



Research Article

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## The French Inégales: An Evidence from East Flanders

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**Abstract:** Among the significant number of historical documents in French that discuss the principles of rhythmically uneven playing, the attention of researchers studying rhythmic alteration techniques has not yet been attracted to the testimony of Jean Baptiste Ludovic de Castillion. De Castillion (1680–1753), a Catholic priest in Ghent (later bishop in Brugge), a close friend of the famous Flemish composer, guitarist and musician of the Chapel Royal of the court in Brussels François Le Cocq (1685–1729), has received from the latter as a gift in 1729 two collections of pieces for guitar (1) composed personally by Le Cocq and (2) by various 17<sup>th</sup> century composers. De Castillion made copies of both collections, added a preface to them, and also — at the end of the manuscript — a short dictionary of the main musical terms and genre names found in the collections of Le Cocq. The manuscript of de Castillion dates back to 1730 and is currently stored in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire Royal de Brussels under the cipher Ms. S.5615. In a brief preface, de Castillion explains the basic principles of playing on the guitar and the fundamentals of music theory. The article discusses the content of the paragraph of the preface devoted to the “movement of the eighth notes”. It is here that we see explanations concerning the specifics of using the uneven playing technique in French performance practice in the first third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. De Castillion’s instructions concerning *les notes inégales* are based mainly on material from treatises by de Saint Lambert (1702) and M. P. de Montéclair (1709), but the author of the preface nevertheless had his own point of view.

**Keywords:** notes inégales, French inégalité, rhythmic alteration, J. B. L. De Castillion, F. Le Cock, de Saint Lambert, M. P. de Montéclair

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## СТАРИННАЯ МУЗЫКА: ПРОБЛЕМЫ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ

Научная статья

# Французские «неровные ноты»: документ из Восточной Фландрис

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**Аннотация:** Среди значительного количества исторических документов на французском языке, в которых обсуждаются принципы неровной игры, внимание исследователей приемов ритмической альтерации до сих пор не привлекло хорошо известное барочным лютистам и гитаристам свидетельство Жана Батиста Людовика де Кастильона (1680–1753), католического священника в Генте (позднее — епископа в Брюгге), близкого друга известного фламандского композитора, гитариста и музыканта брюссельского королевского двора Франсуа Ле Кока (1685–1729), получившего от последнего в 1729 году в подарок два сборника пьес для гитары (1) самого Ле Кока и (2) различных композиторов XVII века. Де Кастильон сделал копии с обоих сборников, добавил к ним предисловие, а также — в конце рукописи — краткий словарь основных музыкальных терминов и названий жанров, встречающихся в сборниках Ле Кока. Рукопись де Кастильона датируется 1730 годом и хранится в настоящее время в библиотеке Брюссельской королевской консерватории под шифром Ms.S.5615. В кратком предисловии де Кастильон объясняет основные принципы игры на гитаре и основы теории музыки. В статье рассмотрено содержание параграфа предисловия, посвященного «движению восьмых нот». Именно здесь мы видим разъяснения, касающиеся специфики применения приема «неровной игры» во французской исполнительской практике первой трети XVIII века. Указания де Кастильона основаны, главным образом, на материалах из трактатов де Сен Ламбера (1702) и М. П. де Монтеклер (1709). Однако сравнительный анализ показывает, что де Кастильон имел собственную точку зрения на проблему, отличную от мнения названных выше музыкантов.

**Ключевые слова:** notes inégales, French inégalité, ритмическая альтерация, Ж. Б. Л. Де Кастильон, Франсуа Ле Кок, де Сен Ламбер, М. П. Де Монтеклер

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The French performing convention, known today as *les notes inégales*, has been discussed many times previously in the writings of 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars.<sup>1</sup> In thesis-like form, the performance instructions from French musical treatises and prefaces to musical editions of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries on the use of the *notes inégales* technique are summarized below:

<sup>1</sup> Among them — Jane Arger [1], Eugène Borrel [4; 5], Jean Saint-Arroman [21], Frederick Neumann [16] and many others.

- “uneven playing” (inequality) in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was exclusively an attribute of the French performing school; in other Western Europe countries at that time, this complex of means of musical expression was not used;
- the techniques of rhythmic alteration (“uneven notes”) began to shape in France in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and were finally accepted at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century;
- the use of rhythmic alteration techniques in the field of French “uneven notes” was strictly regulated by a set of rules, principles and exceptions;<sup>2</sup>
- the determining criteria for choosing one or another category (subdivision) of musical durations written rhythmically even by the composer and moving, as a rule, in stepwise progression, to be performed to a greater or lesser extent rhythmically uneven (dotted), was the meter signature (time signature);
- in addition to the list of rules and exceptions of a more or less particular nature, there have been revealed three basic principles of “inegalization” of the musical text that were simultaneously present: (1) rhythmically uneven performance of note durations when they are one degree smaller than those indicated in the denominator of the meter signature; (2) rhythmically uneven performance of note durations when they are twice smaller than those indicated in the denominator of the meter signature; and (3) the so-called “cumulative inequality”,<sup>3</sup> covering all subdivisions of musical durations that are smaller than the beat.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, French musicians formulated in their writings a fairly stable and complete list of normative (typical) exceptions to the rules of “uneven playing”. Thus, *les notes inégales* were not applied in the following cases:<sup>4</sup>

- in all kinds of foreign, especially Italian music;<sup>5</sup>
- in the 18<sup>th</sup> century — in relation to the beats and their structurally important subdivisions (for example, eighth notes in allemandes and contradances);
- in sequences of musical durations in disjunct movement or repeated on the same sound;
- when two or more notes are slurred;
- when the staccato or *détaché* signs are placed above or below the notes;

<sup>2</sup> In this context, it seems very inappropriate to use the wording *rhythmic freedom* in the title of the dissertation by Newman Wilson Powell [20]. There was no rhythmic freedom in the interpretation of French Baroque music, quite the opposite!

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Neumann’s wording [16, 323].

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this issue was coated in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries by numerous myths and speculations. “Some modern sources clearly state that notes inégales are not used in preludes,” — David Moroni resolutely states in the article the *Performance of unmeasured preludes* [15, 143]. Moroni does not provide any evidence to this statement, which is not surprising, since there is no such evidence in historical documents, and, subsequently, there is no reason to write something like that in the “modern sources”. Moroni’s assertion (again without any evidence) is repeated as a significant rule by Gerhard Blum [2, 213]. Referring further to Moroni and Blum, the same is reported by Jens Hamer [10, 44], etc. The result: “created out of thin air” the “authentic”, if, it may be said so, recommendations are becoming common and are rapidly spreading among practitioners. See also our article on the troublesome field of conventions associated with rhythmic notation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century [18].

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, *Méthode, théorique et pratique pour Apprendre en peu de tems le Violoncelle* by Michel Corrette (1741) [6, 4–5].

- at a very fast tempo;
- in vocal accompaniment;<sup>6</sup>
- with syncopation;
- if the composer has made appropriate terminological guidance in the text (such as: *mesuré, notes égales, coulé, détachez, martelées, marqué, &c.*);<sup>7</sup>
- in pieces with the indication *Andante*;<sup>8</sup>
- in *Adagio, Allegro* and *Presto* parts of sonatas and concertos.

The degree of inequality varied quite individually — depending on the genre and *cadence* of a particular composition, the taste (*goût*) of the performers and other factors.<sup>9</sup>

Among the significant number of historical documents in French that discuss the principles of rhythmically uneven playing, the attention of researchers studying rhythmic alteration techniques has not yet been attracted to the testimony of Jean Baptiste Ludovico de Castillion. De Castillion (1680–1753), a Catholic priest in Ghent (later bishop in Brugge), a close friend of the famous Flemish composer, guitarist and musician of the Chapel Royal of the court in Brussels François Le Cocq (1685–1729), has received from the latter as a gift in 1729 two collections of pieces for guitar (1) composed personally by Le Cocq and (2) by various 17<sup>th</sup> century composers (*Recueil<sup>10</sup> des pieces de guitare composées par Mr. François Le Cocq* and *Recueil des pieces de guitare de meilleurs maîtres du siècle dix-septième*). De Castillion made copies of both collections, added a preface to them, and also — at the end of the manuscript — a short dictionary of the main musical terms and genre names found in the collections of Le Cocq (*Abregé Alphabetique des noms des Airs et des termes de Musique*). The manuscript of de Castillion dates back to 1730 and is currently stored in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire Royal de Brussels under the cipher Ms.S.5615.

<sup>6</sup> See: Antoine FERdinand Emy de L'Ilette, *Théorie Musicale* (c1810) [10, 70].

<sup>7</sup> “When the composer wants the eighth notes to be equal in triple time marked with the number 3 or 3/4, he writes at the top: *Croches Égales*”, — Michel Pignolet de Montéclair, *Fundamentals of Music* (c1736) [14, 30].

<sup>8</sup> E. Borrel cites Sébastien de Brossard’s performance remark, which he found in “one of the motets” of the latter (bibliographic data are missing): “Andante, or Even notes. The word andante indicates that this is Italian music without dotting.” [5, 157].

<sup>9</sup> In most historical sources, there are no specific indications determining in execution the degree of inequality, or the authors limit themselves to formal (abstract) background information. For example, according to François David, the duration of the sound of every second note of a paired sequence should be rhythmically shortened “by a quarter” compared to the duration of the preceding note [7, 23]. In the preface to the *Second Organ Book*, G.-G. Nivers recommends using very soft dotting when performing pieces from this collection [17, no pagination]. At the same time, in the musical context of the *Second Organ Book* the dotted rhythm is regularly found being written out by the composer. It follows that in those cases when Nivers wanted the dotted rhythm namely to sound, and not the soft “inequality/inégal”, he prescribed it in a distinct way in the notation.

<sup>10</sup> The word *recueil* on the title pages of both collections of Le Cocq’s guitar pieces is actually synonymous with the earlier and not always unambiguously interpreted French term *suite*. See: [3].

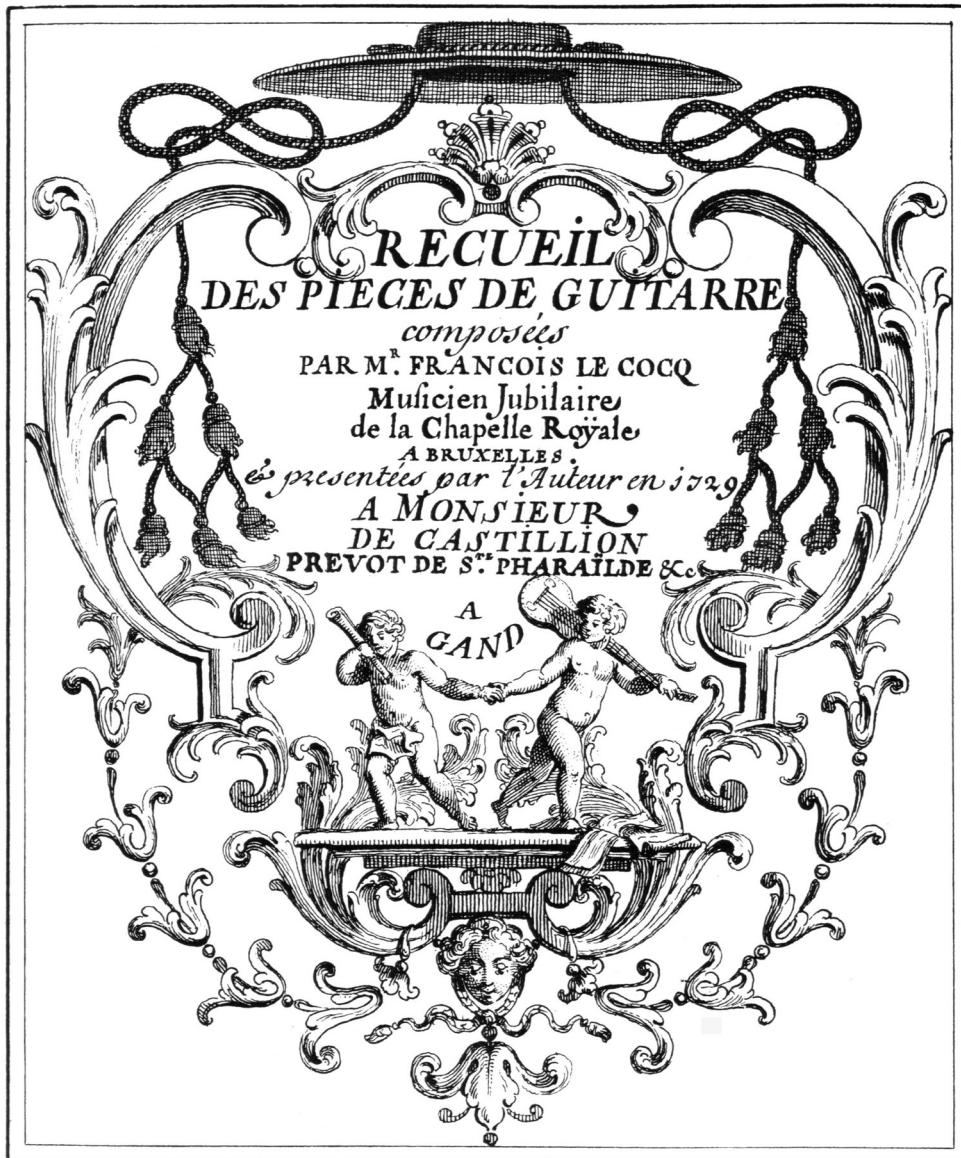


Figure 1. *Recueil des pieces de guitare* composées par Mr. François Le Cocq.  
Title at the beginning



Figure 2. *Recueil des pieces de guitare* composées par Mr. François Le Cocq.  
Title before Le Cocq's pieces



Figure 3. Jean Baptiste Ludovico (Jan Baptist) de Castillion, portrait, unknown artist

In a brief preface, de Castillion explains the basic principles of playing on the guitar, the basics of music theory (types of notes and their duration; embellishments; dots; signs of musical measures, which also prescribe the tempo of performance; namely the musical measures by themselves, etc.). In the section on time signatures, the author of the preface gives mainly information borrowed from the treatise *Les Principes Du Clavecin* by de Saint Lambert [22].<sup>11</sup> This information is partially presented almost verbatim, or simply copied exactly in large fragments from de Saint Lambert's work (for example, the text from pages 25–26 of the Paris edition of the treatise by de Saint Lambert, etc.). In the preface there is also a direct reference to the named publication of de Saint Lambert. "These are the rules of music, — states de Castillion, — which he who sets himself to play the guitar ought never to ignore. But although these are thus established, nevertheless according to the preference of musicians, one can give to the pieces such a tempo as one would wish, provided that one makes sure that it is not directly opposed to the time signature to be observed through all the measures, that is to say, the rhythm of the piece, which consists of playing the notes of the same value with a great equality of movement, and all the notes in general in the correct proportion. For whether one plays a piece quickly or one plays it slowly, one ought always to give to it the rhythm which is its soul and the thing which is the least able to be passed over." (cit. according to the English translation by *The Lute Societe*: [9]).

Of interest to us is the content of the paragraph of the preface devoted to the "movement of the eighth notes". It is here that we see explanations concerning the specifics of using the uneven playing technique in French performance practice in the first third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. De Castillion suggests that the reader be guided by two general rules, further by some instructions for the performance of pieces in certain time signatures and lastly by a list of exceptions. Here is the text of this paragraph in full:

This equality of movement which we demand of the notes of the same value is not observed on the quavers, when there are several following one another. It is the custom to make them long and short successively, because this inequality gives them more grace. If the number of quavers which follows without interruption is equal, the first is long, the second short, the third long, the fourth short, and so on for all the rest. If the number is unequal, the first on the contrary is short, the second long, the third short, the fourth long, the fifth short until they come to an end. Nevertheless, this inequality of several quavers in a sequence is not observed in the pieces where the measure is in four beats, as for example in the allemandes, because of the slowness of the tempo, in which case the inequality falls on the semiquavers if there are any.

<sup>11</sup> In modern musical science, the work *Les Principes Du Clavecin* by de Saint Lambert, according to the title page of the publicly available Paris [22] and Amsterdam [23] editions, is usually dated 1702. However, a multitude of direct and indirect evidence from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries convince us that the 1702 edition was not the first one, but the initial publication of the treatise was in 1697. (See our article: [19].) It is possible that the small discrepancies between de Saint Lambert's 1702 text and the preface mentioned in the paragraph below are due to the fact that de Castillion was not the author of the clarifications in de Saint Lambert's explanations, but he used the 1697 edition.

In the pieces where the measure is in three slow beats, if many crotchets are found in sequence, they are made unequal like the quavers. See in the opera [by J.-B. Lully] “Phaëton” a duet sung to the words *Helas! une chaîne si belle*. Apart from these occasions, all the notes of the same value are treated equally.

Monsieur Montclair of L'Academie Royale de Musique in Paris in his “Nouvelle Methode pour apprendre la Musique” [11] treats this point of unequalizing the notes in the following manner. There are, he says, measures where the quavers are equal, and others where they are unequal, from pair to pair, the first longer than the second. In the measures **C**,  $2/4$  and  $3/8$  they are equal, that is to say each is as long as the other. In ordinary triple, 3, they are often unequal, above all in the airs for violin, where the first ought to be nearly as long as if it were dotted. When the song proceeds by disjunct intervals, the quavers are usually equal in the triple time,  $3/4$ . The semiquavers are unequal in the measure of three-eight,  $3/8$ . It is difficult, he continues, to give general principles on the equality and inequality of notes; because it is determined by the character of the pieces which are sung or played. Nevertheless, it is necessary to observe that in any measure in which four notes are needed to fill up a beat, they are always unequal, the first a little longer than the second. [ibid.]

As can be seen, de Castillion's instructions on rhythmic alteration are mainly an integral of recommendations from the treatises of de Saint Lambert [22] and Michel Pignolet de Montéclair [11]. Below we compile the result of a deductive analysis of these complex and somewhat contradictory rules, coupled with the specific remarks of de Castillion in comparison with the prescriptions of de Saint Lambert and de Montéclair<sup>12</sup> as a summary for each time signature:

#### The time signature “c”:

De Saint Lambert (1702)		In allemandes
De Montéclair (1709)		
De Castillion (1730)		eights – equal
De Montéclair (c1735)	—	eights – equal
De Montéclair (c1736)		according to the general rule eights – equal

#### The time signature “e”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		eights – equal
De Castillion (1730)	and and	«e» two beats in a bar «e» four beats in a bar according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)		according to the general rule; eights – equal

<sup>12</sup> In various treatises of de Montéclair [11; 12; 13; 14], the prescriptions of rhythmic alteration differ significantly, therefore, for comparison, we give information from all known theoretical works of this author.

The time signature “2”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)	and	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1735)		
De Montéclair (c1736)		eights – equal

The time signature “2/4”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)		eights – equal

The time signature “4/8”:

De Castillion (1730)	and	eights – equal; – according to the general rule
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The time signature “3/2”:

De Saint Lambert (1702)		
De Castillion (1730)		according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “3”:

De Montéclair (1709)		
De Castillion (1730)	and	– according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1735)		
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “3/4”:

De Castillion (1730)		according to the general rule; eights – equal
De Montéclair (c1735)		
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “3/8”:

De Castillion (1730)	 and 	according to the direct indication ( 	
De Montéclair (c1736)		eights – equal	

The time signature “3/16”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)	 and 	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1735)		
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “6/4”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)	 and 	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1735)		
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “9/4”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)	 and 	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “12/4”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)		
De Castillion (1730)	 and 	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)		

The time signature “6/8”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)	—	eights – equal
De Castillion (1730)		according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)		eights – equal

The time signature “9/8”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)	—	eights — equal
De Castillion (1730)	♪	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)	♪	eights — equal

The time signature “12/8”:

De Montéclair (c1711/12)	—	eights — equal
De Castillion (1730)	♪	according to the general rule
De Montéclair (c1736)	♪	eights — equal

Thus, differences in the choice of categories of note durations for “uneven playing” are included both for all three authors and actually for de Montéclair in his various treatises. The insufficiently clearly formulated general rules of de Castillon, as in a number of other early documents in similar cases, allow various interpretations. At the same time, the second rule from the preface indicates that de Castillon admitted the so-called “cumulative inégales” in some time signatures.

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