On Hemiolic Resonance

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At the opening of the second movement, Andante, from Haydn's Sinfonia

Concertante in B-flat, Op. 84, the solo violin and the solo bassoon's two groups of

three eighths contain two falling leaps (see the square brackets in Example 1). The

falling leaps suggest the beginning of a hemiola, but what ensues—groups of three

eighths, slurred as such—does not confirm that impression. Genuine hemiolas are

nowhere in sight or sound, not even when the opening theme is repeated

throughout the movement.

Nonetheless, the two falling leaps do project at least a preliminary sense of a

hemiola—of three groups of two spanning two measures in triple meter (or, as here,

spanning a single measure of compound time; see Example 2). That is what I call

hemiolic resonance—the suggestion of a hemiola that may or may not be reified later

on.[1]

An idiom similar to Haydn's appears in two of Mozart's middle-period

symphonic works. In the first instance, during the opening movement of the

Keyboard Concerto in E-flat, K. 449 (Example 3a), the subordinate theme *almost*

bypasses hemiolic resonance completely by placing its two successive groups of

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article, "Metrical Displacement and Metrically Dissonant Hemiolas" (2013) spotted
incomplete, preparatory hemiolas in several of my examples.

three quarter notes under slurs, and by assigning its falling leaps to the beginning of each group (Example 3b). Something like a "hemiolic bump" is nonetheless palpable, since the smaller groups of two falling quarter notes are also subliminally active as such (see the square brackets in Example 3b).

But in the first movement of Mozart's B-flat Symphony, K. 319 (Example 4a), a hemiola suggests itself more explicitly during the corresponding subordinate theme — by emphasizing the rising steps of a very similar idiom (see the square brackets in Example 4b). To be sure, the idiom's falling leaps (which arise out of its succession of rising steps) try in this instance to predominate by following the notated meter, and they almost prevent the hemiolic rising steps from coming into their own. And so they almost prevent the hemiola from coming to fruition. Yet the hemiola is

nonetheless present — resonant — if a little covertly.

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In the opening theme of Mozart's Keyboard Sonata in F, K. 332, bars 5-8, the antimetrical falling leaps seem unmistakably hemiolic (see the square brackets in Example 5a), even though Mozart contradicts them by placing greater, more metrical emphasis on the rising fourths that connect the falling leaps — see the curly brackets in Example 5b). As it happens, both hemiolic interpretations would have to be considered resonant "shadow hemiolas" since their presence is overridden by an underlying descending third, a^1-g^1-f^1, which spans bars 5, 6, and 7[a] (see Example 5b)

in a most expressive way.[2] Note the heavy agogic accent that accrues to g^1 in bar 5

and to G, in the left hand, in bar 7: It anchors the linear progression a-g-f and its later

repetitions.

Johannes Brahms, treating idioms similar to those in Mozart's K. 332 in the

opening Allegro non troppo from his Second Symphony, offers full-fledged hemiolas

early on.[3] In K.332, Mozart offers genuine hemiolas only later on, in bars 62-67[a] and

similar measures (Example 5c). These last-named are contraction hemiolas,[4]

intended to accelerate the harmonic rhythm from one-to-the-bar in the subordinate

theme (bars 41-63) to three-to-the-bar (bar 66), in preparation for the arrival of the

closing complex of themes (bars 71ff.).

In sum, it is not entirely clear, even in retrospect, whether Mozart intended

bars 5-6 and 7-8 to be heard as hemiolas, at any level, or as two groups of three

quarter notes, along the lines of K. 319 (see again Example 4b); his slurs cover three

quarter notes—i.e., one measure—at a time (Example 5a). In any case, Mozart's

hemiolic resonance remains unmistakable. One composer who may have regarded

Mozart's falling leaps as hemiolic was Haydn, who borrowed extensively from the

opening movement of K. 332 in the opening Allegro from the Symphony No. 98, in B-

flat (Example 7a).[5] Within the context of cut time, Haydn slurs the rising leaps but

places more thematic and metrical emphasis on the falling leaps, which he sets in

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[2] I thank John Reef (private communication) for this observation.

[3] One might argue that Brahms's hemiolas here represent changes of meter, what the eighteenth-century theorists (and some present-day theorists) have referred to as *imbroglios*; see below.

[4] For an extended discussion of contraction hemiolas, along with expansion hemiolas and cadential hemiolas, see Willner 1991.

[5] Haydn is said to have learned of Mozart's death while composing the Symphony.

motion with a weighty upbeat, Bb, at the close of bar 17 (see the curly brackets in

Example 1b). One might be tempted to say that Haydn's metrical articulation of his

falling leaps provides internal evidence, from the pinnacle of Viennese classicism, of

Mozart's hemiolic articulation of his corresponding leaps in K. 332; hence the

legitimacy of reading at least shadow hemiolas in K. 332. But that may be going too

far: Mozart deliberately offers only scant hemiolic information—at most, hemiolic

resonance—and then allows us to interpret his enigmatic passage as best we can.

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A special instance of hemiolic resonance can be observed in Haydn's reliance on

motivic fragmentation in his symphonic menuets. In prospect, the resulting

fragments coalesce into climactic hemiolas just before the close of the menuet; see

the square brackets in Example 8, from the "Oxford" Symphony, No. 92, in G.[6] In

some cases, as in the "Oxford" Symphony, we barely hear the suggestion of a hemiola

at the outset: Haydn reserves the foreshortening, contracting, and intensifying effect

of the hemiola for the very end of the menuet.

But in other menuets, as in that of the Symphony No. 99 in E-flat (Example 9),

the hemiolic resonance is unmistakable right at the outset (see the square brackets

in Example 9).[7] The two quarter-note fragments that are suggested but not quite

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[6] Danuta Mirka (2009) refers to such fragments, when they become the constituents
of a hemiola or an *imbroglio* (see below), as *parallelisms* (137).

[7] A similar but simpler thematic and hemiolic setting may be found In the Menuet
from Haydn's Symphony No. 81 in G (not shown). Indeed, the last-named appears to

established as independent motives coalesce into two displaced hemiolas at the climax of the Menuet (bars 52-56; see again the square brackets in Example 9), where they are set against an undisplaced hemiola in the violas, cellos, and basses. The hemiolas are formed by those two-note fragments that were parts of the three-note motives that were originally articulated across the barline in bars 1-2 and their many varied repetitions throughout.

A special case of hemiolic resonance occurs in the second (and last) movement, Finale: Presto, from Haydn's miniature keyboard Sonata in D, Hob . XVI: 51 (London No. 61; Example 10). Here one expects to encounter a hemiola soon after the opening gestures because the gestures' two-note fragments are so powerfully articulated within the opening arpeggios (see the square brackets in Example 10a). Notwithstanding Haydn's slurring of three arpeggiated tones within each measure in bars 1-2, what we in fact hear as grouped is the opening upbeat and the subsequent two-tone fragment, just as we did in the Menuet of the Symphony No. 99 (Example 9), and just as we do in two movements from Beethoven's D major Keyboard Sonata, Op. 10, No. 3 (Example 11), which seems to owe something to the Haydn Sonata.[8]

But in Haydn's Sonata we expect a hemiola to occur soon after the turbulent opening gestures, given the power of its two-tone fragments, which are so intently articulated and repeated (see again the first two square brackets in Example 10a).

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be a trial run for both the Menuet from the E-flat Symphony and the Menuet from the Symphony No. 104, in D.

[8] And again, see also the Menuet from Haydn's Symphony No. 81, in G (not shown).

And indeed, the left-hand accompaniments in bars 5-8 yield just that (see the next two square brackets in Example 10a).[9]

Haydn reserves the right-hand hemiolas for the climactic measures of the Presto, which begin with the upbeat to bar 28 (Example 10b). After two groups of six quarter notes, each subdivided into two groups of three (as in bars 1-5), a vigorous, displaced contraction hemiola (beginning at the upbeat to bar 32) overlaps with an undisplaced cadential hemiola (bars 33-34; see the square brackets in Example 10b).[10]

This hemiolic climax closely resembles those in the symphonic menuet examples presented earlier (recall Examples 8 and 9), even though it is located ahead of the recapitulation, rather than near the closing double bar. All of these climactic hemiolas might also qualify as *imbroglios*—unnotated, temporary changes in meter as described by eighteenth-century theorists (who did not use the term *hemiola*, at least not in the way we do).[11] At the same time, because they are closely prepared by earlier fragments that are replete with hemiolic resonance, they also qualify as what we would call hemiolas.[12] And because (again) these thematic-metric constructs are so thoroughly prepared here by hemiolic resonance, I would argue that their hemiolic quality overrides their articulation of an imbroglio.

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[9] The two groups of six quarter notes that begin with the upbeat to bar 1 are initially articulated as two groups of three. In bars 5-8, in the left hand, they are twice reinterpreted as three groups of two.

[10] For an extended discussion of contraction and cadential hemiolas, along with expansion hemiolas, see Willner 1991.

[11] See Mirka 2009, 133-51, for a detailed account.

[12] Mirka (2009, 162) allows for the fusion of imbroglios and hemiolas. Paul Newton-Jackson (2021, 18) goes a step further and coins the term *imbroglio hemiola*.

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Turning to the Baroque instrumental repertoire, we could make a case for a genuine imbroglio in the rather speedy Largo from Handel's keyboard Suite in F-sharp minor of 1720 (Example 12). Here the three groups of two that make up the multiple voice-exchanges in bars 12-13 offer surprise intensification of an upbeat figure that was present throughout bars 9-11 (and earlier measures). In the absence of any hemiolic context or preparation, one may well hear bars 12-13 as a bona fide, unnotated and temporary change of meter, from 3/4 to 2/4, and hence as an imbroglio.[13]

Along similar lines, one could also argue for a true imbroglio in the altogether mysterious Menuet from Handel's Saul (Example 13). Here the dotted half notes in bars 1-2 are positioned against multiple voice exchanges in bars 3-6a. The voice exchanges' clear articulation of 2/4 time spills over into bar 6, a transitional measure with elements of both 2/4 and 3/4.

That Handel intended a genuine change in meter here is buttressed by a substantial borrowing—not by Handel but, for a change, from Handel—throughout the opening Allegro from Mozart's Violin Sonata in A, K. 526, whose first measure displays elements of both 6/8 and 2/4, and whose second measure is clearly in 2/4 (Example 14). Mozart's bar 3, just like Handel's bar 6, is a transitional measure that

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[13] For a detailed account of notated as well as unnotated changes of meter during the high Baroque, see Newton-Jackson 2021.

also displays elements of both 6/8 and 2/4. Consequently, in Mozart just as in

Handel, we hear a real imbroglio, not a true hemiola.

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Three remarkable examples of hemiolic resonance occur in the last movement, a

brisk Allegro, from Handel's Trio Sonata in B minor, Op. 2, No. 1, for flute, violin, and

continuo (Example 15a).[14] This resolute, fast-moving Allegro derives for the most

part from the very deliberate and mournful duet, "Why so full of grief," which Handel

reimagined several times across the five versions of the Chandos Anthem No. 6, *As

Pants the Hart* [sic], HWV 251a-e (Example 16a).

The opening ritornello of Handel's Trio Sonata movement, as a whole (bars 1-

19a), is displaced by one quarter note to the right. The opening downbeat is

occupied by a *pedal call*, an assertive bass tone that calls attention to the notated

meter even as it displaces the thematic meter by one beat to the right (see again

Example 15a). Thanks to the displacement, the closing tone of each phrase—and

that of larger and smaller entities—appears on the downbeat of its closing measure.

The upper voice begins in earnest on the second beat of bar 1 and it continues,

displaced, to the downbeat of bar 9. The hemiola in bars 1-2, as hemiolas often do,

follows the notated meter—not the displaced, thematic meter.[15] As a result, the

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[14] This is the better known version of the Trio Sonata; an alternative version, in C
minor, is scored for two violins and continuo.
[15] For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Willner 2013.

Allegro from the outset presents a conflict between the notated and displaced

meters.

Bars 1-9a constitute the *Vordersatz* of a three-part ritornello; bars 9b-13a the

Fortspinnung (borrowed from an aria by Agostino Steffani, (Example 16b);[16] and

bars 13b-19a the *Epilog* (Example 15a). The hemiolic resonance in the *Vordersatz* is

due to the incomplete way in which the hemiola of bars 1-2 is expressed, and to the

way in which the hemiola's second half (bar 2) is echoed in bar 3—as if bar 3, too,

were part of a hemiola. The hemiolic resonance in the *Fortspinnung* (Example 15b)

revolves around the flute's and the violin's incorporation of the hemiola's center—

the two quarter notes on the two sides of the barline—within their ornaments and

embellishing excursions. This last hemiolic reference may seem faint, but once

apprehended it becomes manifestly resonant.

The third instance of hemiolic resonance in Handel's Allegro occupies the

center of the developmental episode that follows the *Epilog* (bars 19-25, Example

15a; bars 22-23, Example 15b). The opening rest and the succession of two quarter

notes in bars 22-25 (and similar measure later on) echo the opening hemiola in the

same way their counterparts in bars 9-12 did. Again, that is not immediately

apparent, but quite resonant once the relation is uncovered.

Endnotes

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article, "Metrical Displacement and Metrically Dissonant Hemiolas" (2013) spotted
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[16] Roberts 2017, 318-19.

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16 Roberts 2017, 318-19.

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