

## CHAPTER VII

# Rhythmic Notations

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### 1) First Notation

There are four methods of notating these rhythms whose theory we have detailed since Chapter II. The first consists of writing the exact values, without measure or beat, while saving the use of the bar-line only to indicate periods and to make an end to the effect of accidentals (sharps, flats, etc.). This notation is evidently the best for the composer, since it is the exact expression of his musical conception. It is excellent for one alone or a few performers in a group. As I remarked in the Preface of my *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*, interpreters who feel a little strained by the rhythms can mentally count all the short values (the sixteenth-notes, for example), but only at the beginning of their work; this procedure could make the performance in public disagreeably dull and would become a real puzzle for them; they ought, in course of time, to keep in themselves the feeling for the values, without more (which will permit them to observe the dynamics, accelerations, retards, all that which makes an interpretation alive and sensitive).

I have used this first notation in my works for organ (*La Nativité du Seigneur, Les Corps glorieux*), in my vocal works (*Poèmes pour Mi* — voice and piano version, *Chants de terre et de ciel*), and in several movements of my *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.

### 2) Second Notation

In the orchestra, things are complicated. When all the performers play the same rhythms and these rhythms gather into normal measures, one can pile up metric changes; that is what Stravinsky did in *le Sacre du Printemps*. These changes of meter are very tiring for the orchestra conductor. I used this second notation in my *Offrandes oubliées*.

### 3) Third Notation

Still in the orchestra, if all the performers play the same rhythms and these rhythms do not gather into normal meters, it is necessary to divide the music into short measures; a numeral written at the head of each measure indicates

the number of beats in it. These beats are equal or unequal in duration; it is necessary then to have recourse to some rhythmic signs, placed above the beats to indicate their exact duration. In the version of my *Poèmes pour Mi* for voice and orchestra — upon the advice of Roger Désormière, orchestra conductor and inventor of these signs — I used the following rhythmic signs : **example 63**

With these three signs and their doublings : **example 64**

one can notate the most difficult rhythms. This notation necessitates preliminary agreement between musicians and conductor and a rather forbidding effort at the first reading. The thing is nevertheless very possible.

#### 4) Fourth Notation

The easiest for performers since it disarranges their habits in no way. It consists, by means of syncopes, of writing in a normal meter a rhythm which has no relation to it. This procedure is indispensable when it is a question of having performed by several musicians a superposition of several rhythms, complicated and very different from each other. In order to produce the effect, it suffices to multiply the indications of slurs, dynamics, and especially accents exactly where one wants them. This notation is false, since it is in contradiction to the rhythmic conception of the composer; but if the performers observe the indicated accents well, the listener hears the true rhythm. I used this notation in several movements of my *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.

Here is a rhythmic fragment as it was conceived by the composer; it is in the first notation : **example 65**

Third notation — the same fragment with rhythmic signs : **example 66**

Second notation — another fragment, with metrical changes : **example 67**

Another fragment as it was conceived by the composer; it is again in the first notation : **example 68**

The same, written in a false meter, with exact accentuation; it is in the fourth notation : **example 69**

I add that one will find in my works and in the examples of this treatise some metrical passages conceived in some meters which are absolutely independent of my rhythmic system. Moreover, — let us repeat it — whether my music is measured or not, the values there are always notated very exactly : *the performer has then only to play the values indicated.*

### 5) Some Metrical Rhythms

In appendix to the present chapter and to all those on rhythm, here are some supplementary examples which do not at all obey the laws of my rhythmic system : **examples A, B, C, D, E, F, G**

The rhythms of A, B, C, and D retain an impressionistic character. The short tied to the long in example C (at the cross) is of Debussy-like essence; it contrasts with the Stravinsky-like sonorities of the passage. Examples E and F are in "bird style" (see Chapter IX). G offers us an effect of resonance (see Chapter XIV, article 4); further, X, Y, Z are allied to the rhythmic variants of a Jolivet, Y being the inexact augmentation of X, Z being the inexact augmentation of Y (see Chapter IV, article 4).

von  
 Clar. Sib  
 vlle  
 pno

61  
 8  
 1<sup>er</sup> groupe  
 A B  
 2<sup>e</sup> groupe  
 62

63 □ vault<sup>(1)</sup> ♪ || △ vault ♪ || | vault ♪ || 64 □ vault ♪ || △ vault ♪ || | vault ♪ ||

<sup>(1)</sup> Vault means "is worth", or "has the value of". | vault : gilt

65 66

67  
 Trompette  
 Les Offrandes oubliées  
 ff

68  
 Clarinette en Sib  
 Liturgie de cristal  
 p expressif

69  
 Clarinette en Sib  
 Liturgie de cristal  
 p expressif

**A**  
Piano

**B**  
Piano

**C**  
Piano

**D**  
Piano

**E**

**F**

G  
Piano

8<sup>a</sup> bassa

70

71

72

73

74

75  
Moussorgsky  
Boris Godounow  
1<sup>er</sup> tableau

76

77  
Lent  
La Vierge  
et l'Enfant  
Orgue

*mf legato* (quintaton 16 *mf*, flûte 4 et nazard *pp*)

78  
Subtilité des Corps glorieux

79  
Subtilité des Corps glorieux

80  
Grieg, Peer Gynt  
La chanson de Solweig