range of relationships between long notes and short notes that neither the triplet rhythm nor the dotted rhythm fully signifies.
- Affekt, tempo and instrumental technique all appear to contribute to the realisation of unequal notes.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms



(15) 1

SONATE

(SONATA QUASI UNA FANTASIA)
für das Pianoforte

Beethovens Werke.

von
L. VAN BEETHOVEN.

Serie 16. N° 137.

Der Gräfin Julie Guicciardi gewidmet.

Op.27.N° 2.

Adagio sostenuto.

Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordini.

Sonate N° 14.

sempre pp e senza sordini.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms



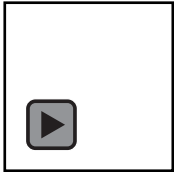
Chopin Nocturne Op. 9 No. 1

Larghetto $\text{♩} = 116$

p espress.

The musical score is written in E-flat major (three flats) and 4/4 time. It features a variety of complex rhythmic figures and fingerings. The first system shows a treble clef with a 6/4 time signature, a bass clef, and a 6/4 time signature. The treble clef part has a *p espress.* marking and a *ff* marking. The bass clef part has a *ped.* marking and a **ped.* marking. The second system shows a treble clef with a 6/4 time signature and a bass clef with a 6/4 time signature. The treble clef part has a *fz p* marking and a *3 5* marking. The bass clef part has a *2 2* marking and a *3 2* marking.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



Var. 5
Tempo di tema
molto dolce

teneramente
p

2 3 4

molto espressivo

legato

sempre col Ped.

5 6 7 8

9 1 2 9 10

p

11 12 13 14 15

cresc.

f

16 17 18 10 18

1. 2.

p

f

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21

Var. 5
Tempo di tema
molto dolce

2 3 4

teneramente
p

molto espressivo

legato 3 3 3

Canone in moto contrario

sempre col Ped.

5 6 7 8

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21

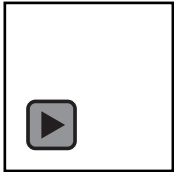
$\text{♩}:$ 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ | $\frac{1}{2}$ 2 $\frac{1}{2}$
 : . : . . : .

3 3 3
 : . . : . . : . .

$\text{♩}:$ 0 $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{2}{3}$ | $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{2}{3}$ 2 $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{2}{3}$
 : . . : . . : . .

$\frac{1}{2} = \frac{2}{3} ?$

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



The image displays a musical score for Brahms Op 21, featuring complex rhythmic patterns. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music consists of a sequence of notes, many of which are grouped into triplets, indicated by a '3' above the notes. The rhythm is highly complex, involving impossible rhythms that cannot be performed in a single continuous motion. The score is annotated with various numerical values and symbols:

- At the beginning, there is a '0' followed by a triplet of notes, with a red $\frac{2}{3}$ above the second note.
- Below the first triplet, there is a '0' followed by $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$.
- Vertical bar lines separate the measures, and a double bar line is present after the third measure.
- Each of the six triplets is marked with a '3' above the notes.
- Below each triplet, there is a '3'.
- A vertical bar line is present after the first measure.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21

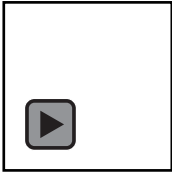


0 1/2 | 1

0 1/4 1/2 | 1

The image shows a musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation consists of six measures. The first measure contains a quarter note (G4), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (A4). The second measure contains a quarter note (A4), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (B4). The third measure contains a quarter note (B4), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (C5). The fourth measure contains a quarter note (C5), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (B4). The fifth measure contains a quarter note (B4), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (A4). The sixth measure contains a quarter note (A4), a quarter rest, and a quarter note (G4). Above the staff, there are time signature markings: '0 1/2 | 1' above the first measure, and '0 1/4 1/2 | 1' above the second measure. Below the staff, there are additional markings: '0 1/4 1/2 | 1' in red ink above the first measure, and '1' above the second measure.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



0 $\frac{1}{2}$ |

0 $\frac{1}{3}$ () |

The image displays a musical score for Brahms Op 21. It features a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes a series of notes with stems, some of which are grouped into triplets. Above the first triplet, there is a '0' and a '1/2' with a vertical bar. Below the first triplet, there is a '0', a '1/3', a red pair of parentheses '()', and a vertical bar. The triplets are marked with a '3' underneath a bracket. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, with some beamed together.

Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21

Var. 5
Tempo di tema
molto dolce

2 3 4

teneramente
p

molto espressivo

legato

sempre col Ped.

5 6 7 8

9 1 2 9 10

p

11 12 13 14 15

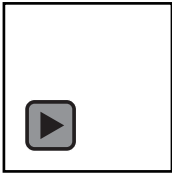
cresc.

f

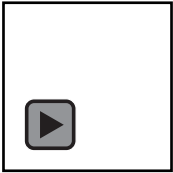
16 17 18 10 18

1. 2.

p



Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



Var. 5
Tempo di tema
molto dolce

2 3 4

teneramente
p

molto espressivo

legato

sempre col Ped.

5 6 7 8

9 10

11 12 13 14 15

16 17 18 10 18

Canone in moto contrario

3. Conclusion and Discussion

- Musical notation is not literal, it is subject to shared conventions
- The relationship between long notes and short notes is rich and varied
- HIPP is about a performer engaging creatively with a score, bringing to it as much context and knowledge as possible in order to be able to make informed interpretive decisions.

References

- Badura-Skoda, Paul. 1993. *Interpreting Bach at the Keyboard*. Transl. Alfred Clayton. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Booth, Colin. 2010. *Did Bach Really Mean That? Deceptive notation in Baroque keyboard music*. Mount Pleasant (uk) : Soundboard. More information: <http://www.didbach.co.uk>.
- Brown, Clive. 1991. *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice*. OUP.
- Drefyus, Laurence. 2004. *Bach and the Patterns of Invention*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Hook, Julian. 2011. *How to Perform Impossible Rhythms*. Music Theory Online, Vol. 17, No.4
- Leathwood, Jonathan. 2000. *Reading Bach's Ideas: the Prelude to BWV 998*. EGTA Journal 2000, EGTA (UK)
- Leathwood, Jonathan. 2017. *The Limits of Notation: Reading Bach's Rhythms*. Paper given at the 2017 GFA Convention, Fullerton, CA, USA
- Ledbetter, David. 2009. *Unaccompanied Bach: Performing the solo works*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Discussion

Prof Stephen Goss

Composer

Director of the International Guitar Research Centre

Chair of Composition

University of Surrey, UK

Professor of Guitar,

Royal Academy of Music, London

www.stephengoss.net