

On Irregularity in Baroque Phrase Rhythm

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In his study of the Stamitz symphonies, Eugene K. Wolf devotes a chapter to the growth of the phrase in Stamitz's music and, more generally, to the evolution of eighteenth-century phrase rhythm.¹ In the course of a long footnote that describes the changing significance of periodicity at mid-century, Wolf expresses a sentiment common among eighteenth-century scholars when he writes: "Contrary to what is often assumed, a significant proportion of Baroque dances are not fully hierarchical in the proportional sense, being highly irregular at levels down to and even including the beat--this despite the fact that articulations may occur regularly every four, eight, sixteen, and thirty-two bars."

² What does Wolf mean when he says "irregular"? Is Baroque phrase rhythm really as unsystematic as the word "irregular" would seem to suggest?

There are, of course, many Baroque pieces that seem to cultivate an unpredictable rhythmic design—one thinks of the *bizarrie* in the sinfonias of Stradella and the sonatas of Corelli,³ for instance, or of Bach's and Handel's allemandes, courantes, and giges. But these do not form a majority within the body of instrumental works composed during the early decades of the eighteenth century. What may strike us as deliberately whimsical, unplanned, or improvisatory in this repertoire most often presents us instead with a blend of the patterned and the unpatterned, of the structured and the unstructured.⁴

¹ Wolf 1981, chapter 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 137, fn. 83.

³ Not to mention the *Bizarrie per camera a tre* by Giuseppe Valentini; see Barnett 1996.

⁴ Among those who have tried to capture the essence of this blend are Laurence Dreyfus (1990), Raymond Monelle (1998), and Susan McClary (2000).

Five or six large categories of real and apparent irregularity suggest themselves. First, durational articulation that changes its strategy consistently at the entrance of each new measure and sometimes even at the entrance of beats within the measure (Examples 1 and 2); such articulation is likely to have its roots in a stable tonal design, and to depend on a highly supportive and readily discernible tonal structure.⁵ Second, apparently chaotic turns of phrase that disrupt the design through their isolated occurrence (Example 3); these, more than any other idiom, may register as genuine metrical irregularities if the disturbances they bring about betray a deliberate lack of congruence between the tonal and the durational design. Third, material set in a duple meter that is more appropriately reserved for triple meter (Examples 5-8). Fourth, a deliberate emphasis on an avoidance of patterning that is due to the superimposition of irregular grouping on a large-scale duple design, or to the division of a large duple group into smaller nonduple groups (Examples 9 and 10). And fifth, thematic statements, especially those encompassing ritornellos and refrains, whose suffixes, extensions, repetitions, and echoes reside at different levels of structure (Examples 11 and 12). A sixth category, the cumulative grouping of uneven segments, subphrases, and phrases that occurs frequently in allemandes, giges, courantes, and fugues will require a separate study.⁶

⁵ This strategy fits Wolf's description most closely.

⁶ Although it is this sixth category that we associate most closely with irregularity in Baroque phase rhythm, its characteristically uneven additive grouping serves principally to support the substance and the length of the keyboard suite's principal movements. It goes hand in hand with the tonal complexity of the allemande, courante, and gigue. The prominent position of the allemande, courante, and gigue at the head and at the tail end of the suite magnifies considerably the impact of such grouping.

The temporality of fugues is in some ways more straightforward than one might imagine yet even more deliberately manipulated than one might expect. See my observations on the Fugue from Handel's E minor keyboard Suite (1720) in my dissertation, chapters 2 and 4.

In this paper I trace the five types of irregularity in several keyboard works of Bach, Handel, and Couperin, and in a few orchestral pieces by Vivaldi, Telemann, Corrette, and Blavet. Although I take refuge in the comforts of a systematic approach, I also go to some length to show how the phrase rhythm of each piece embodies a dialectic between the stable and the unstable, and between the foreseeable and the unexpected. Such a flexible approach is essential because each composer—in fact, each composition—offers a unique amalgam of these opposing rhythmic qualities. The paper is accordingly intended to offer not a comprehensive survey but rather an analytically suggestive, preliminary report.⁷

I. Durational strategies that change at the level of the measure and the beat

The Allegro movement from Handel's G minor Violin Sonata--previously known as the G minor Oboe Sonata but recently reassigned to the violin--begins with an octave descent from g^2 to g^1 (Example 1a). The time span which the descent occupies—four bars that overlap in the middle of the fourth measure with the next four-bar group—would seem to lend itself to an even articulation in pairs of half-notes. Yet a pair of rhythmic reductions, highly normalized (Examples 1b and 1c), and a pair of tonal reductions (Examples 2a and 2b) reveal a curious situation.⁸ Tonally, the descent is quite unpatterned: $\hat{8}$ enters in bar 1; $\hat{7}$, $\hat{6}$, and $\hat{5}$ occupy bar 2; $\hat{4}$ takes up all of bar 3; and $\hat{3}$, $\hat{2}$

⁷ I purposely exclude metrical displacement from the topics under discussion. I deal with metrical displacement at length in my dissertation, chapters 2 and 3. As I show in those chapters, displacement is more often than not a regular feature of each meter.

⁸ Rothstein 1990b describes the process of normalization, which restores the time spans of underlying tones to its proper length, in detail.

, and $\hat{1}$ span the first three beats of bar 4 (see again Example 1a). Durationally, on the other hand, the middleground (Examples 1b and 1c) suggests that the theme contains its share of patterning, after all. The opening pair of tones, $\hat{8}$ and $\hat{7}$, and the closing three tones— $\hat{3}$, $\hat{2}$, and $\hat{1}$ —are all quarter notes, whereas the intervening notes— $\hat{6}$, $\hat{5}$, and $\hat{4}$, the developmental core of the theme—are half-note syncopes, displaced through suspension. The idiosyncratic rhythms of the surface, then, reflect the absence of patterning that marks the *tonal* middleground. Through close interplay with the putative inner voice—that is, by means of compound melody expressed by the upper voice alone—each note of the octave descent acquires its own distinct embellishing figure (see the numbers with carets atop example 1a); no two notes are composed out in the same way. The bass is only a little more stable.

Thematically unpatterned octave descents are common throughout the late Baroque instrumental repertoire, not only in the key of G minor but (perhaps even more so) in the key of D minor, where they establish a family of unpredictable but artful descents. (William Renwick describes such a familial situation in his book, *Analyzing Fugue*.⁹) If the articulation of the descending octave and the durational disposition of the supporting bass in this instance both strike us as rhythmically irregular, that is because they are *unpatterned*: Handel ensures that the tonal and durational elaboration of almost every principal tone will be different from the elaboration of the preceding or following tone. There is nothing really *irregular* about the descent: One might say that its avoidance of patterning, as such, expresses a distinct and holistic thematic idea that holds the entire group of discrete motives together. The idea itself, as a basic compositional idea, is regular enough.

⁹ Renwick 1995, pp. 45-46.

II. Isolated irregularities resulting from a lack of congruence between the tonal and rhythmic structures

Even if we continue to seek a union between our metrically articulated durational perspective and our hierarchically ordered tonal orientation (at least as an analytical desideratum or an analytical tool), we shall sooner or later come across examples of genuine metrical irregularity in pieces whose durational outlines don't quite correspond to the flow of their tonal structure. Clashes between counterpoint and duration occur when pivotal turns of phrase appear either on the “wrong” beat or, having begun on the right beat, continue for too long, all the way to the wrong beat or beats, upsetting the flow of the piece without offering the benefit of a salient reason for the imbalance they bring about. Two instances of misplaced dominants occur in the ambitious Allemande from Handel's early D minor Keyboard Suite, published in 1733 but composed in Hamburg around 1703, when Handel was about eighteen years old (Example 3). It would be most helpful if we looked at this Allemande through the lens of a later and much more mature Allemande that reuses some of the same material, namely the Allemande from Handel's F minor Suite, published in 1720 and composed probably sometime after 1715 (Example 4a). The opening four bars of this later Allemande show a fairly consistent grouping in one-bar segments and two-bar subphrases. The pace at which the counterpoint between the outer voices flows—the *basic pace*, as I have named it in several earlier papers—comprises quarter notes throughout bars 1 and 2, in keeping with the norms of the compound 4/4¹⁰ (see the reductions in Examples 4b and 4c). The basic pace

¹⁰ Whereas the compound 4/4 as a rule shows a basic pace of quarter notes (which is subject to expansion and contraction), the simple or small 4/4 shows a basic pace of half notes. For a detailed treatment of these norms see Willner 1998 and 1999, and my dissertation, chapter 2.

accelerates to eighth notes during bar 3, but it already begins to slow—to the original quarter notes—before the end of the measure, on the fourth beat. Its deceleration serves to prepare for the arrival of Eb, the dominant of the mediant, in the middle of bar 4.¹¹

(Examples 4b and 4c also bring in two paces that I shall discuss later: the fast *figural pace* of eighth notes, realized by the thematic spinning at the surface, and the moderate, half-note *obbligato pace*, realized by the slow-moving harmonies of the underlying progressions. The figural pace is taken over by the basic pace when the basic pace accelerates, and the obbligato pace is taken over by the basic pace, in similar fashion, when the basic pace expands. Like the hypermeter of the 1710's and 1720's, the obbligato pace comes and goes, and it tends to grow as the composition evolves.)

The F-minor Allemande's confirmation of the mediant, Ab, is still very far away: it takes place in the middle of bar 9. In bar 4, in order to begin the tonicization of Ab with an emphatic caesura on its dominant, Eb, Handel slows the basic pace again, to movement in half notes. This second deceleration, quite lyrical in effect, places a great deal of emphasis on Eb, and it allows Eb to arrive, persuasively, at the metrically weighty middle of the measure. One might therefore say that because the basic pace has slowed to movement in half notes just when tonal emphasis was needed, tonal and durational emphases are in complete agreement. The brackets in Example 4b show how this deceleration also allows Handel to recompose and to enlarge the opening upbeat of the Allemande several times over.

Things are very different in the early D minor Allemande, whose first reprise is

¹¹ For detailed discussions of the basic pace see Willner 1998 and 1999, and my dissertation. I did not raise the issue of pace in my discussion of the G minor Violin Sonata because that is the rare Handel piece composed in the middle style. The middle style is marked by a flexibility of pacing much greater than that of the high style; see Willner 2006.

reproduced in Example 3a. Here the basic pace, which is defined in bars 1 and 2, also follows the norms of the compound 4/4 and progresses in quarter notes (see the pace reduction in Example 3b) but it almost defers to a strong obligato pace of half notes, which acts as a stabilizing temporal counterforce to the busy sixteenths of the surface. Other things being equal the presence of this stabilizing counterforce would be advantageous, but the prominence of the underlying half notes in bars 1 and 2 (so unlike the understatement of the half notes at the beginning of the F minor Allemande) compounds the D minor Allemande's difficulties by adding a strict metrical backdrop against which the later irregularities, or rather peculiarities, appear in sharp relief.¹²

The progression of the outer voices in bar 3 of the D minor Allemande carries no trace of either quarter notes or half notes. Instead, it presents an underlying acceleration to eighth notes that bears striking resemblance to the progression of the outer voices in bar 3 of the F minor Allemande (Example 4). Not unlike the corresponding progression in the F minor Allemande, the progression here leads to the dominant of the mediant (in this case C) on the second beat of bar 4, in preparation for a later turn to the mediant, F; see Example 3b. The present acceleration is much more precipitous than its counterpoint in the F minor Allemande because it leaves the pronounced half-note obligato pace hanging in mid-air. And the D minor Allemande's deceleration, which occurs at the turn of bar 4, is unsure: Handel does not introduce a preparatory surface deceleration on the fourth beat of bar 3 as he would later do—with great subtlety—in the F minor Allemande (Example 4, especially 4b).¹³ Instead, Handel waits until the first beat of bar 4, where he brings

¹²It is not often that Bach's, Handel's, or Couperin's allemandes emphasize their underlying half notes so insistently right at the outset (regardless of whether such half notes represent the basic pace or a slower, less structural *obligato pace*).

¹³That Handel does project such deceleration at a deeper level is beside the point.

back the quarter notes of the basic pace. The goal of the progression, C, enters on the second beat, and the mediant, F, arrives in the middle of the measure (see again Example 3b).

Without a clear-cut deceleration to movement in half notes that would allow for a convincing composed-out $\frac{6}{4} - \frac{5}{3}$ succession over C across the first half of bar 4,¹⁴ the relationship between the second and the third beats of bar 4 becomes durationally and tonally nebulous. As things stand—a D minor chord at the downbeat, a quarter-note basic pace, and an impending mediant at the middle of the measure—Handel has no choice but to squeeze in the C major chord at the second beat of bar 4. It is here that one of the Allemande's most serious complications arises: The implicit $\frac{6}{4} - \frac{5}{3}$ suggests that a cadence will lead to F, the mediant, on the third beat, but there is no time for the progression to resolve to it in the way a cadential $\frac{6}{4} - \frac{5}{3}$ succession would usually do.¹⁵ Not only does the $\frac{6}{4}$ consequently anticipate F (instead of suggesting the impending dominant, C₃⁵): The Allemande's texture, design, and thematic environment all change on the second beat, on what sounds like I₄⁶, instead of on the third beat. This contradicts the durational expectations set up by the fairly regular design of bars 1-3. The resulting contradiction is intensified since the F chord, which arrives on the second beat of bar 1, turns out in retrospect to be not the expected mediant but an ancillary chord in a sequential expansion that begins at that very moment, on the third beat of bar 4 (see again the reductions in Examples 3b and 3c).

With all this in mind, one is quite justified in saying that the cumulative impact of

¹⁴ Or, alternatively, for a convincing quarter-note displacement to the right, which is common in the compound 4/4.

¹⁵ In this case that would mean a $\frac{5}{3}$ over C on the third beat and an F chord on the fourth beat, displacing the Allemande's metrics by a quarter note to the right—not entirely unusual, but not very common either.

the change of design on the second beat of bar 4 and the entrance of the developmental sequence on the third beat of bar 4 betrays a tentative and unfocused coordination of tonal progression and metrical articulation. The succession of two unexpected and misplaced events—on the second and fourth beats of bar 4—is as disruptive and disjunctive a gesture as one is likely to find in all of Handel’s instrumental works; one is certainly reminded of Mattheson’s account of Handel’s early style: “At that time he composed very long, long airs, and really interminable cantatas, which had neither the right kind of skill nor of taste . . . he knew very little of melody until he came to the Hamburg operas.”¹⁶ This, then, is an example of true metrical irregularity, not least in the sense that it leaves the ear no time in which to absorb the ongoing tonal changes, to connect them with what has come before, and to assimilate their substantial long-range implications.¹⁷

Undaunted, Handel does not run away from the awkward effect of these two metrical malapropisms. On the contrary, he turns their effect into a thematic idea that is to be developed in the passages that follow. Taking advantage of both the inadvertent counterstress on the second beat of bar 4 and the metrical emphases built into the sequential expansion that follows, Handel highlights the second and the fourth beats of the next measure—bar 5—through a series of chordal and intervallic counterstresses in the right hand (see the arrows in Example 3a),¹⁸ and he introduces the dominant’s dominant, E, on the second beat of bar 7 (see Example 3b). By way of preparing the impending arrival of that E, Handel reintroduces in bar 6 the accelerated and persistent figural pace of

¹⁶ Mattheson 1740, quoted in Hogwood 1984, p. 23; see also Hogwood 2005, p. 51.

¹⁷ Admittedly, a slow and lyrical performance can mitigate the Allemande’s peculiarities; cf. Fernando De Luca’s at http://xoomer.alice.it/gfh/sala_del_cembalo/audio/handel-suite-re-min-hwv448-02.htm

¹⁸ On counterstress, see Rothstein 1995 and Willner 1998.

eighths that occupied bar 3 (see Example 3c). Notwithstanding all these efforts, things come to a head—incoordinately—at the turn of bar 7. Having prepared for the second-beat entrance of the E major chord so elaborately, Handel allows the E major seventh chord to linger from the counterstressed second beat all the way to the end of the measure. There is consequently no harmonic or contrapuntal motion in bar 7 to balance the rapid contrapuntal rhythm of bar 6; the dominant, A, arrives only in bar 8. Under the circumstances, the extension of E across most of bar 7 generates an odd, incongruous aural effect: It brings the Allemande's phrase rhythm to a near-halt by suspending its pacing apparatus just when one would expect it to engage in cadential acceleration and intensification. In other words, the acceleration to quarter notes and eighths that takes place during the early beats of bar 6 leads not to further cadential acceleration (the norm in such situations) but to a moratorium on such acceleration—to a composed-out fermata. The fermata appears precisely at the spot where an intense tonal movement forward, by way of an additional, nested harmonic progression confirming the dominant's tonicization, is called for. Very rarely are Handel's tonally driven metrics *that* unsettled.

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III. Material for triple meter that is set in duple meter

Similarly disruptive irregularities may sometimes be found in pieces composed in either the compound 4/4 or the simple 4/4, when the composer has chosen to introduce or to work out materials that could more appropriately be set in 3/4 time. This is a situation unique to 4/4 time: In triple meter, hemiolas that rely on duple subgrouping (e.g., three sets of two quarter notes in time) abound, and a generally hemiolic atmosphere consequently prevails, with the result that disruptions occasioned by an unnotated duple

meter do not represent a significant issue. (Nor does an issue arise when the simple 4/4 gives way to unnotated 3/2, as opposed to unnotated 3/4, for the simple reason that the status of each strong and weak beat within the enlarged, unnotated measure of 3/2 is hardly ever in question.¹⁹) If, however, the music in 4/4 time does suggest 3/4 time in any way, many questions regarding the relative metrical status of each beat immediately come up, and the ensuing uncertainties occasion a good deal of aural confusion.

The opening ritornello from Vivaldi's A minor Violin Concerto, No. 6 from *L'estro armonico*, Op. 3, illustrates; see the reproduction in Example 5a and the annotated quotations in Example 5b. Even a casual aural familiarity with the music suggests there is something “funny” about it—not an inept, awkward, or ungainly feature, but rather an aural bump similar to the rhythmic hurdle that Charles Burkhart has identified at the beginning of displacements in 4/4 time.²⁰ Vivaldi's is not a gentle bump by any means, yet its precise origin and extent cannot easily be traced. One at first simply has a hunch that a measure or two of unnotated 3/4 lurk in the opening measures, namely in the ritornello's *Vordersatz* and perhaps in its *Epilog* as well. Unlike many Vivaldi ritornellos, the ritornello at hand divides in straightforward fashion into a brief *Vordersatz*, bars 1-3^a, a plainly sequential *Fortspinnung*, bars 3^b-7^a, and a chromatically inflected *Epilog*, bars 7^b-12. This division's bluntness—so uncommon in Vivaldi—only enhances the ritornello's metrical peculiarities.

¹⁹ For an elaborate example of unnotated 3/2 time in the simple 4/4 without help from 3/4 time see my analysis of the Allemande from Handel's E major Suite in chapter 2 of my dissertation, pp. 174-78, Examples 2.22-2.23.

²⁰ Burkhart 1994, p. 3: “a kind of rhythmic bump, gentle or otherwise.” Hans-Joachim Marx suggests that the fugal subject of the second movement, Allegro, from Handel's A minor Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 4, could be read in $\underline{\quad}$ rather than in the notated 4/4; see Marx 1998, p. 56, *Tabelle* 3.

Bars 1-2. The simplest explanation for the ritornello's bumpiness is that Vivaldi is buying time during the second half of bar 1 and during the first half of bar 2 by stating the same descending-third figure, $c^3-b^2-a^2$, three times in a row without regard to the repetition's metrical consequences. The repetition stops only when it is time to descend to c^2 , at the approach to bar 3. Plain though it is, the threefold statement of $c^3-b^2-a^2$ contradicts the twofold statement of the eighth-note pair, c^3-c^3 , which takes up the first half of bar 1; it leaves us unsure as to what the metrics of the second, third, and fourth beats of bar 2 will be. These two features—the threefold motivic statement and the mild jolt occasioned by the ensuing metrical uncertainty—represent the dual bumps of the *Vordersatz*. And to my mind they are sufficiently intense to invite a reading more elaborate than the “metrical filling in” explanation.

What Vivaldi might have been trying to do was to inject a note of artifice, borrowed from the complexities of the high style, into the blunt discourse of the middle style and into the blunt thematicism of his ritornello. Such mixtures are as common as they are extravagant (one thinks of Couperin's low style, whose working-out is anything but low), but whether Vivaldi's mixture here works as elegantly as it might is a matter of personal judgment.²¹ The peculiarity of Vivaldi's imported 3/4—at least for our organically trained hearing—resides in its sudden entrance, its prompt abandonment, and its relatively scant repetition or elaboration in the course of the Allegro as a whole. That is why it continues to sound bumpy, rather than merely dissonant, in the context of our metrical and hypermetrical entrainment.²²

²¹ For an extended account of stylistic mixture vis-à-vis high, middle, and low see Willner 2006 and the detailed analysis of the Allegro from Handel's Concerto Grosso in G minor, Op. 6, No. 6, in my dissertation, chapter 5.

²² Recall my remarks about Handel's G minor Allegro's opening theme (and Examples 1-

My first reading, on the top staff of Example 5b, makes use of the *incremental periodicity* I described in detail in my dissertation.²³ Although no periodicity seems to be in sight here, and although the length of the segments in question is small, the principle of consistent increments in length is nonetheless at play: Each group in bars 1-2 is longer than the preceding group. An unnotated measure of 2/4—the insistently repeated c^3 s—enters first; then, two measures of unnotated 3/4 follow—the threefold statement of $c^3-b^2-a^1$, which crosses the barline into bar 2, and lastly the descent to c^2 , which takes up the remaining three beats of bar 2. The articulation of 4/4 time finally begins in earnest in bar 3. The sense of an “earned 4/4 time,” built from the ground up, is unmistakable at this point, despite an idiomatic displacement that takes place later in bar 3 (more on that presently). Like all results of incremental strategy, the “true 4/4” in bars 3ff. sounds as if it were the reward for the preparatory work in 2/4 and 3/4 time in bars 1 and 2.

Two additional readings, however abstract they may seem to be, suggest themselves within the context of Baroque metrical idioms. The reading shown at the top staff in Example 5b (see the bracket under the staff) proposes that notwithstanding our preliminary orientation in duple meter (which is due to the idiomatic announcement of the four-eighths rhythm), we hear a hemiola, implying a large measure of 3/2, superimposed atop the unnotated 3/4 of bar 1^b and bar 2.

The reading offered on the second staff of Example 5b (again, see the bracket under the staff) is more speculative. It depicts the *effect* of the music with less concern for

2): The music of the middle style does not realize or follow any one underlying pace for very long. Along the same lines, it does not oblige the composer to elaborate on—let alone explain—material or rhythmic complexities that may emerge from time to time.

²³ See the analyses of the Allegro from Handel’s Concerto Grosso in E minor, Op. 6, No. 3, in chapters 1 and 5 of my dissertation.

what might have caused that effect. It proposes that we could hear both bars 1 and 2 in $3/4$ time with the last beat of the first $3/4$ measure extended by two statements of $c^3-b^2-a^2$. The result is a larger, split hemiola, which encompasses both measures and hints at $3/2$ time. Such split hemiolas are not uncommon in this repertoire.²⁴

But in the final analysis the metrics of this passage may well remain elusive. Vivaldi's bevy of repeated notes and repeated descending-third figures is simply not the sort of figural passagework that is well suited for rhythmic or thematic artifice. Within the framework of the middle style the collection of repeated notes and repeated figures can hardly be worked out with the kind of contrapuntal complexity it requires.²⁵ How, then, can we hear bars 1-2 without breaking our redaction down into a series of fragmented and disjointed interpretations that cannot be reconciled or reconnected hierarchically? Since both interpretations are based on durational idioms, perhaps we can keep both in mind and oscillate between them in somewhat the same way Marianne Kielian-Gilbert moves between different tonal readings of complex contrapuntal passages.²⁶ I shall elaborate on this notion later, when we look at several different explanations for sustained irregularity in a Telemann Concerto.

Lest it be said that so close a reading of Vivaldi's ritornello represents analytical overkill, I observe that the implication of $3/4$ time is a feature Vivaldi goes on to cultivate, however briefly, at the corresponding spot of the *Epilog*, in bars 8 and 9. Here $3/4$ time

²⁴ For examples, see Corrigan 1992. I offer several examples in Willner 1996a.

²⁵ Handel, Op. 6, No. 7, II—a fugue whose subject is made up mainly of repeated notes—is the exception that proves the rule. A composition that also contains problematic artifice centering on repeated notes is the Fugue in A minor from Mozart's Suite in C, K. 399.

²⁶ Kielian-Gilbert 2003.

resurfaces with the Neapolitan inflections of the *Epilog*'s cadential voice leading (see the lowest staves of Example 5b and the brackets underneath those staves). Looking first at the preceding *Fortspinnung* (bars 3^b-7^a, Example 5a), we see that it is displaced in its entirety to the middle of the measure, as *Fortspinnungen* in 4/4 time often are.²⁷ It extends from the middle of bar 3 to the middle of bar 7. The *Epilog* begins at bar 7^b, its initial measures (bars 7^b-10^a) serving to move the displaced 4/4 of the *Fortspinnung* back into the Allegro's notated 4/4. The two readings presented in the lower staves of Example 5b show how the transformation is carried out with the help of two intervening measures of 3/4 time. The difference between the readings is more apparent than real: It reflects different ways of hearing the metrical articulation of the climactic bb² that flanks the two sides of the barline at bar 9. In both readings it is the half-note d², in the second half of bar 9, that provides the metrical bump, impressing upon us the presence of 3/4 time across the beats just preceding.

Were Vivaldi's Concerto cast in the high style one could search its solo episodes and developmental discourse for additional and more revealing clues regarding the provenance of the ritornello's metrical bumps. But the middle style places its composers under no obligation to elaborate on the music's idiosyncrasies. Indeed, some of the most inventive introductory gestures across Vivaldi's extensive instrumental oeuvre occasion little by way of follow-up during the music's later discourse.

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That 3/4 time *does* figure prominently in the A minor Concerto's ritornello is supported by the use that two French composers, Michel Corrette and Michel Blavet,

²⁷ See my dissertation, chapter 2, pp. 87-88, Example 2.30.

made of the same basic material. The A minor Concerto (which, along with the rest of *L'estro armonico* was published by Etienne Roger in Amsterdam in 1711) was highly popular in Paris, and it influenced the *concertato* writing of several composers there.²⁸ The Corrette and Blavet borrowings from the Concerto are reproduced in Examples 6 and 7, and their outlines are set against Vivaldi's in Example 8. (Both French pieces should be reasonably familiar, at least to Baroque enthusiasts, having been recorded relatively often since the early days of the Baroque revival during the 1950's and 1960's, and also during the more recent era of historically informed performance.) A quick glance at Examples 6-8 will disclose that Corrette and Blavet take over both Vivaldi's repeated-notes motive and his descending-third figure, rearranging them in a variety of permutations and combinations. And it will disclose that, without compromising the animate and sanguine quality of Vivaldi's discourse, both Corrette and Blavet choose 3/4 time for their meter. A plain 3/4 it is, with no durational complications of any sort—not even a hemiola.

Oddly enough, it appears to have become the task of Georg Philip Telemann, whose penchant for problematizing the metrics of his concertos we shall soon encounter, to simplify and clarify the rhythms of Vivaldi's Concerto while maintaining Vivaldi's 4/4 time. In the fourth movement from his D major Concerto for Trumpet and Strings TWV 51: D 7, Telemann takes over the first two measures of Vivaldi's ritornello (Example 8b). But instead of stating the descending third (in this instance $f\sharp^2-e^2-d^2$) three times across bars 1 and 2, Telemann substitutes a generic run of sixteenths, on the third and fourth beat of bar 2, for the third statement of the descending third $f\sharp^2-e^2-d^2$ (see the bracket atop Example 8b). Gone are the pleasant bumps of Vivaldi's theme and their overlay of triple meter. Perhaps Telemann wanted to place the very complicated metrics of the corresponding measures in the second movement of his Concerto in relief by showing

²⁸This influence seems to have first been described in Paillard and Lambert 1958.

uncharacteristic restraint in the fourth movement.²⁹

IV. Irregular division of duple grouping; superimposition of irregular grouping and odd numbers of measures on a duple design

For a very different and much more controlled and studied kind of irregularity let us turn to the première partie, the *servant de Rondeau*, of "Le gondoles de Délos" from the Twenty-third Ordre of François Couperin's Pièces de clavecin (Examples 9a and 9b). The first reprise divides into an antecedent and a consequent, each eight bars long. Couperin initially leads us to believe that two-bar groups might prevail: The upper voice descends from the high f^2 in bar 1 to a^2 in bar 6 at the rate of one tone per measure, and the design changes only very slightly at the turn of bar 3. In the absence of signals to the contrary, we infer a duple design. Sixteenth notes, however, migrate in improvisatory fashion from the left hand's accompaniments to the right hand's melody at the turn of bar 4, where the two hands begin to go their separate ways (see the numbers atop and under the central system in Example 9a). We now realize that a three-bar group has just concluded. From bar 4 on, the right hand outlines a 2 + 3 division of the remaining five measures, while the left hand shows a 3 + 2 division. The entire eight-bar antecedent therefore divides into 3 + 2 + 3 in the melody, and into 3 + 3 + 2 in the bass (see again the numeric annotations in Example 8a). The consequent displays a somewhat lesser irregularity since both melody and accompaniment agree on a 3 + 2 + 3 division.³⁰

²⁹ In the absence of other parallelisms between Vivaldi's and Telemann's ritornellos, one could consider the resemblance between their opening measures an instance of two composers drawing on the same thematic stock. This sensible argument has no bearing on the validity of my observations, however.

³⁰ During one's first hearing (or during an imagined first hearing), it is only at the turn of bar 5—when the sixteenths introduced by the melody in bar 4 continue uninterrupted into

In the course of the second reprise, and during the *petite reprise* which concludes the première partie, Couperin puts the same material to different use, articulating each eight-bar phrase as a pair of symmetrical four-bar subphrases (Example 9b). On account of the mildly duple signals he had sent out at the beginning of the first reprise, we might have suspected all along that "Le gondoles" would eventually turn foursquare. The delay in Couperin's realization of our expectations is by no means unusual: It is a powerful and sustained undercurrent of triple grouping throughout the instrumental repertoire of the late Baroque.

* * *

The long-range implication and realization of duple grouping in nonduple surroundings is hardly confined to triple groupings in the music of the late Baroque. The repertoire's frequent but brief abandonment of a modest periodic grid typically and quite idiomatically promotes a variety of irregular subgroupings of eight-bar phrases, especially in lighter instrumental works. Divisions of eight involving groups of five are particularly common: There are many instances in the music of Bach and Handel in which the fifth measure of an opening eight-bar phrase is denied a strong emphasis. The sixth measure consequently introduces either a mild rhythmic jolt or some metrical confusion, or both. Later on, as the piece evolves, the proper duple emphasis is restored as a matter of course. Example 10, from the closing Allegro of Handel's C minor Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 8, illustrates.

The Allegro's first reprise, in keeping with the lightness and brevity characteristic of closing movements, is only eight bars long. A point of tonal articulation, V-I, marks the boundary between bar 2 and bar 3, but Handel facetiously overrides the concurrent

bar 5—that one becomes aware that some form of non-duple grouping prevails in bars 1-6.

thematic articulation on top: Since much the same falling figure occupies bars 2, 3, and 4, he can deny the sense of melodic caesura at the turn of bar 3. Thanks to the tonal articulation in the bass, we're still aware that the caesura exists at a deeper thematic level, and that it is simply not expressed at the surface.

The first thematic caesura having been dissembled, we can expect a clearly articulated caesura at the turn of bar 5, atop the bass's brief halt on the dominant of the mediant. But the rising-third figure that enters on the third beat of bar 4 is repeated all the way to the end of bar 6. Again, thanks to the tonal design we know that a caesura was to have been expressed here, but that it had been elided in the foreground through the absence of differentiation between the thematic materials on the two sides of the barline. Only at the close of bar 6 do all the voices halt simultaneously, on III, and offer us a short respite. An underlying division of $8 = 2 + 2 + 2 + 2$, then, is expressed as $2 + 4 + 2$ or, more radically (depending very much on the performance), as $6 + 2$. The reason Handel follows so devious a procedure has to do with the Allegro's location at the end of the Concerto: As the sixth and last in an otherwise somber succession of melancholy movements with tragic overtones, the Allegro is the proper venue for light-hearted, even humorous metric play. (That may well be the reason why such divisions as $8 = 5 + 3$ and $8 = 3 + 5$ sometimes appear in Bach's and Handel's minuets and trios, and why the upper voice and bass that articulate such divisions are not often in agreement.)³¹

* * *

³¹ For a similar example from Handel's Concerto Grosso in F, Op. 3, No. 4, see Willner 1999, pp. 202-3, Example 4; for an example from Bach's B minor French Suite, see Willner 1998, pp. 282-89, Example 1. In later repertoires divisions of $6 + 2$ and $2 + 6$ are not so uncommon or odd-sounding; Rothstein 2003 contains illuminating comments on their appearance in the Beethoven piano sonatas, with further references.

For an excellent account of what takes place in closing movements throughout the tonal era, and why, see Talbot 2001.

V. Ritornellos whose various expansions operate at different levels of structure

To this type of periodically based "light irregularity" belong the many instances of echo-like additions to a fundamentally duple setting. Echoes that contain only one, two, or three measures are quite common in Baroque orchestral music. Most often, such additions are not at all disruptive; even echoes that contain as many as four measures are likely to require little interpretation on the part of the listener when their articulation is metrically unequivocal with respect to their surroundings. It is only when their location, length, and extent don't fit readily into their surroundings that one needs to take a closer look in order to gauge their metrical significance. Such echoes, duple or not, call attention to themselves because they lend the music an irregular, exotic, or folkloristic flavor. That is the effect of the various additions to the ritornello-like refrain from Telemann's well-known Concerto in E minor for flute, recorder, and strings TWV 52: e 1 (Example 11 and 12). This ritornello is hardly unpatterned, at any level. But because neither the length nor the durational effect of the ritornello's echoes is readily predictable or explicable, its tenuous grid threatens, however facetiously, to collapse at every turn.

If the value of reading Vivaldi's A minor ritornello as closely as I have done resided in the insights it offered into Vivaldi's rather casual metrical ambiguities, the value of studying Telemann's refrain in similar detail resides in the light it sheds on the deliberate metrical obfuscation that Telemann builds into his themes. It is here that Marianne Kielian-Gilbert's notion of oscillating between readings comes into play. A close look at Telemann's ritornello reveals that its many repetitions, echoes, and suffixes are added onto the ritornello's basic length at different levels of metrical structure. Unlike comparable additions in the music of the high style, these are not commensurate with each

other: Every addition belongs to a different durational idiom, and each idiom generates its own a distinct reading of the theme, which resides at a distinct level of structure. The different additions consequently generate decidedly different readings that operate at different levels of duration. These readings are not mutually compatible. If one cannot reconcile them with each other, one can at least keep them all in mind, subliminally, and oscillate between them as one hears or plays through the ritornello.

Like Couperin, Telemann is a master of blending the seeming simplicity of the middle style with an artifice that is distinctly his own. Telemann's reason for problematizing his theme (and the themes of many other of his concerto ritornellos) is the evocation of folk idioms.³² These idioms seem to embody the low style, but they in fact display or engender a highly intricate temporal design that conjures up the middle or even the high style.³³

The annotations atop and under Example 11, and the diagram in Example 12, suggest that the metrical structure of Telemann's refrain can be read at no fewer than three levels. These levels are not so much structural levels (though that, too) as they are levels

³² Koch 1976. Telemann's deliberately provocative treatment of folk-like phrase rhythm was grounded in an equally folk-like but thoroughly foursquare approach. Compare the ritornello under discussion with, say, the folksy but quadratic ritornello of the closing Allegro from the frequently recorded Concerto in A minor for Recorder, Viola da gamba, and Strings, TWV 52:a1.

³³ A good deal of folk music is metrically complex; only some of it is metrically foursquare. It is the complexity of traditional Polish tunes that attracted Telemann's attention. He gives a vivid account of the circumstances surrounding his encounter with it in the brief autobiography he submitted to Johann Mattheson's *Grundlage einer Ehrenpforte* (Mattheson 1740). See Petzoldt 1974, p. 25, and Zohn 2006.

For up-to-date perspectives on folk and popular roots in "art" music see Wiora 1957, Rothstein 1989, Ling 1997, and Van der Merwe 2004.

The sources for the rhythmic sophistication that pervades Couperin's middle style may well be similar to Telemann's, even though they are quintessentially French.

of underlying durational idioms or procedures. Each of the idioms or procedures in question represents a common model that Telemann summons up in spinning the complexities of his theme. That is why none is compatible with the others, and why each idiom yields its own, largely independent reading of the refrain. The diagram in Example 12, and especially the boxes that highlight each model in the Example, suggests that the cumulative basic length of each model, as such, is not its principal durational feature. The metrical profile of each model is charted, rather, by a complex of relations between the surface length and the basic length of the model's constituents, namely its phrases and subphrases.

The "background" reading. At the deepest level, as it were, we find the familiar principle of incremental periodicity, to which I referred earlier (see the symbols and annotations marked "Background" in Examples 11 and 12, and recall the incremental periodicity previously displayed in the upper staff of Example 5b, bars 1-3). Two subphrases of four measures each make up an eight-bar antecedent (bars 1-4 and 5-8), and two subphrases of five and six measures (bars 9-13 and 14-19) make up the ensuing consequent. (In parsing the refrain, one must bear in mind that at all levels the refrain and its models close into a strong measure, namely bar 20, as themes in early eighteenth-century music often do; and one must remember that in such cases neither the closing measure's downbeat nor the closing measure itself is included in the refrain's basic length).³⁴ At this most abstract level, all the echoes in the refrain serve a single purpose—they bring the length of the phrase and subphrase in which they occur up to the length required by the grouping at the surface. The echoes therefore constitute

³⁴ Bars 20 and 21 (the first measure of the ensuing solo, not shown) thus present the familiar phenomenon of two successive strong measures.

essential repetitions. Those echoes under consideration are the echo of bars 5-6 in bars 7-8, the repetition of bar 12 in bar 13, and the rapid alternation of $d\#^3$ and e^3 in bars 16 and 17.

The “middleground” reading. The importance I attach to the repetitions at the deepest levels points to a paradox that embraces many repetitions in early eighteenth-century music. Although the repetitions sound like ancillary suffixes in the foreground, they tend *not* to reduce out *just* at those levels where one would expect them most readily to disappear—at the deeper metrical levels, during a reduction of a complete movement or a complete ritornello. In the course of reduction it usually emerges that the repetitions carry out some indispensable task in the larger scheme of things.³⁵ That is the reason why, at the background level, I did not take them out: It is only at the middleground (and, under certain circumstances, near the foreground) that we can dispense with them (see the middle layer of Example 12). The middleground kernel of Telemann’s refrain thus shows a basic six-bar antecedent (bars 1-6, expanded by the echo in bars 7-8), a basic eight-bar consequent containing two basic four-bar subphrases (bars 9-12, expanded by bar 13; bars 14-15 and 18-19, expanded by bars 16-17), and a final strong measure (bar 20). The underlying idiom here is the succession of a six-bar antecedent by an eight-bar consequent, which is a common paradigm in both the foreground (unexpanded) and the middleground (as a kernel for expansion) throughout the eighteenth century.³⁶ The paradigm and its expansions are supported in this instance by an important durational parallelism: by the correspondence between the repetition of bars 5-6 in bars 7-8 and the repetition of bars

³⁵ I discuss this issue in detail throughout chapter 5 of my dissertation.

³⁶ Several examples of 6 + 8 bars occur in the second half (bars 67ff.) of the last movement, Allegro, from Handel’s A minor Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 4. The opening allegros and the minuets of Haydn’s later symphonies provide many additional examples.

14-15 in bars 16-17. The repeated measures in each case are the fifth and sixth measures of the basic phrase, and their geographic correspondence does much to draw the antecedent and the consequent together. Since the basic phrase of the consequent—unlike the basic phrase of the antecedent—is not yet complete when the parallelism is established, it would seem that the consequent’s eight bars try to realize something that the six bars of the antecedent left unfinished, namely the construction of a miniature but nonetheless deeply lying periodic grid.

The “foreground” reading. Closer to the surface, as one might expect, we reduce out rather less (Example 12, lowest layer). What we come up with, after reduction, is a more shallow periodicity than the middleground’s, one that comprises an eight-bar antecedent and an eight-bar consequent. The antecedent, like its background counterpart—but within the context of a different paradigm—contains two four-bar subphrases (bars 1-4 and 5-8), the repetition of bars 5-6 in 7-8 being parsed again as essential, and hence a constituent of the paradigm’s basic length. The first subphrase of the consequent (bars 9-13), like its middleground counterpart, is extended by a one-measure echo (bars 13). Only the second subphrase (bars 14-17) really alters the profile of the foreground paradigm and shapes the irregularity of the surface: Owing to the paradigm’s pronounced periodicity, we expect each subphrase to consist of four adjacent measures. In place of a nonessential, expanding repetition of bars 14-15 in bars 16-17—these last two measures are now set as an essential part of the unbroken second subphrase—we hear a repetition and an expansion of bar 16 in bars 17-18 (see again Example 11 and 12).

Reading and defending three different and mutually exclusive paradigms in an attempt to explain a folksy 20-bar theme surely amounts to more than an analytical exercise, one whose merits are largely academic. The three paradigms support Telemann

s ritornello theme simultaneously in different ways. Those listeners who are familiar with the paradigms (or those who familiarize themselves with the paradigms) may be able to hear and to keep all three readings in mind subliminally, while at the same time taking in the complete ritornello theme without undue concern for its internal components. Such historically informed listeners might be able to oscillate between the readings intuitively, in the manner Marianne Kielian-Gilbert suggests but without deliberate effort, without trying to take the theme expressly apart.³⁷

For all its playfulness, then, Telemann's elusive but resourceful refrain embodies a temporal structure far removed from the wild game of casually sprinkled echoes that Telemann attempts to feign. Its artistry resides in the effortlessness with which Telemann breaks the barriers between his three paradigms, and in the seeming effortlessness with which he recombines them. In other words, its improvisatory character is as sturdy as it is cagey.³⁸

³⁷ Kielian-Gilbert 2003. David Temperley (1996) points to the paradox of hearing the metrics of closing themes in sonata form in two ways at the same time.

³⁸ This brings to mind the brilliant account of expansion in chapter 3 of Kevin Korsyn's *Decentering Music* (Korsyn 2003). Very often we know there is an expansion—we can sense it (and its model) and at a certain level hear it—but we cannot quite pin its location or its outlines down. See the closing remarks about this issue in chapter 5 of my dissertation.

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