

#### 4. WHAT IF PAPA HAYDN...

Call me a disestablishmentarian, but I remain,

Disestablishmentarian that I am,  
Disestablishmentarian tho I am,

constantly a-Paul-ed by the unidimensional, nay, simple-minded view most musicians have regarding notated meters, and metric usage, in “classical”, and other musical periods. Even major composers of the last century, who in their own music admitted the irrelevance of the barline, and/or resented its strictures,

and thought nothing of assuming that previous generations could not possibly think as modern composers do, and hence condemned their forebears to metrical prisons.

As example, let us vivisect some bars of Haydn’s String Quartet op. 76, no.4, IIIrd movement minuet, (hardly a unique example!), the first eight bars of which nominally read:

### Ex. 1 (original)

Menuet  
Allegro



This is usually performed in a cutesy-poo, affirmatively-innocuous, narcolepsy-inducing state usually referred to as “style”, or as Lewis Carroll would have it:

"The style is that which is usually known as 'Early Debased': very early, and remarkably debased."<sup>i</sup>

with most downbeats being heartily thumped, in case we did not know that minuets are occasionally in  $\frac{3}{4}$ .

But let us suppose, just suppose, that, rather than the de rigueur  $\frac{3}{4}$  “tub-thump”, what good old rascally papa H really had in mind was a portrait of three or four stumblebums who would not know a dance step if it bit them in the nether regions (a fair description of your writer), and who could not determine the downbeat (not a fair description of your writer - I can determine them; I just do not like them); each stumblebum with a different idea as to what the meter, and where the

downbeat; each bum utterly convinced of his own correctness until, in a desperate panic, they all (sf) clunk down together at the penultimate moment before catastrophe. In short, suppose Haydn had wanted something that might be better understood had it been notated:

Ex. 2 (Ex.1 rebarred)



Here the imbecile first violin BOLTS prematurely out of the gate, sawing away in  $\frac{3}{2}$  to his heart's content; the viola and cello blat their  $\frac{3}{4}$  "oom-pahs" but NOT in synchrony with the first violin; and the second violin, desperate to join the fray, decides to more or less side with the first violin in terms of  $\frac{3}{2}$ , but is "out-to-lunch" in terms of coordination, ultimately deciding to hold on to a G $\sharp$  while pretending to not be hopelessly lost in this anarchy, which reigns supreme until that moment of:

3

“OOPS -- WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE TOGETHER AND IN 4 AND THE DOWNBEAT IS”

**NOW!!!**

which occurs at measure 6, at the notated “sf” -- probably the reason that “sf” is there, i.e. to clarify the locus of convergence.

Now there will be those who will argue that a minuet is a dance, and therefore thinks on the barlines and downbeats are part and parcel of the concept, and stylistically may be of paramount importance.

Disestablishmentarian that I am, I would argue that is specious because:

if you believe this minuet is not an art-minuet, but rather a representation of reality, anyone who has ever seen genuine folk dancing (that is not carefully nurtured and/or cultured for anthropologists, tourists, Las Vegas, etc) will immediately understand that the participants are not always well coordinated; not always graceful and lithe; and often take a while to settle into a physical rhythmic unison<sup>ii</sup>, i.e. Ex. 2 is a closer simulacrum of actuality than is the original notation.

If, on the other hand you wish to argue:

that a Haydn or similar minuet represents the quintessential ennoblement of a simple-minded peasant activity, you are hoist upon your own petard, since version (b) is the far more elevated, experimental -- and some might even say, aristocratically corrupt and decadent -- version.

People might also argue that the “sf” is where it is because H wanted to emphasize the harmony at that particular point; but are we really to believe that the writer of *The Seasons* etc thought a V7 in the penultimate of the “A” section of a minuet something SO terribly unusual and/or harmonically interesting?

There will be others who will argue that music from this time period never involved conflicting and conflicted meters, or certainly not to such an extent. Why then, did Koch, and various others, bother to define the concept “imbroglio” in a musical dictionary? Even the *Century Dictionary* manages to define “imbroglio”<sup>iii</sup> as:

a concept that seems to have vanished from our collective musical consciousness in the latter half of the 20th century.

So on which grounds do you wish to fall on your sword?

In another example from the same movement, notice how the basic notation conspires against us!

### Ex. 3 (original)

22

Trio

[60]

What is disguised is how this 17-bar exposition (plus one bar from the earlier 2nd ending, totaling 18) clearly parses into V+V+III+V (in terms of measures).

But what happens if we renotate as:

Ex. 4 (Ex.3 rebarred)

The image shows a musical score for a 'Trio' section. It consists of five staves: two for voices (Soprano and Alto), one for a string instrument (likely Violin or Viola), and two for a keyboard instrument (likely Piano or Organ). The music is in 5/4 time and features a rebarred section. The dynamic marking *sfz* (sforzando) is used throughout, indicating a sudden increase in volume. The phrasing is marked with accents (>) and slurs. The rebarred section is indicated by a dashed vertical line and includes measures with time signatures 10/4, 14/4, 10/4, and 15/4. The overall mood is dramatic and expressive.

With the appearance of the “Lungas” in the lower voices, suddenly the voice of the dudelsack is heard throughout the land, and bird droppings keep falling on my head -- a much different scenic image from Stomping-on-Every-Downbeat, At-the-Palace.

Here the “sf” clearly serves to delineate phrase structure, because the harmonic stasis of this example does not allow an alternative explanation centered on harmonic change.

Now I will NOT ask you to believe that any of the above was actually Haydn’s intent (although in the interest of full disclosure, you should know that I am firmly convinced it was); BUT, do you really want to argue that papa H was:

not intelligent enough

not mischievous enough

not experimental enough

not observant enough

not alive and aware enough

basically too brain-dead

to have had such a musical thought?

Now I make no claim to any clairvoyance in regards Haydn's mind, and have little faith in people who do so claim...<sup>iv</sup>

but even if you truly believe such an analysis is unrealistic, every now and again it is important to consider that:

“we have here a proposition that could hardly apply to reality under any conceivable circumstances; and which is nevertheless of the utmost importance in order to understand this reality.”  
(Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* p.1050)

So for those of you who have NOT "arrived at full knowledge of the subject without knowing the facts" (Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 9) and who might like to explore the possibility, I WILL ask you to seriously consider:

***How was H supposed to notate the above if this, or some other close approximation, is what H actually had in mind, and wanted us to realize, think and play?***

Had Haydn been writing some hundreds of years earlier, there would be no score per se, and each voice could be notated individually, in isolation; but the form was different in Haydn's time. Note that it was the form that changed. That does not mean the idea itself was dead, or that H could not imagine it!

With very, very rare exceptions, convention would not allow H to switch meters within the same movement, and certainly not within a section of



a movement. Specifying two simultaneous yet different time signatures was also not allowed; and once again, I must point out that we are speaking of a notational convention -- the fact that it was not allowed to be notated is not evidence that H could not think it.

Haydn could not have easily notated displaced downbeats.

Yes, he could have used beams across barlines, but that would not work for quarter-notes; and there is not much evidence that he extensively used beaming against the barline (again I emphasize: the absence of such cross-beaming is not evidence that he did not, or could not, or would not, think in those terms).

Yes, he could have cluttered the page with “sf”s or “sfz”s, but that would have not been a panacea since:

(a) if multimetric rhythmic thinking WAS the norm, those markings would at best be redundant, and at worst would obfuscate;

(b) if multimetric rhythmic thinking was NOT the norm, the dynamics might have been thought of as they are today i.e. accents against a grid, but not necessarily an indication to displace the grid.

What then was the man supposed to do in order to achieve the result of Ex. 4?

The answer to that question, at least in the Robbins Landon edition of H. (my personal favorite) is to put nothing in the score except for that single “sf”, thereby leaving the maximum flexibility (within the bounds of reason) to the performer’s judgment. On the other hand, this is not a case where what the law does not expressly forbid, it allows.<sup>v</sup>

### **THE MAIN POINT:**

“LISTEN to the sound that it makes.” (Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 201)

PLAY WHAT IT IS, NOT WHERE IT IS

PLAY HOW IT SOUNDS, NOT HOW IT IS WRITTEN

When thinking about metric stresses in what appears to be a fairly conventional context, keep in mind that the notation can be particularly deceptive.

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Hong Kong  
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i Lewis Carroll - *The New Belfrey of Christ Church*, Oxford  
(Dover ed. from 1872)

ii For those who might think bringing fireflies into the mix is a bit much: in the early days at Bell System, the question arose as to how to synchronize all the clocks needed to run a plethora of disparate telephone networks, and they thought to use many clocks in chain to self-synchronize, before settling on the master-slave system that is currently common.

Orchestras may well employ some sort of related concept since players do not always follow the conductor but nevertheless can stay together, probably by listening for and receiving cues from the players in closest surroundings.

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iii In Koch's *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802), imbroglia was defined as "those phrases of pieces in which a contrary meter is inserted". For interesting reading on "imbroglia", see Danuta Mirka's *Metric Manipulations in Haydn and Mozart* (Oxford, 2009).

iv Although he is writing on a somewhat different subject, I draw your attention to the following:

It is also true that whenever we attempt to interpret human attitudes, especially attitudes of people far removed from us in time or culture, we risk misunderstanding them not only if we crudely substitute our own attitudes for theirs, but also if we do our best to penetrate into the working of their minds. All this is made much worse than it would be otherwise by the fact that the analyzing observer himself is the product of a given social environment - and of his particular location in this environment - that conditions him to see certain things rather than others, and to see them in a certain light. And even this is not all: environmental factors may even endow the observer with a subconscious craving to see things in a certain light. This brings us up to the problem of ideological bias in economic analysis. (Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, p.34)

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√ Such a decision is not dissimilar to the decision discussed in [Starglow](#), whereby maximum flexibility is provided by the simplest notation.