

Doug

+++++ NOTES ON THE " FRENCH MANNER " +++++

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" .. There are, in my opinion, certain faults in the way we write music which correspond to the way we write our (musical) language. We write things differently from the way we play them and, as a result, foreigners play our music less well than we play theirs. The Italians, on the contrary, write their music in the true time-values in which they intend it to be played. For example, in playing, we dot several consecutive eighth-notes (quavers) moving by degree, but we write them as equal. Our custom has enslaved us, and we persist. "

(François COUPERIN)

We can take " manner " as meaning " system of ornaments ". In fact, the " FRENCH MANNER " is a rhythmic style which involves a veritable doctrine of UNEQUAL NOTES . The French tendency is above all " trochaic ", in contrast to the Lombard Manner (" iambic ") of the Italians. There are two reasons for this :

- 1) The place of supreme importance which singing holds in French Music is above all melodic -- hence the necessity for the instrumentalist to model his musical phrasing on the singer's example, stressing the tonic accent. (This also explains the evolution of the French Organ which from 1700 on, apart from an increasing number of manuals, has more and more stops with different quality and colour of tone, intended to be used as solos either in ^{an} upper or a middle voice.)
- 2) The custom which persisted for a long time, of fingering rapid, scale passages without using the thumb.

We have evidence of this French System of Unequal Notes from the year 1550 (BOURGEOIS : Le Droit Chemin de Musique) and it is confirmed between 1650 and 1800 by some thirty texts.

----- LOULIÉ (1696) distinguishes three manners :

" detached " - " grouped " - " dotted " .

" In any kind of time, but especially in triple time, the half-beat notes are played in two different ways although written in the same way :

- 1) Sometimes they are played equal. This manner is called "detaching the note". It is used in melodies where the notes proceed by interval.
- 2) Sometimes the first half-beat notes are made a little longer. This is called "grouping" (lourer). We use it in melodies where the notes follow one another by step.
- 3) There is a third manner where the first half-beat note is made much longer than the second, but in this case the first note must be dotted. This third manner is called " pricking " or "dotting" (piquer ou pointer)." ...

Later on " Piquer ", " Pointer ", " Marteler " (lit.: to hammer), " Passer " are all used in the same sense as "Lourer". This gives rise to some confusion and considerable difficulty for the

modern interpreter in getting at the true rhythmic style of a piece.

LOULIÉ continues :

" The first and third quarter of each beat are longer than the second and fourth, although they be written as equal, in any given bar." ...

----- SAINT-LAMBERT (1702) :

5 " In a sequence of eighth-notes (quavers) we are accustomed to playing one long and one short in alternation, because this inequality makes them more graceful... However, this inequality does not apply in pieces written in 4 time, like the Allemandes, because of the slow tempo. In this case, the inequality applies to the sixteenth (semi-quavers) if there are any. In pieces written in a slow triple time, if there is a series of several consecutive quarter-notes (crotchets), they are played unequal like the eighths. Apart from these instances, all notes of equal value are played equally. ...

WHEN NOTES ARE TO BE PLAYED " UNEQUALLY ", IT IS " TASTE " WHICH MUST DECIDE WHETHER THE INEQUALITY IS TO BE SLIGHT OR PRONOUNCED. THERE ARE SOME PIECES WHERE THE NOTES CAN BE PLAYED VERY UNEQUALLY, AND OTHERS WHERE A LESS MARKED INEQUALITY IS SUITABLE. " TASTE " MUST DECIDE THIS, AS IT DECIDES THE TEMPO."

----- ENGRAMELLE (1775) who attached much importance to being exact (he used to make bird-organs) says that the music does not show whether the difference between unequal notes is $1/2$, $1/3$ or $1/4$ of their value.

" Sometimes we give them the values $3/4$ and $1/4$, says Eugène BORREL, sometimes $2/3$ and $1/3$, sometimes $3/5$ and $2/5$ (these last especially in many Minuets), sometimes even $7/12$ and $5/12$." (BORREL wrote $5/15$, but this is obviously an error)

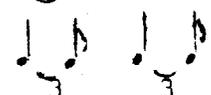
Hence ENGRAMELLE's remark which is of supreme importance :

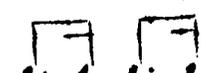
" THERE ARE MANY PLACES WHERE THE INEQUALITY OF THE NOTES VARIES IN THE SAME PIECE : IT IS GOOD TASTE ALONE WHICH CAN APPRECIATE THIS VARIETY IN INEQUALITIES ONE WILL SEE HOW A LITTLE MORE OR A LITTLE LESS INEQUALITY IN THE NOTES CHANGES CONSIDERABLY THE EXPRESSIVE CHARACTER OF A PIECE. "...

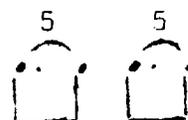
Therefore, if the unequal values are written down, they could be set out as follows :

a)  original notation

b)  phrased in two's

c)  triplets

d)  dotted eighth plus sixteenth

e) 

f) 

In the last two cases, the inequality takes on the character of an expressive accent which is still noticeable in case (e), and almost imperceptible in case (f). In these two cases, we arrive at a kind of "phrasing". This word, it must be stressed, did not exist in the period under consideration. In the light of the foregoing texts, it is possible to conclude that in pieces of an expressive character, "observing unequal values" means "phrasing".

= Table of notes to be played as unequal, according to the various time-signatures :

Time-signature	Note which may be played unequal
3/1	the 
3/2	the  or 
2, 3, 3/4, 6/4, 9/4, 12/4 often : $\frac{2}{4}$, C and 2/4	the 
C, 2/4, 3/8, 4/8, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8	the 
3/16, 4/16, 6/16, 9/16, 12/16	the 

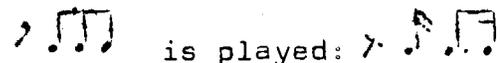
----- DUVAL (1764) says, for his part :

" ONE PLAYS AS UNEQUAL ALL NOTES OF A VALUE SMALLER THAN THE LOWER FIGURE IN THE TIME-SIGNATURE. "

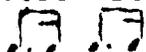
According to BORREL, we may draw the following conclusions :

- Of those notes which it would be possible to play "grouped", "passed" or "dotted", we leave as equal :
 - 1) Those intermingled with notes of smaller value (or one could play them all unequal).
 - 2) Those moving by interval
 - 3) Cases where there is a marking like "notes égales" (notes to be played equal), "martelées", "détachées",  or "mouvement décidé ou marqué"
 - 4) Cases where a dot or a ~~horizontal~~ line is to be found above the note (in contrast to this, notes linked in two's call for a tender or "grouped" (louré) style).
 - 5) Those intermingled with many rests of the same value.
 - 6) Those intermingled with syncopated notes.
 - 7) Notes repeated at the same pitch.
 - 8) Passages of accompaniment.
 - 9) Foreign music, or music written in a foreign style (e.g. where the tempo indications are written in Italian).

- When playing unequally, the rests must have the same value as the written note. Thus :



- Even notes already dotted are affected :

thus, in C time  is played 

and here, we find the typical style of the French "Overtures", which should always be played thus, even in the works of foreign composers.

----- QUANTZ recommends that in " dotted French style " one should wait till the last moment before playing 32nd's (demi-semi-quavers), and that one should not play them legato.

Having studied these various texts, it would nevertheless be untimely to think that every melody moving by step must be played " inegal ". We have already heard SAINT-LAMBERT and ENGRAMELLE say that " good taste " alone must decide upon the type of inequality, and that sometimes this inequality will be imperceptible, being limited to a slight stressing of the beat and its stronger sub-divisions.

----- EMY DE L'ILETTE : " These various ways of playing the note-values should be employed only in the parts which have the melody and never in the accompaniment. Even in the melody parts one observes them rigourously only during practice, so as to acquire confidence, but in the actual playing they are often disregarded because they would make the performance heavy. In brief, there are passages where these different ways of playing the note-values produce a good effect; it is therefore up to the performer to use them only after due consideration."

----- MARCOU (1782) says that some people stick rigidly to the written values, but : " there are others who recognise that there is a noticeable difference between 1) giving an equal value to these notes, 2) grouping them slightly two by two and 3) dotting them in a more marked manner when this is indicated by the dots which precede the short notes. As there is no complete agreement on this matter, one must choose whichever of the three ways is most suitable to the type of music to be played."

For the player searching for historical accuracy, the problem remains therefore, constantly open. It is impossible to base oneself on any one fixed rule, the basic guide proposed by all the authors being " good taste ".

----- LACASSAGNE (1716): " Taste is indefinable; it is a certain something with which the sensitive soul is always imbued. A delicate ear can easily distinguish its different shades, but it is impossible to explain in what exactly they consist."

SAINT-LAMBERT said: " Good taste often makes us decide to do things whose only justification is good taste itself."

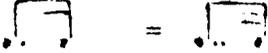
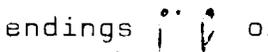
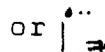
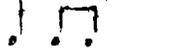
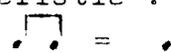
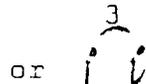
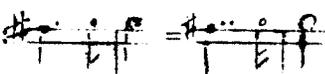
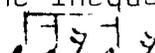
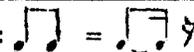
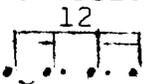
When one reads the remark made by MARCHAND (1783) that : " The most passionate music is often that in which the beats, though themselves equal, are the most unequally sub-divided ", one cannot help making a COMPARISON WITH THE MODERN IDEA OF " RUBATO ".

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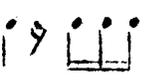
In conclusion, -- it is the style of the piece which must decide which manner of " inequality " we are to use. It would be just as unmusical to play all the notes unequally as it would be never to make any of them unequal. To go further (cf. ENGRAMELLE), the melodic shape of a piece can leave room for various kinds of inequality. We must, therefore, avoid developing a fixed system.

Above all else, a long period of reflexion is essential: we must grasp the exact rhythmic pattern of the piece to be played, understand its melodic meaning, steep ourselves in the spirit of an era passionately devoted to freedom and sensitivity. Rather than a literal application of the rules of performance, it is a personal interpretation which is demanded of the player, an interpretation which must always be guided by "good taste". I will now go back to the expression "Personal Interpretation" used in the last sentence. So far, I have deliberately confined myself to remarks of a general nature. Having made a long study over many years of the various kinds of inequality in the light of the texts I have just quoted, I will now try to formulate some general principles, the fruits of my personal experience, leaving the application of them to the good taste of the player who wishes to profit by them.

Tempo indications are very vague and this makes it difficult to establish a connection between the rhythmic style of a work and the type of inequality one should choose. What follows here is merely an attempt and is intended to serve only as a general guide.

- OVERTURES : rhythm written  = 
- OVERTURE-TYPE Pieces (heroic style): rhythm written  = 
 endings  or  =  or 
- QUICK PIECES : a) Characteristic rhythm :  = no inequality.
 The same remark is valid for " Basses de Trompette ou de Cromorne " where unequal playing holds back the tempo if one wishes to give the reed time to speak. One must be content to give a slight stress to the strong beats.
 b) Where the rhythm is not characteristic :
 - in many " Plein-Jeux " :  =  or 
 - always stress the rhythm in endings where there is an anticipation: 
- PIECES IN COMPOUND-DOUBLE TIME (6/8, 6/4) : The inequality will affect the length or duration of the notes :  
This is a question of articulation
- MODERATELY RHYTHMICAL PIECES : Here the choice becomes difficult, since the different types of inequality could all be used, even combined. " Good Taste " (same thing again !) remains the only rule.
- PIECES " OF AN EXPRESSIVE CHARACTER " : Here one would give preference to
 - " grouping " : 
 or - " stressed phrasing " :  

It is important to remember that the dotting of rests is valid also for a group of notes ; thus :

 =  or more, according to the style of the piece.
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