

Performance Practice of the Haitian Quintolet and Puerto Rican Elastic Tresillo Rhythms

Bill Harned

The recent publication of Haitian classical music in PDF format by the SRDMH archive, which has stored original manuscripts of Haitian classical music in Montreal, has exposed previously unknown compositions that date back to the first Haitian piano compositions from the 1890s and include the co-inventor of the quintolet rhythm, Occide Jeanty.

In Haiti only compositions of the Méringue traditionally used the quintolet rhythm, which is now considered as a symbol of Haitian identity. My dissertation was able to analyze 15 Méringue compositions (only published 2015 – 2017) for the piano to produce my own theories about their execution.

Disclaimer – These theories are based on my conclusions. In this music less is better in the sense that technicality can interfere with the organic nature of music. However, these rhythms appear to accomplish the feat of preserving the Afro-centric style of cross-rhythms with Western notation.

Tresillo Rhythm

- Represents the fundamental triple meter in Afro-centric music
- Common to general folk and popular music worldwide
- Occurs naturally in African languages
- Usually represented at 3:3:2 ratio
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Tresillo Rhythm with common 3:3:2 ratio.

The Tresillo-based Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm

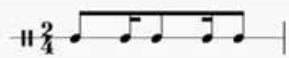


Sub-dividing the tresillo rhythm produces the Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm.

Notations of the Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm

Cinquillo Rhythm

- Sharp Syncopation
- Commonly used



Quintolet Rhythm

- Relaxed Syncopation
- From Haiti



Elastic Tresillo Rhythm

- Relaxed Syncopation
- From Puerto Rico



Quintolet and Elastic Tresillo Rhythms

- Indicate a more relaxed syncopation than the cinquillo rhythm with larger values for the secondary divisions of the 2nd and 4th beats
- Are not literally executed
- All have the tresillo rhythm embedded
- Haitian 5/8 meter - coincides with the quintolet rhythm

Comparing Sharp and Relaxed Syncopations

(also applies to other Afro-centric rhythms like swing)

Relaxed Syncopation

- More equalized values between primary metric divisions and secondary divisions
- Reduced (increased) values for secondary divisions allow fluctuation, especially in slower tempos

Sharp Syncopation

- Secondary divisions are shortened and placed later in time, which also provides a stronger lead into the following note

Repertoire Examples

Quintolet Rhythm

Méringues populaires No. 3

En la moll majeur

éd. Robert Grenier
Volume 1, No. 13

Justin Élie (1883-1931)

Allegretto

Justin Élie - Méringues Populaires No. 3, opening.¹

28

a tempo

sf martellato

sf

f

33

ten.

sf

f

sf

f

sf

Edmond Saintonge – Prélude - Méringue, mm. 28 – 37.²

¹ Justin Élie, *Méringues Populaires No. 3*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti, Vol. 1* (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 82.

² Edmond Saintonge, *Prélude Méringue*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti, Vol. 9* (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 180.

Elastic Tresillo Rhythm

The musical score shows five measures of music. The treble clef staff begins with a measure marked '37'. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The rhythm is characterized by syncopated chords and triplets. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with triplets. The number '3' is written above the treble staff in measures 48, 49, and 50, and below the bass staff in measures 48, 49, and 50, indicating triplet rhythms.

Ludovic Lamothe – *La Dangereuse*, mm. 47 – 56.³

Cross-Rhythms

Misalignment of these rhythms to the duple meter preserves the Afro-centric style of cross-rhythms to allow polyphonic misalignments between voices.

Example of Quintolet against Duple Rhythms

The musical score shows four measures of music. The treble clef staff features a quintolet (a group of five notes beamed together) in the first measure, marked with a forte 'f' dynamic. The bass clef staff features a steady eighth-note accompaniment with quintolets. The number '5' is written below the bass staff in measures 28, 29, and 31, indicating quintolet rhythms.

Justin Élie - *Méringues Populaires No. 2*, mm. 28 - 31.⁴

³ Ludovic Lamothe, *La Dangereuse*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti, Vol. 8* (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 225.

⁴ Justin Élie, *Méringues Populaires No. 2*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti, Vol. 1* (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 81.

Another Example of Quintolet Rhythm against Duple Rhythms

Élie - *Méringues Populaires No. 4*, mm. 26 – 30.⁵

If cinquillo rhythms were used, cross-rhythms would be removed with synchronization.

Same passage with substituted cinquillo rhythms.

Websites

To purchase recently published Haitian classical music directly from the SRDMH Archive, go to <http://www.srdmh.com>

My presentation for the 2022 World Piano Conference includes more examples from repertoire of preserving cross-rhythms - <http://www.wpta.info/wpc/14th/>

My Website has links to the WPC Presentation and to download My Dissertation with more examples – <http://www.harnedpiano.com>

To contact me about hosting a Lecture Recital, please email me at bill.harned@gmail.com

⁵ Justin Élie, *Méringues Populaires No. 4*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, Vol. 1 (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 85.