

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

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The recent publication of Haitian art-music (classical music) in PDF format, from the SRDMH archive, has exposed previously unknown compositions dating back to the 1890s. These include piano compositions by Occide Jeanty (1860-1936), the co-inventor of the quintolet rhythm.

In Haiti, only Méringues traditionally used the quintolet rhythm, now considered a symbol of Haitian identity. My dissertation presented 15 Méringues for piano solo (published in 2015-2017), wherein my theories about their execution were developed.

Disclaimer- These theories are based on my observations. In this genre, an over-reliance on technical accuracy can interfere with the organic flow of the music, hence: less is more. I assert that these rhythms appear to accomplish the feat of preserving the Afro-centric style of cross-rhythms in 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



Tresillo Rhythm with common 3:3:2 ratio.

The Tresillo-based Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm

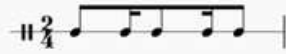


Sub-dividing the tresillo rhythm produces the Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm.

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)

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

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



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



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.