Unequal music: the long and short of it

Prof. Steve Goss

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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?

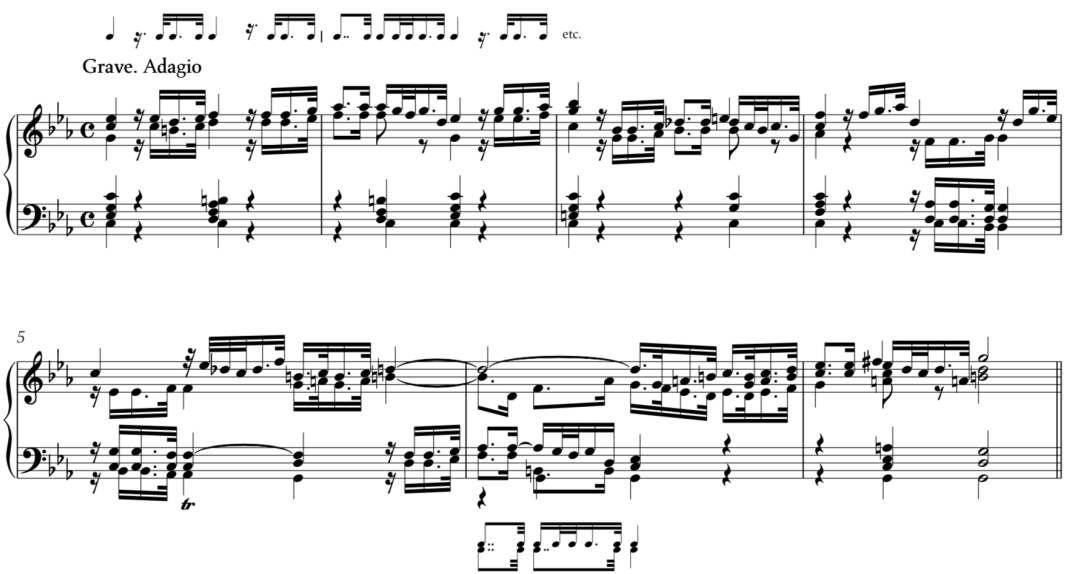
- Inequality – the long and short of it

- The trouble with tuplets

Inequality

BWV 826, Sinfonia

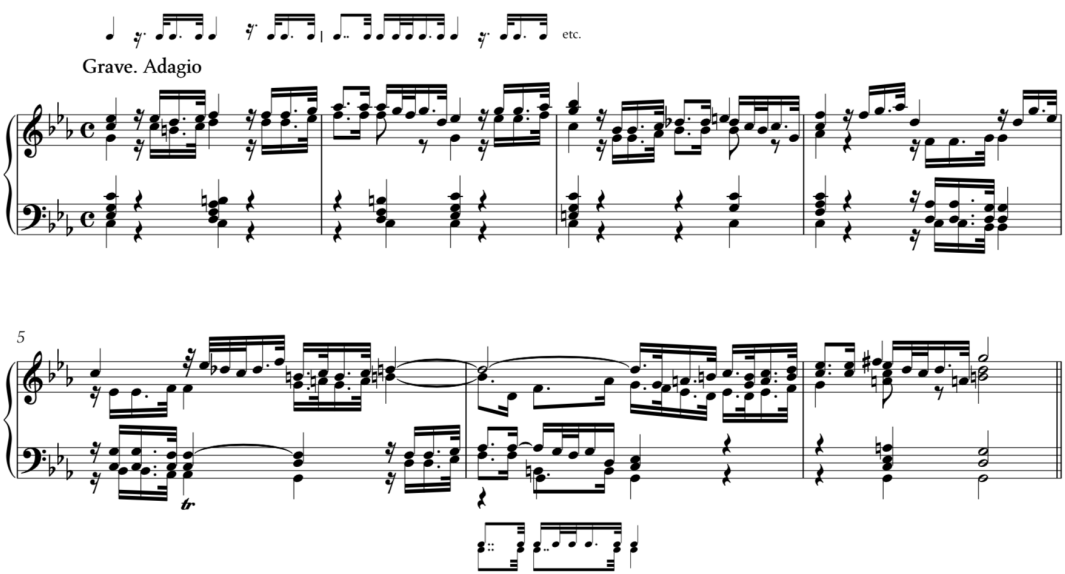
Argerich



Inequality

BWV 826, Sinfonia

Schiff



The Double Dot

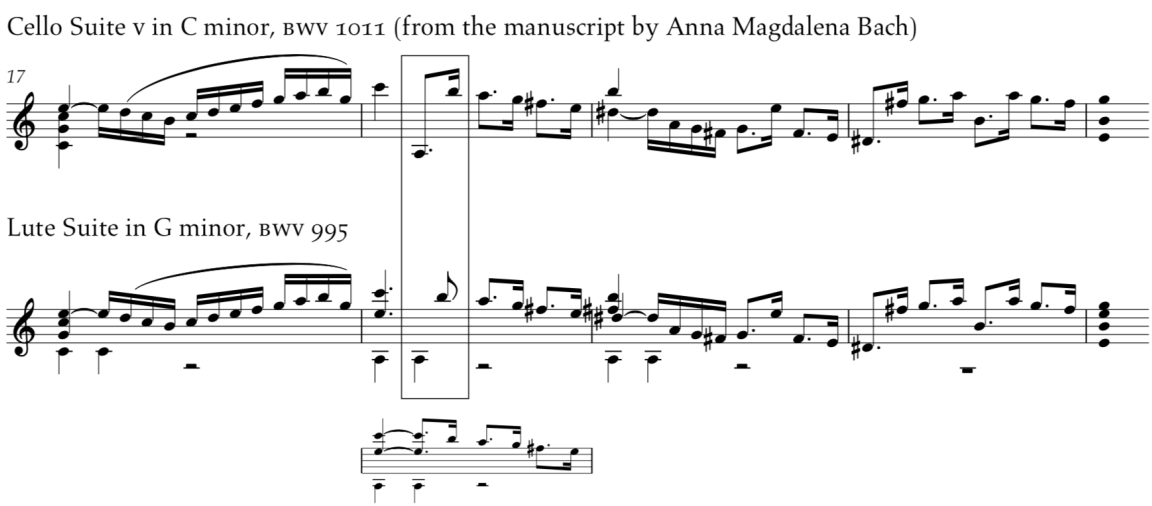
invented by Leopold Mozart in 1769

(a) unavailable

(b) unidiomatic

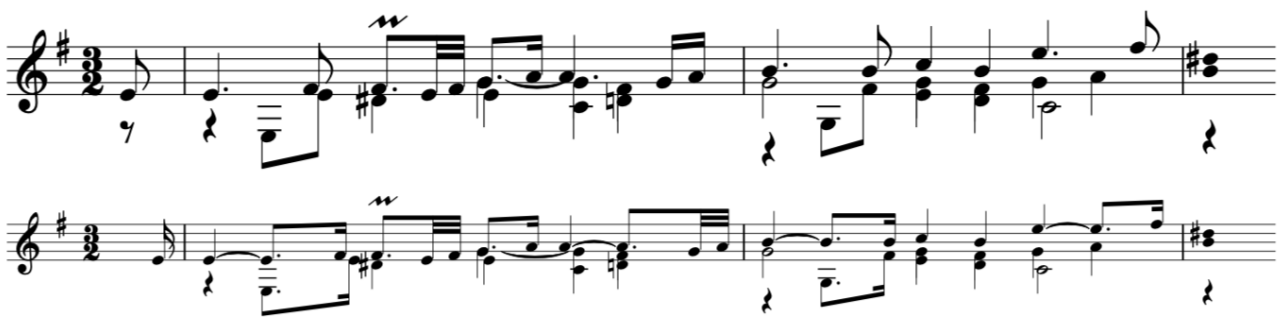
(c) standard approximation

The Double Dot



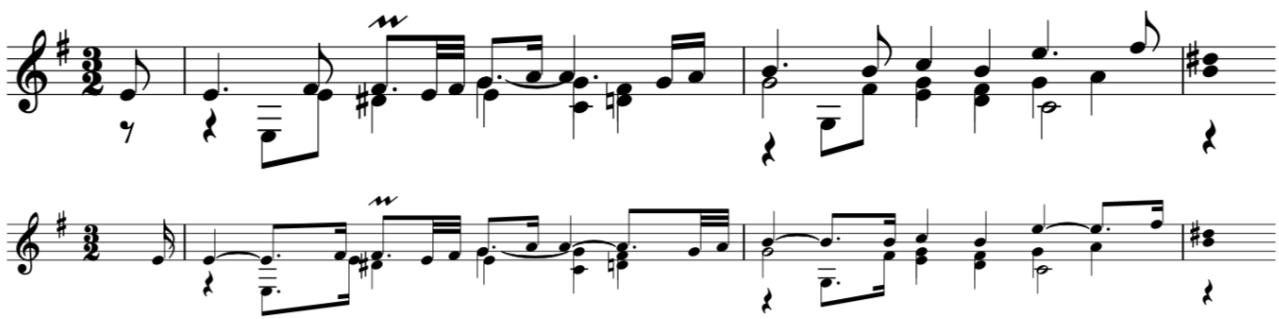
BWV 996, Courante

Vieaux



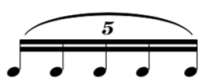
BWV 996, Courante

Shibe



Tuplets and Flourishes

How can a quintuplet be notated?

(a) 

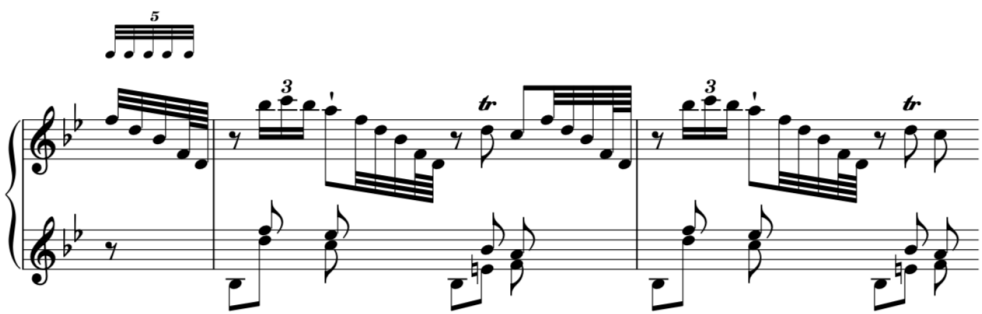
unavailable (in Bach's time it had not yet been proposed)

(b)
"Smooth" option: sums incorrectly to the ♩

(c)
"Jagged" option: sums correctly to the ♩

Examples of tuplets and flourishes

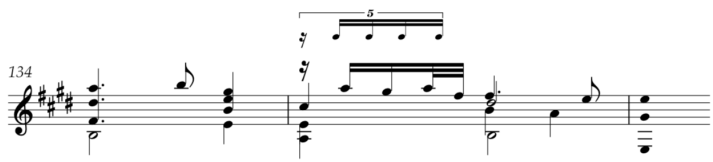
Haydn, Piano Sonata in G minor, Hob. xvi:44: i. Moderato, mm. 13–14



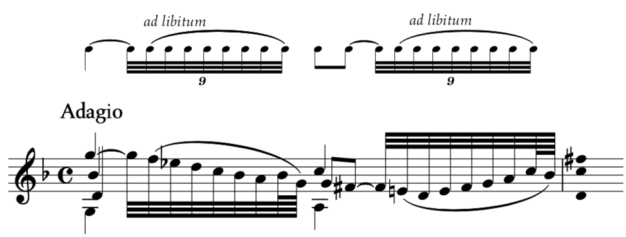
Schiff

Examples of tuplets and flourishes

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



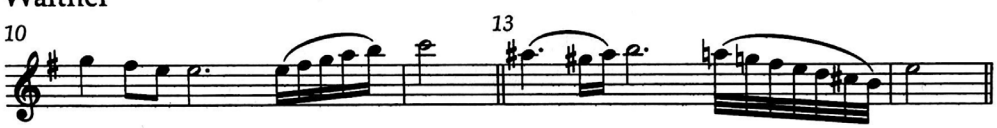
Violin Sonata I in G minor, BWV 1001: Adagio, mm. 1–2 (original key signature)



Examples of tuplets and flourishes

Suite in E minor, BWV 996: Sarabande
Excerpts from the treble line according to two different copyists (ornaments omitted)

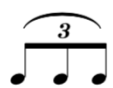
Walther



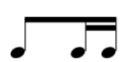
Gerber

Triplets

How can a triplet be notated?

(a) 

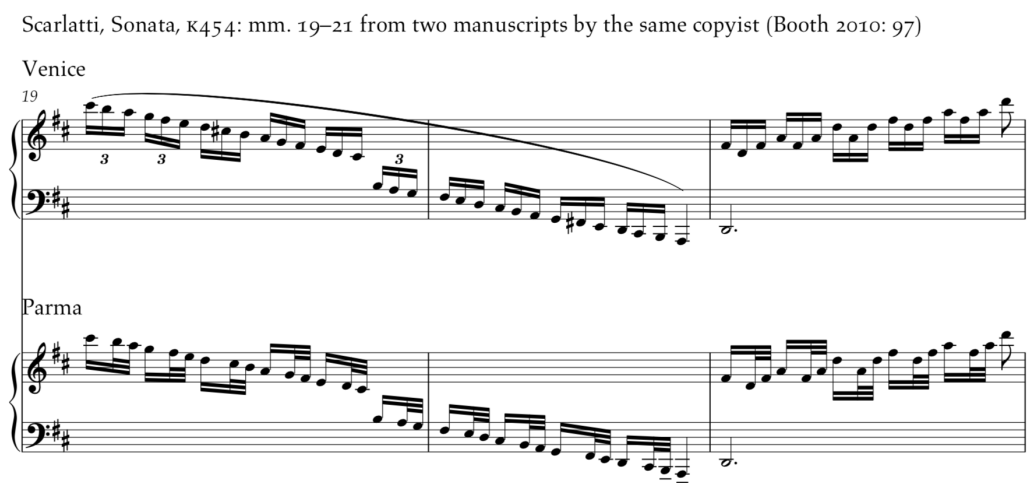
common but not the only possibility: it is most likely to be used in groups of two or more and at slower tempi

(b) 
used occasionally as an approximation for a triplet

(c)
used occasionally as an approximation for a triplet

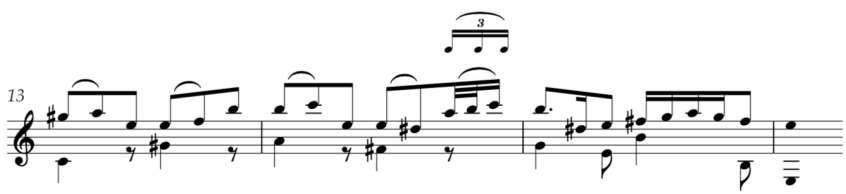
Examples of triplets

Zacharias

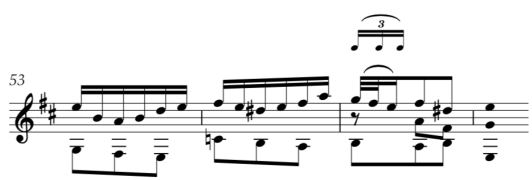


Examples of triplets

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

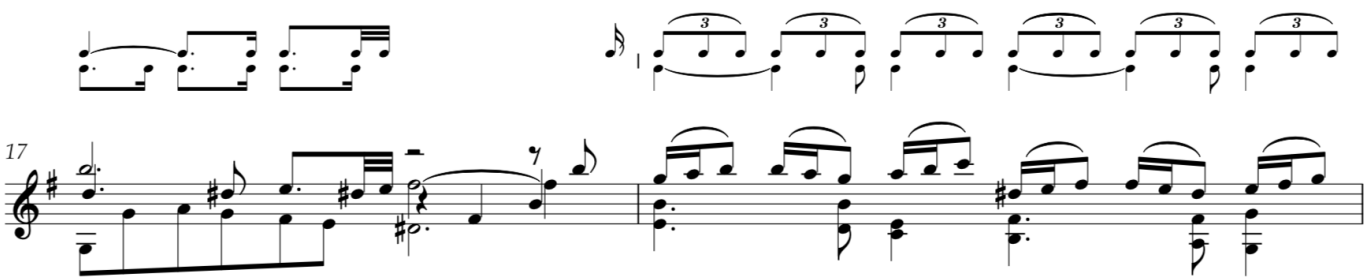


Prelude, Fugue and Allegro in E♭, BWV 998 (transposed to D): Allegro, mm. 53–56



Examples of triplets

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



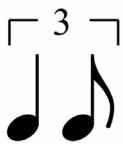
Rhythm and Bach: did Bach really mean that?

“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…



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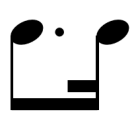

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3:1

Django and Swing

Swing 42, solo extract

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

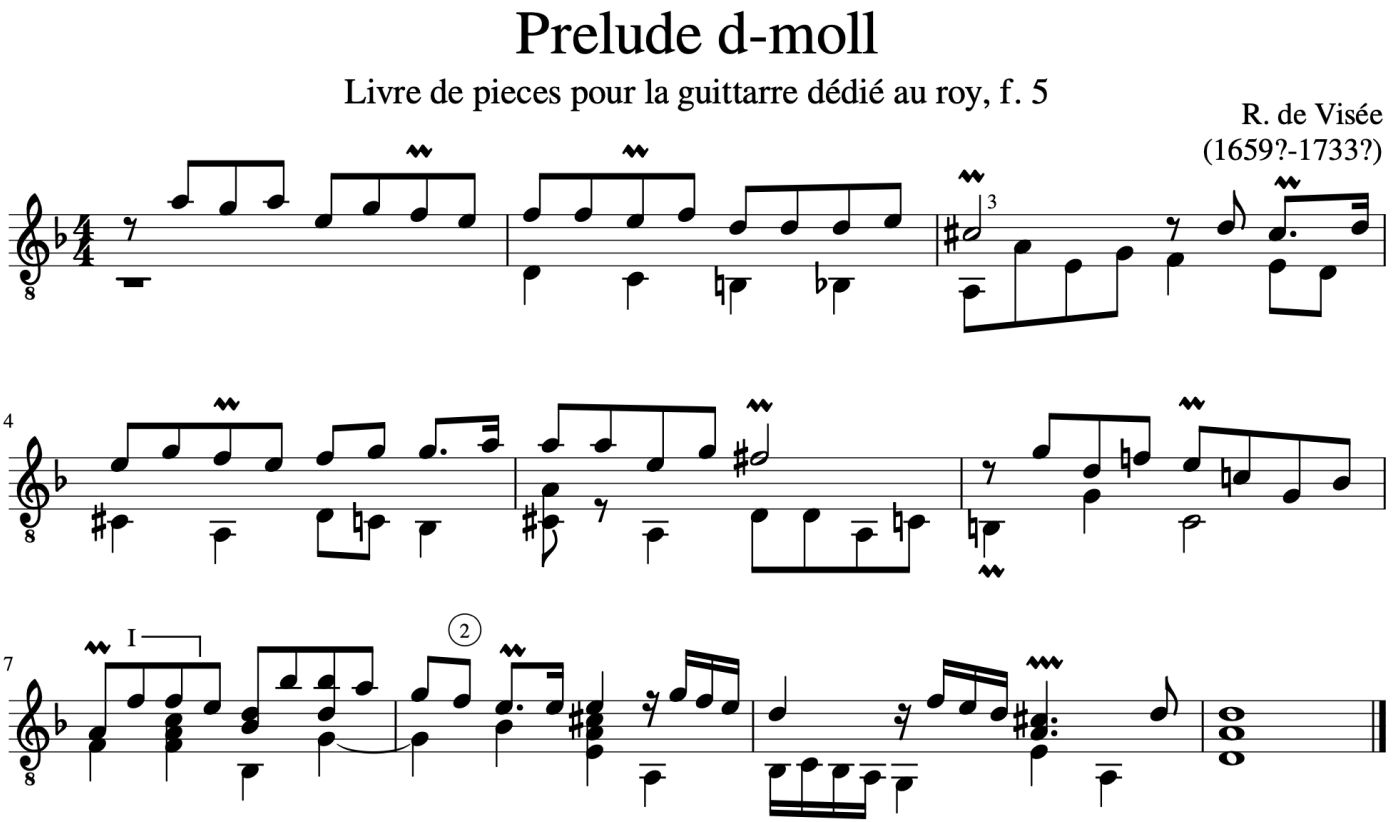
Django and Swing

Swing 42, solo extract

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

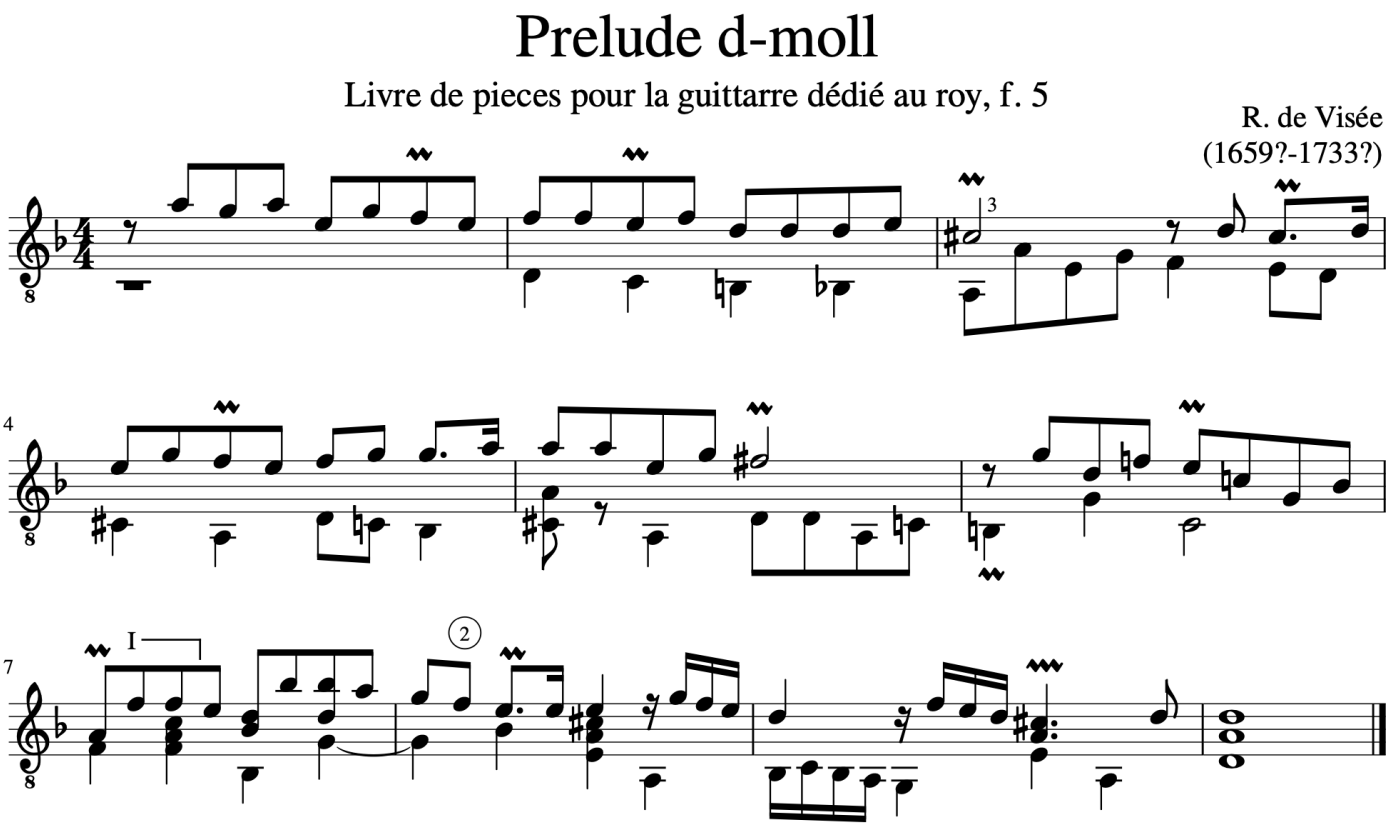
Notes inégales

Bream



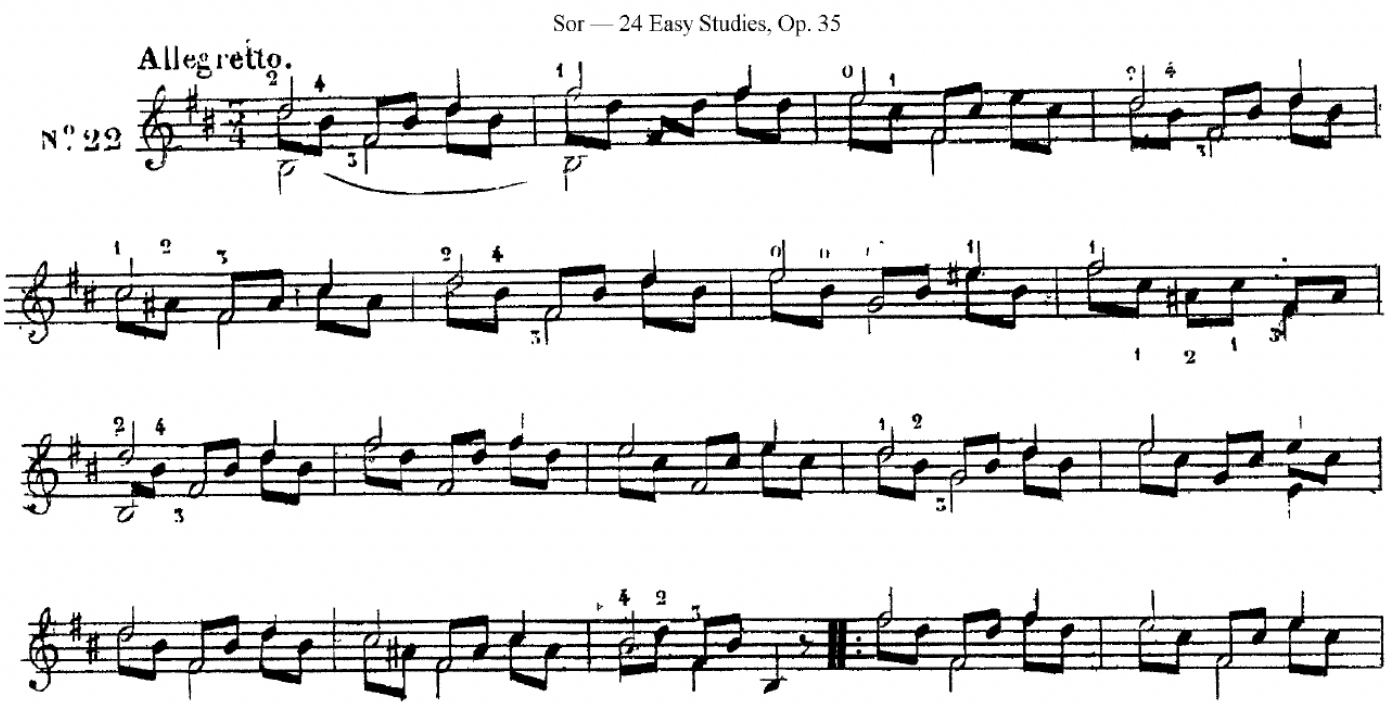
Notes inégales

North



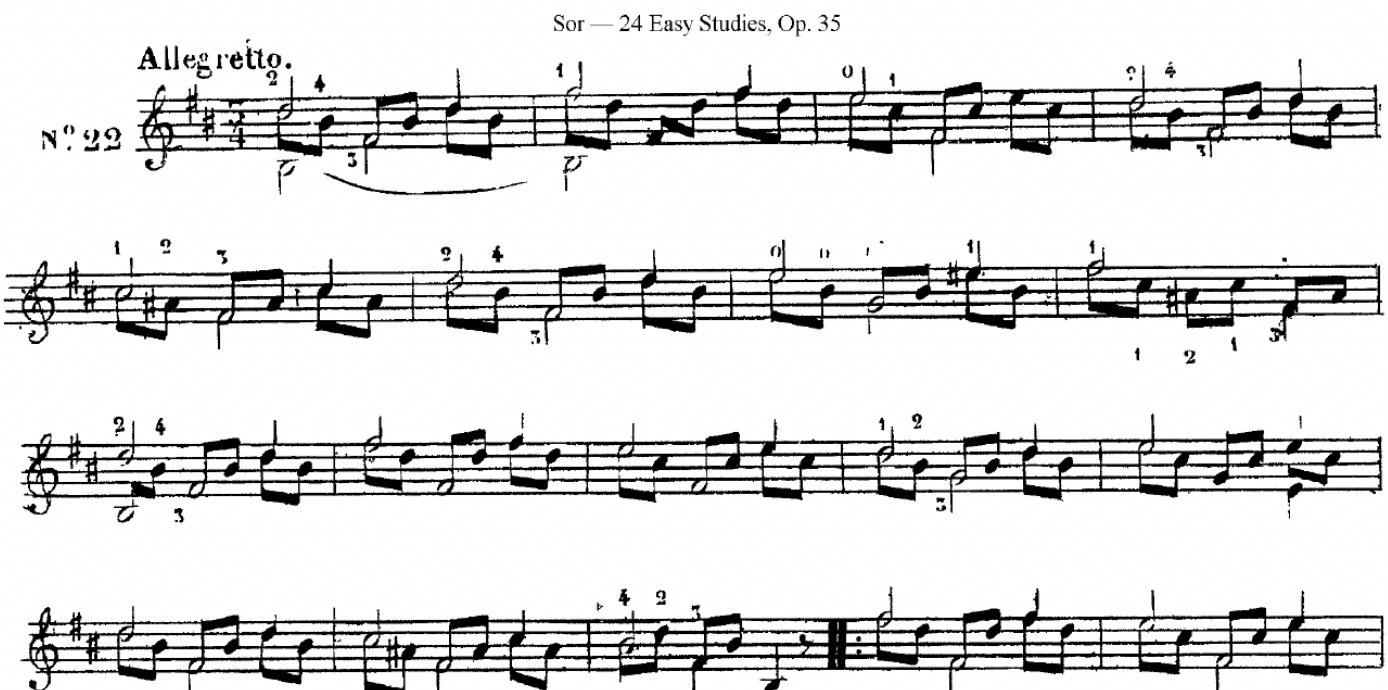
Notes inégales

Segovia



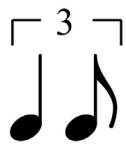
Notes inégales

Llobet



Schubert and Mertz: Affekt and rhythm

If it ain’t got that swing…



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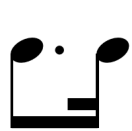

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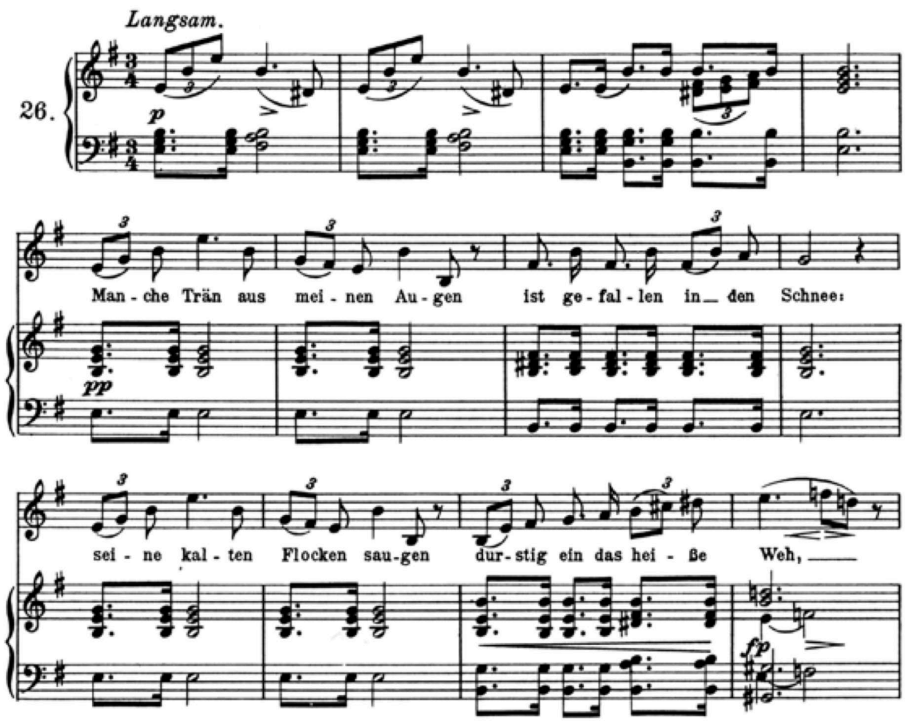
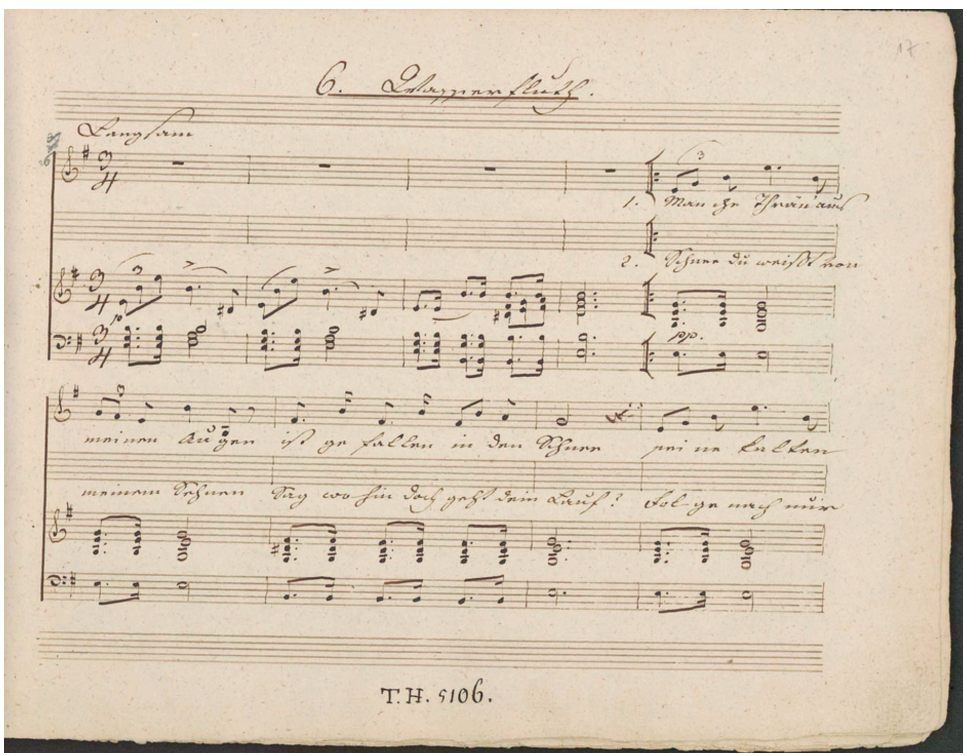
Schubert – Wasserflut from Die Winterreise

6.
Wasserflut.



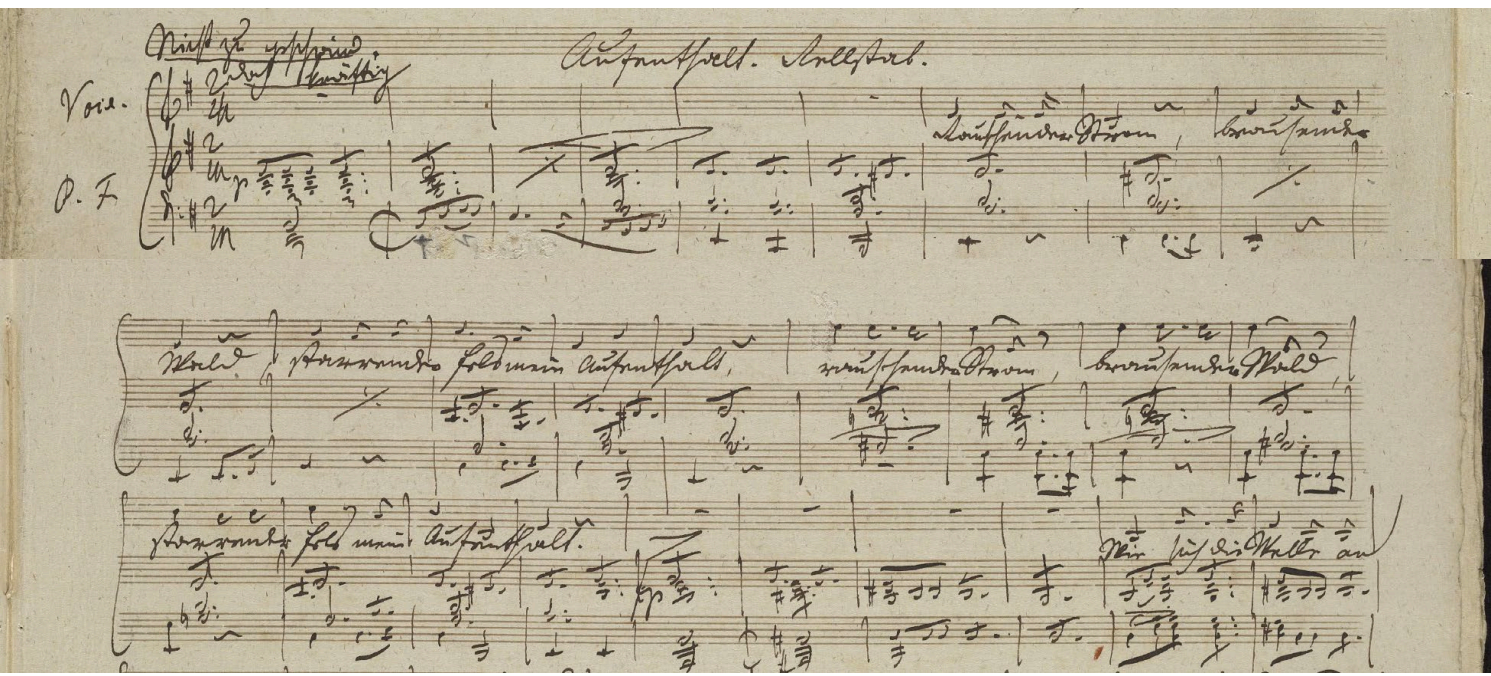
Fischer-Dieskau & Moore

Schubert – Manuscript of Wasserflut from Die Winterreise

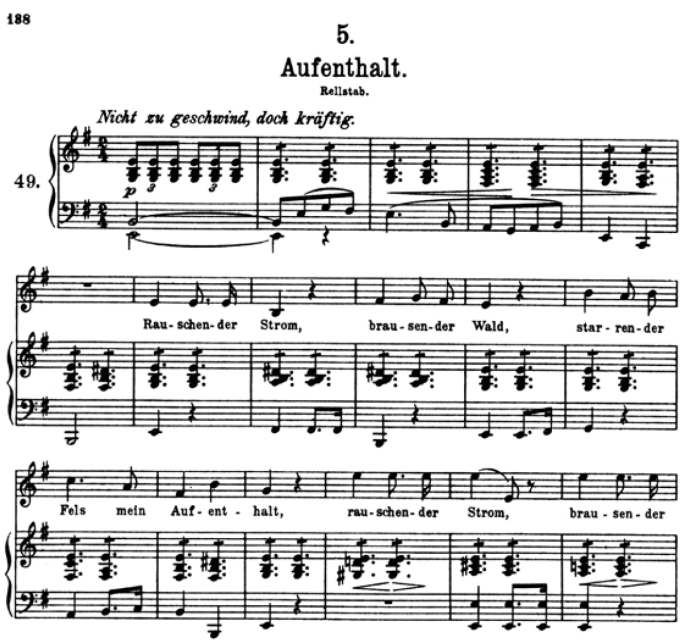


Fischer-Dieskau & Brendel

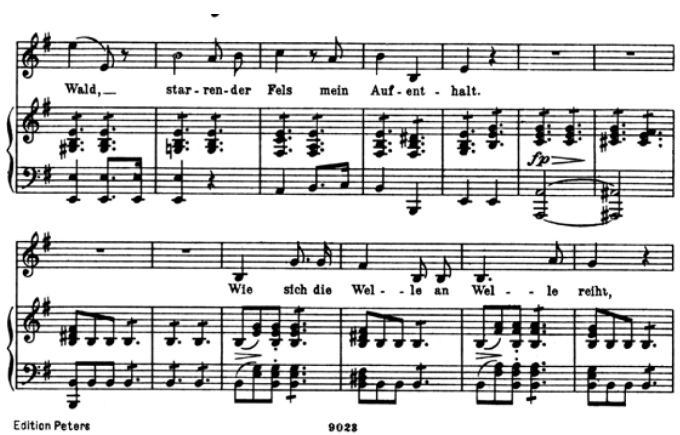
Schubert – Aufenthalt from Schwanengesang



Schubert – Aufenthalt from Schwanengesang

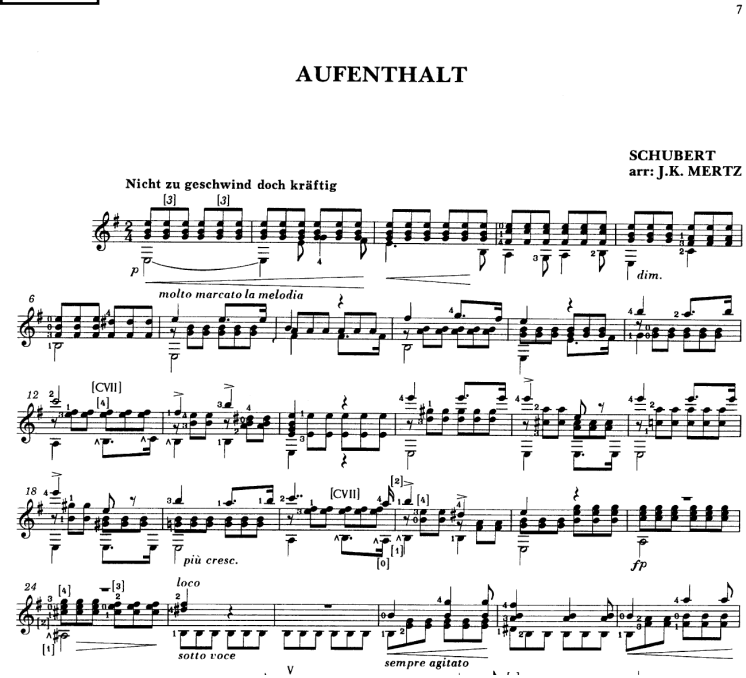


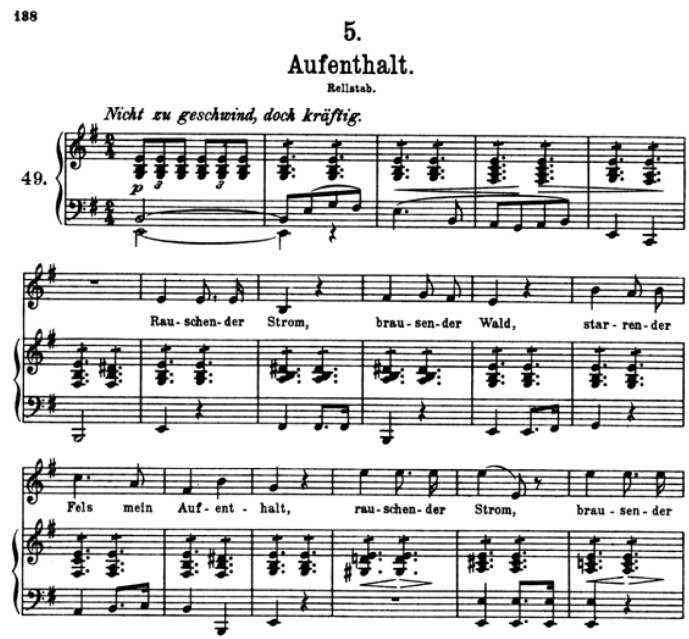
Padmore & Lewis



Schubert/Liszt/Mertz – Aufenthalt

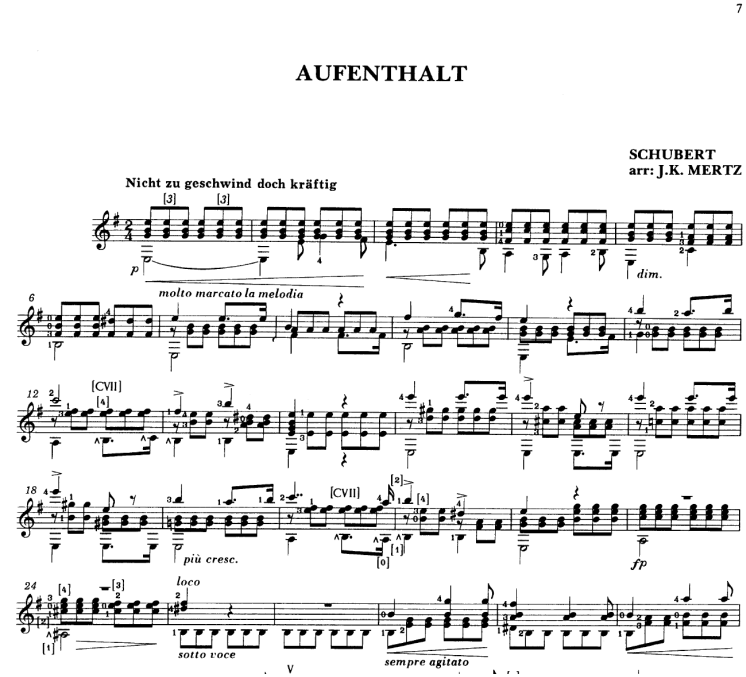
Smits

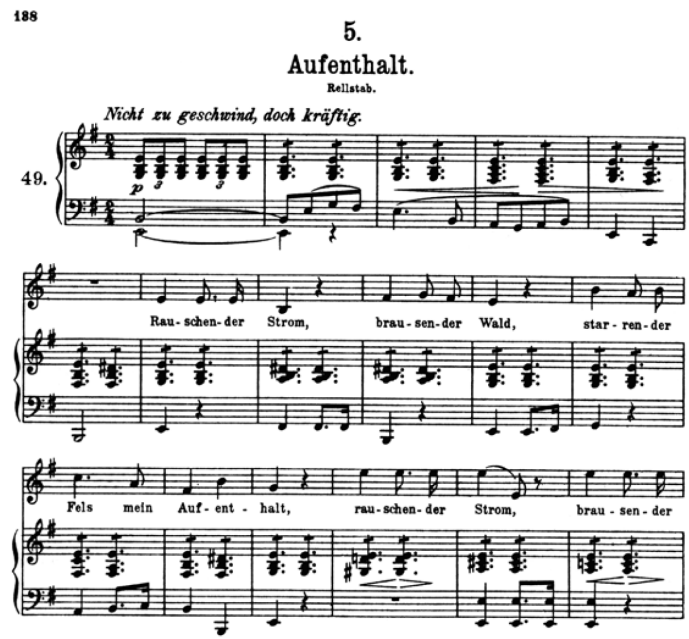




Schubert/Liszt/Mertz – Aufenthalt

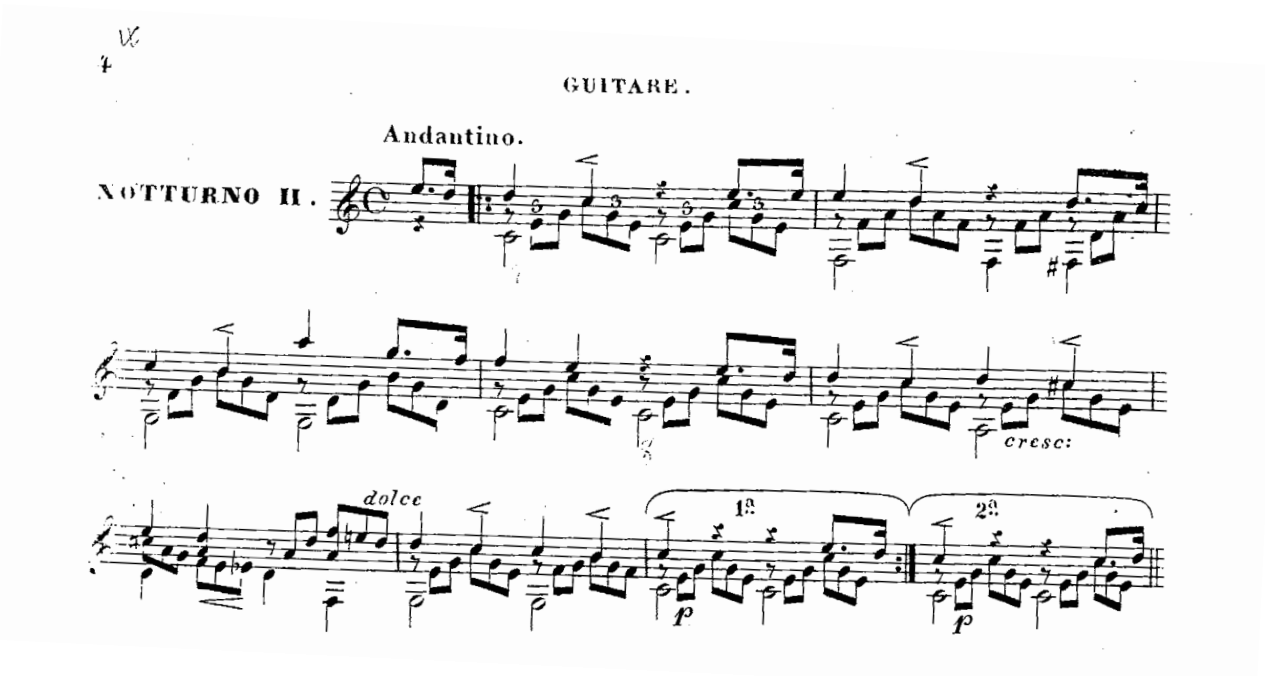
Leisner





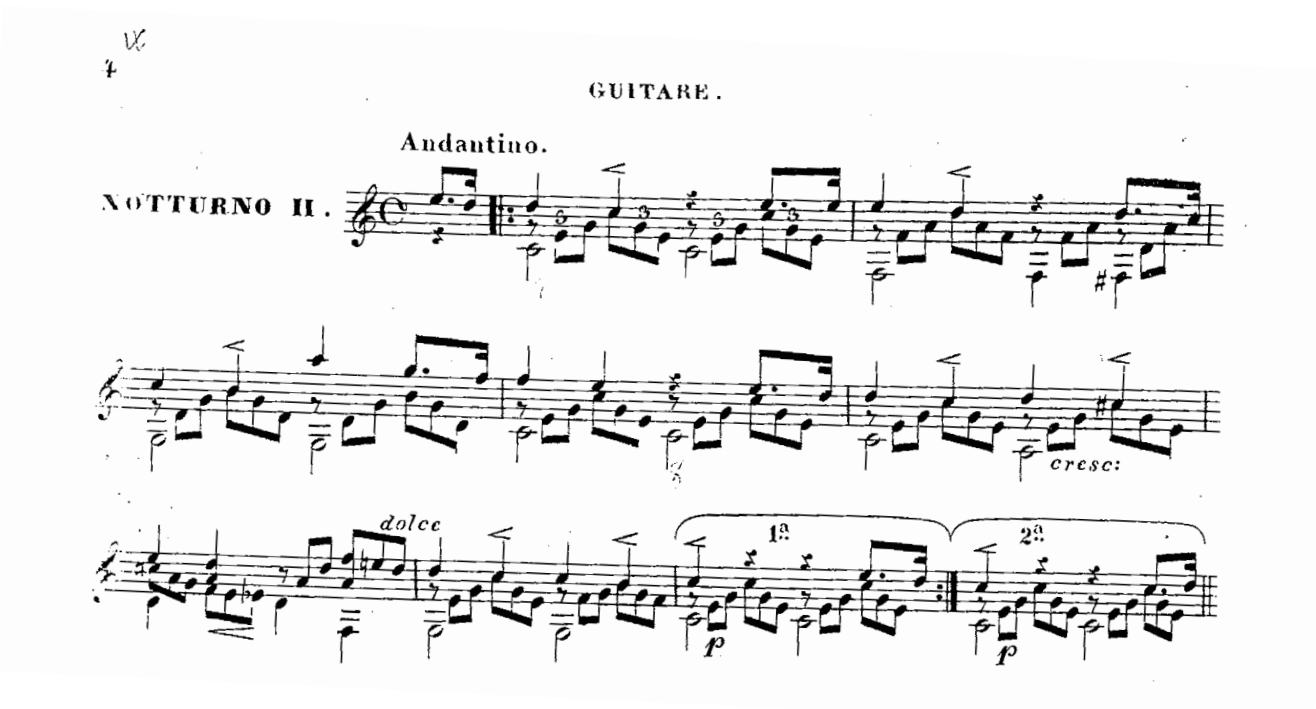
Mertz – Nocturne Op.4 No.2

Petrenko



Mertz – Nocturne Op.4 No.2

Salvoni

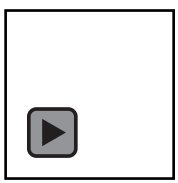


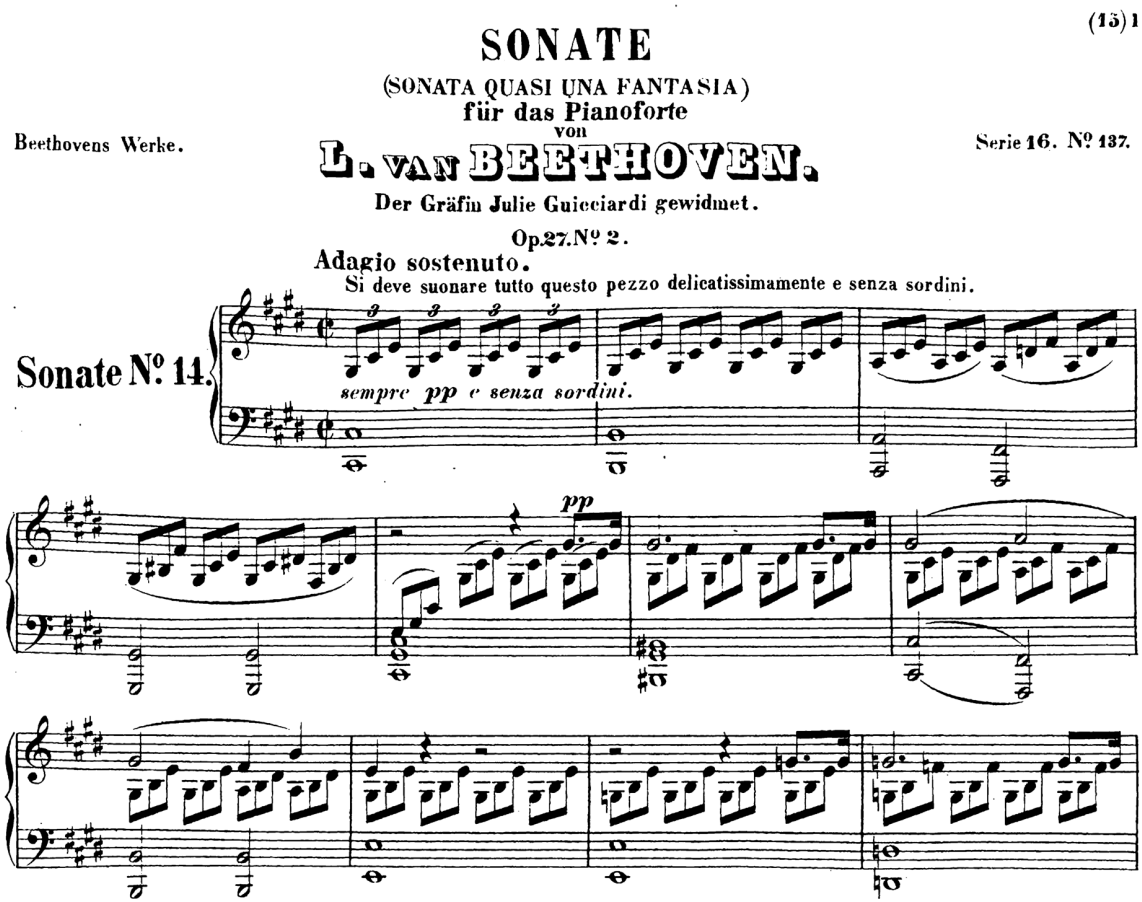
Schubert and Mertz: Affekt and rhythm

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.

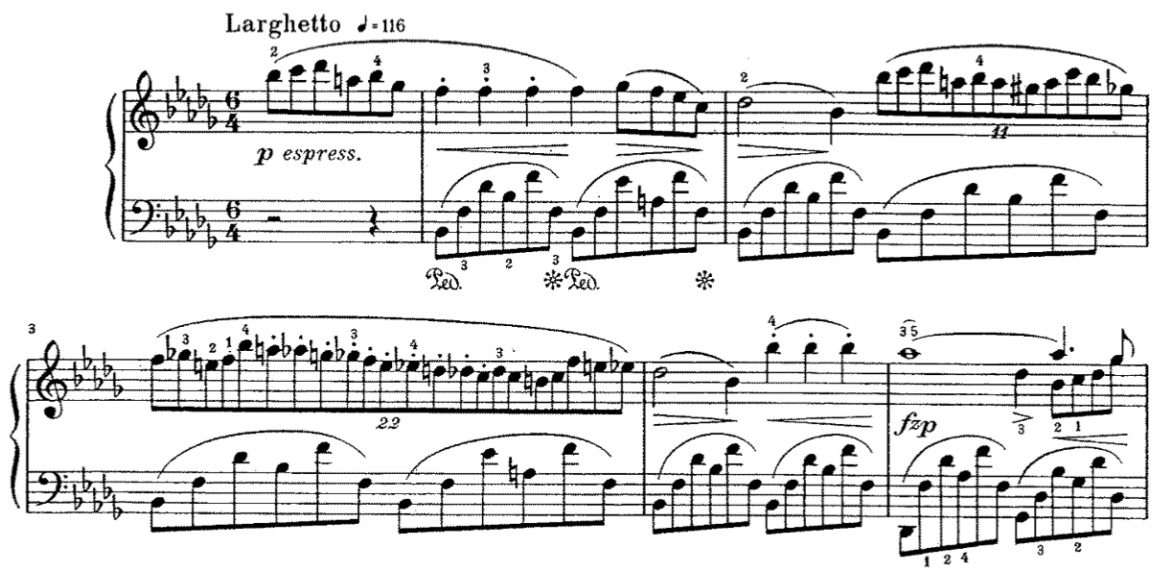
Complex examples and impossible rhythms



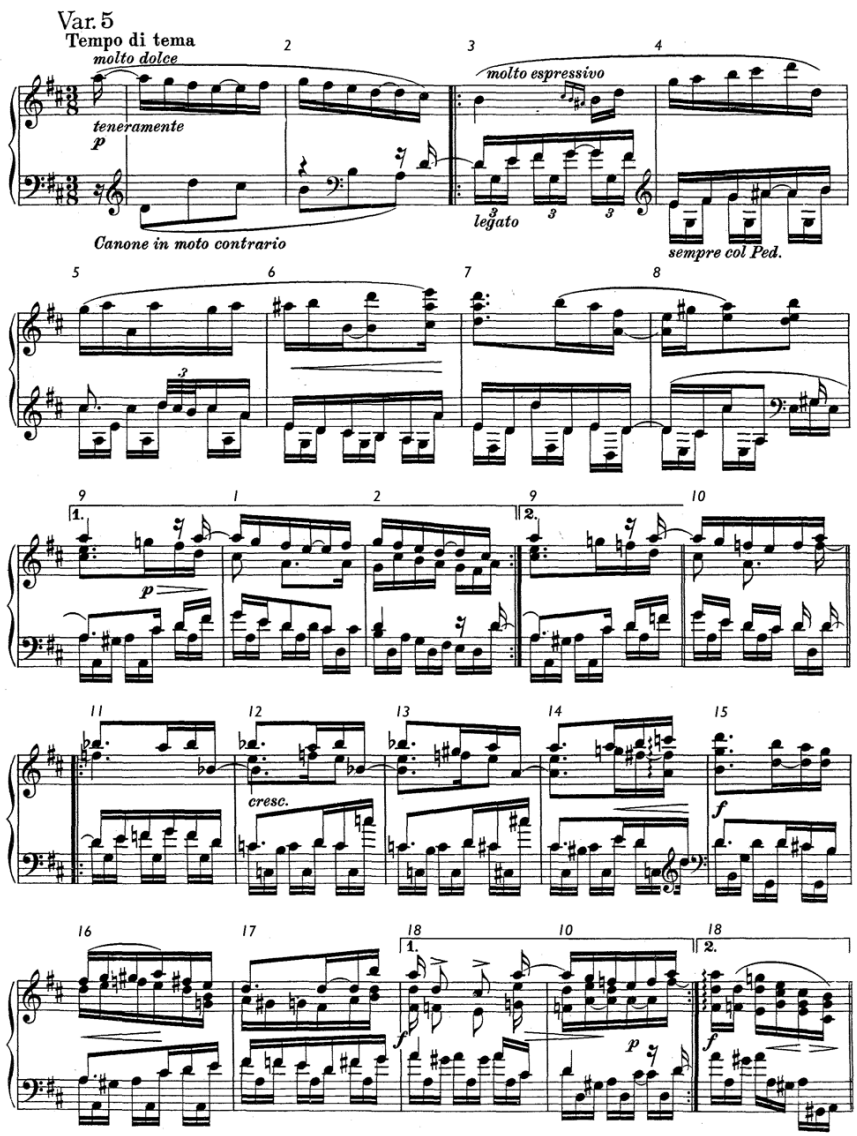


Complex examples and impossible rhythms

Chopin Nocturne Op. 9 No. 1



Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



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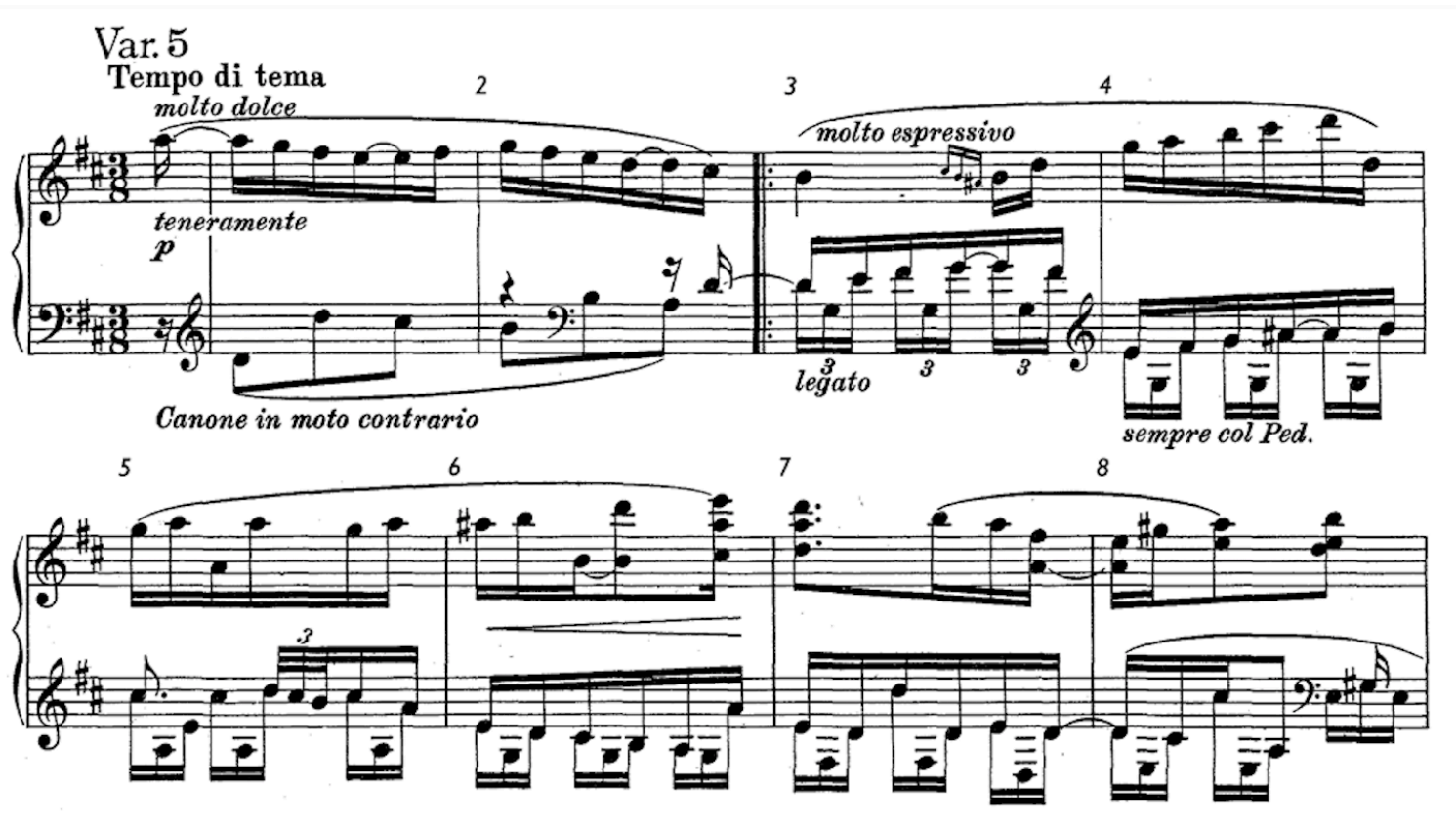

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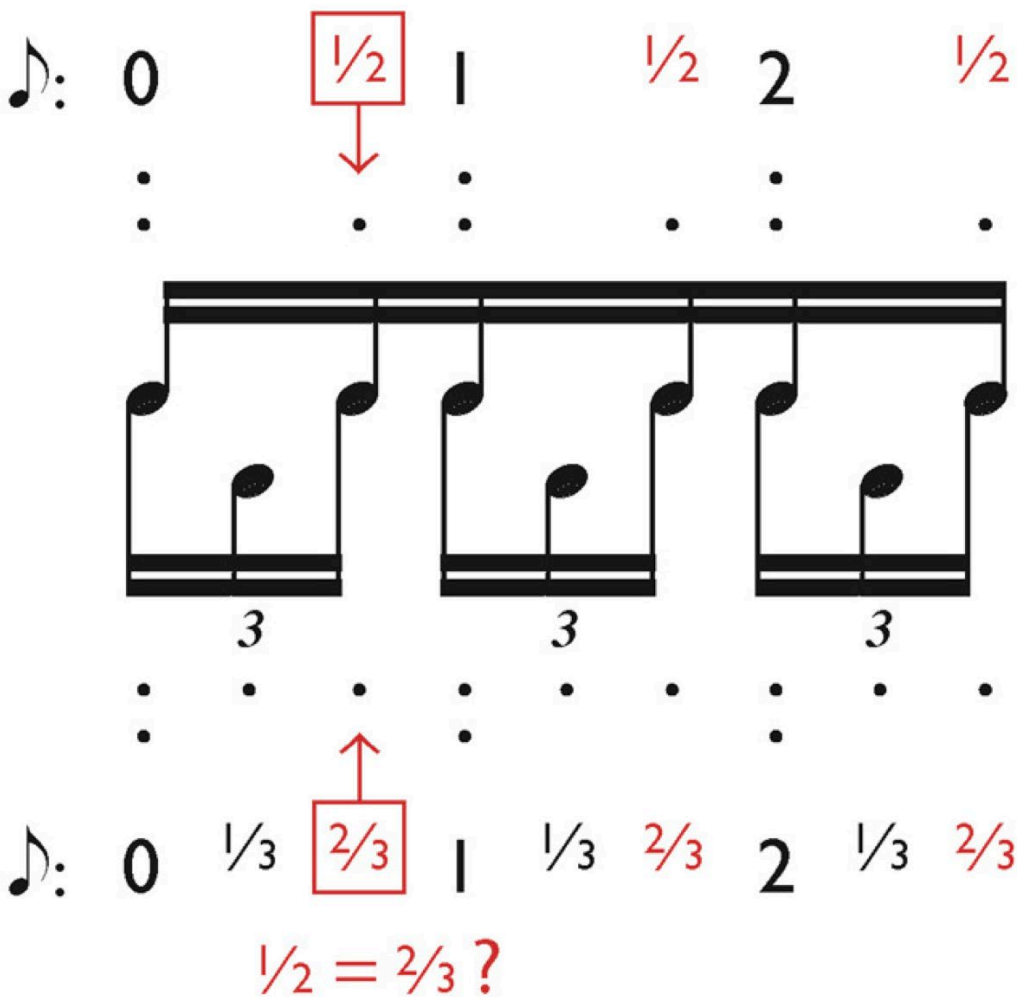
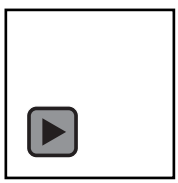
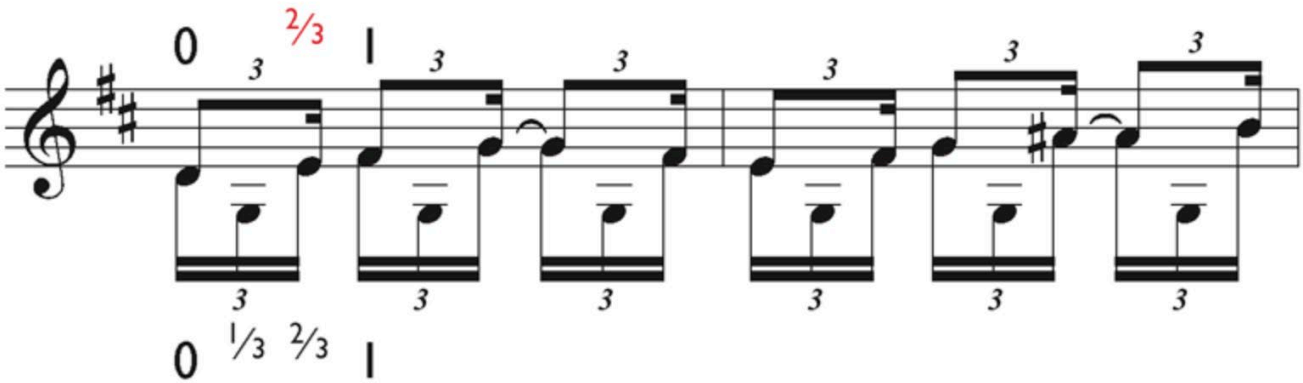
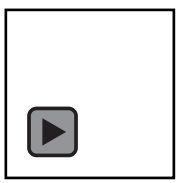


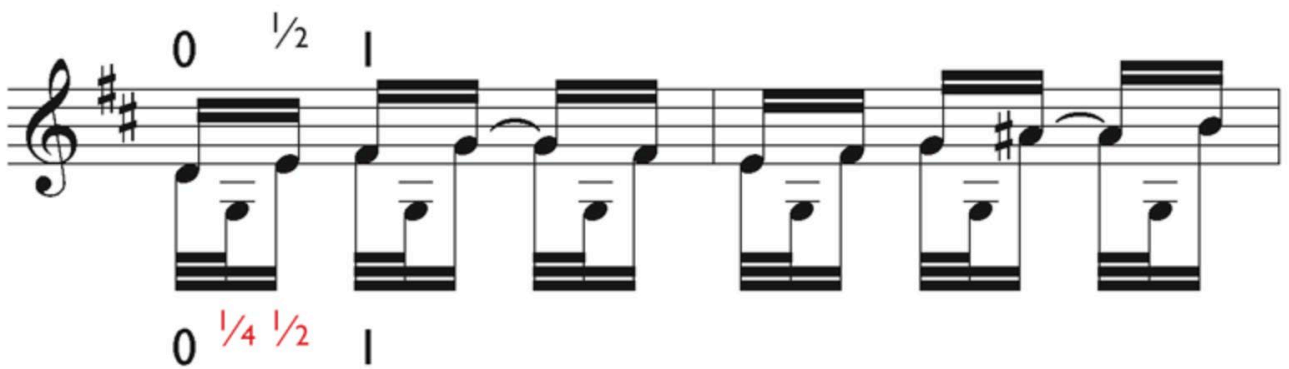
Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



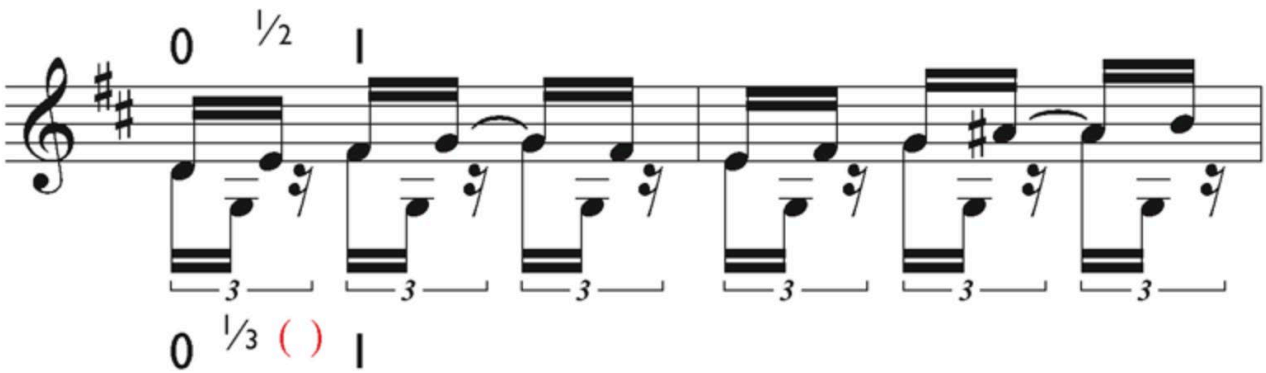


Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21

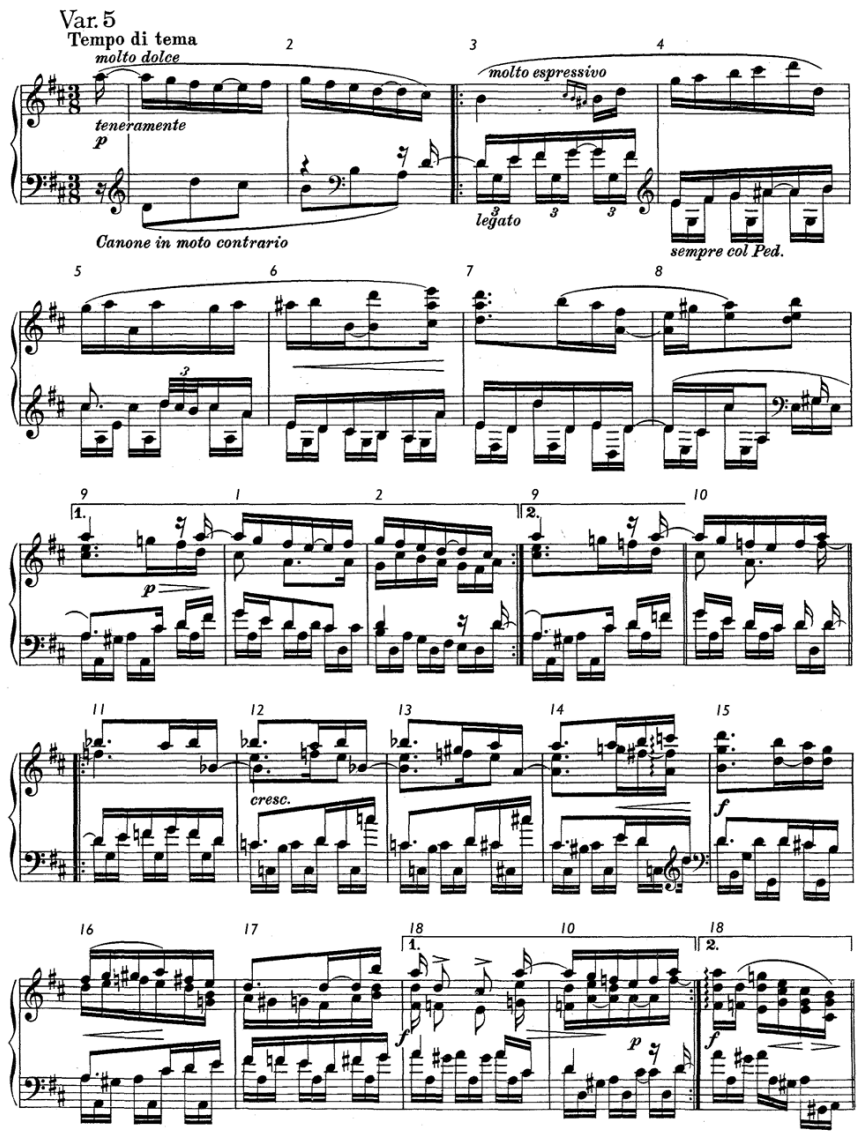




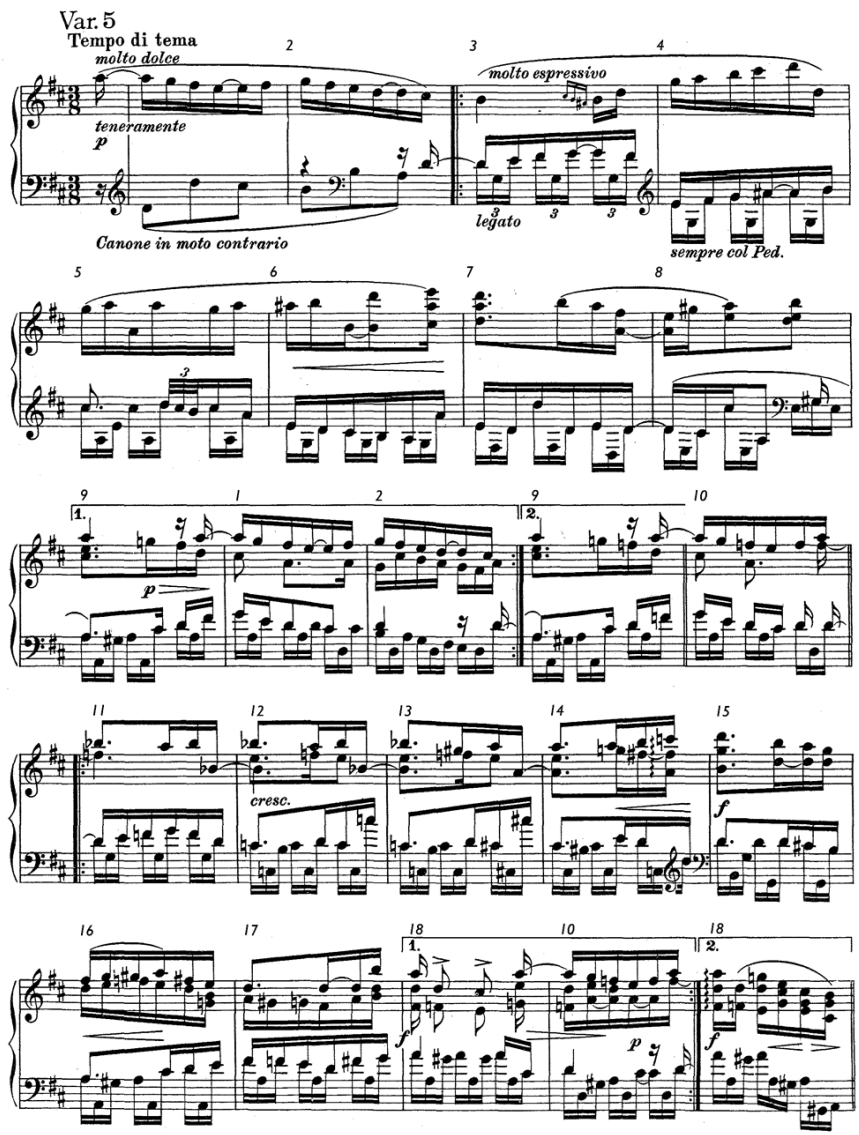
Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



Complex examples and impossible rhythms – Brahms Op 21



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.

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Discussion

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