Unconventional Rhythmic Notations in the Haitian Méringue

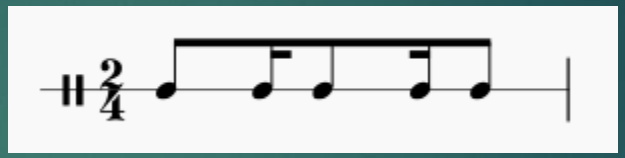
BILL HARNED

Premise

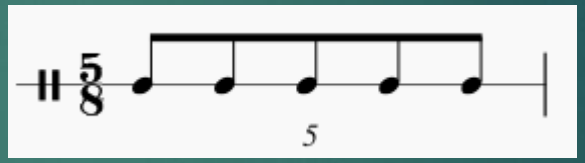
- Salon compositions of the Haitian méringue use different notations to indicate a more relaxed syncopation of the five-beat syncopated rhythm, usually codified with a sharp syncopation as the cinquillo rhythm
- These unconventional notations can be converted to cinquillo rhythms to correct the underlying fundamental tresillo rhythm to coordinate with other tresillo rhythms in repertoire

Notations of the Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm

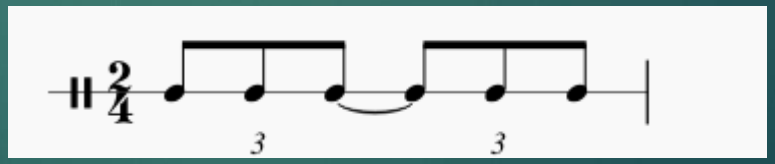
- Cinquillo (commonly used)



- Quintolet (Correlates with Haitian 5/8 meter)

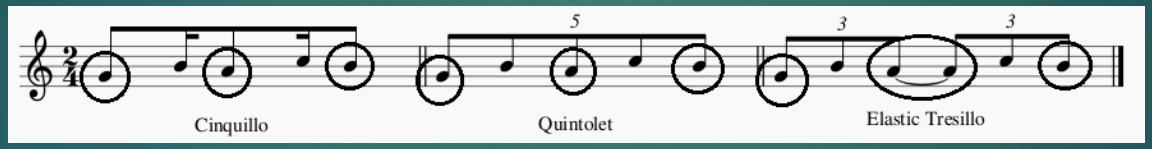


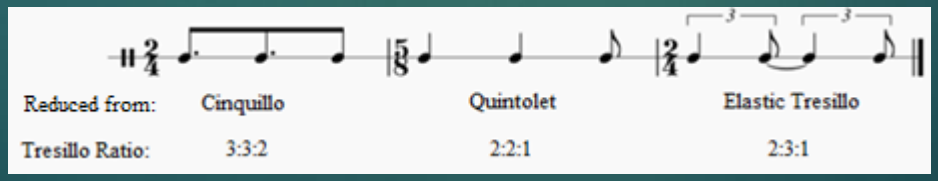
- Elastic Tresillo



Tresillo Rhythm

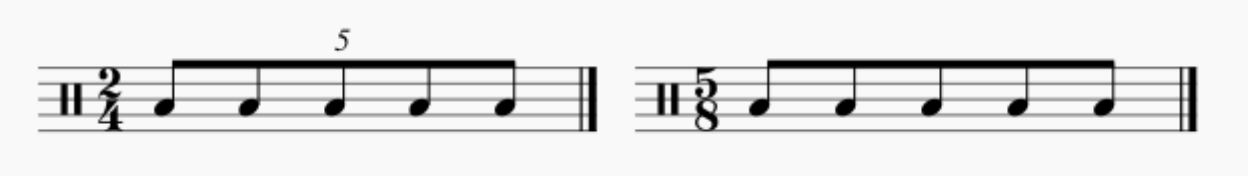
- Fundamental Rhythm of the Five-beat Syncopated Rhythm
  - Should keep integrity with all notations
  - Not accurately transcribed in the quintolet and elastic tresillo rhythms
- Common rhythm in Caribbean music
- Derived from African music and language





Quintolet Rhythm

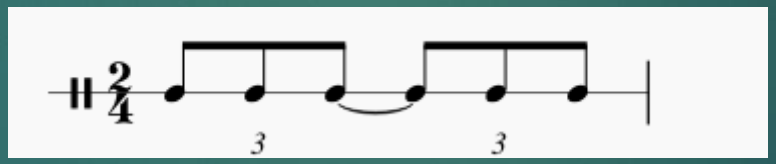
- Appears as an even quintuplet but has the tresillo rhythm embedded in the first, third, and fifth notes
- Has an execution of long-short-long-short-long[1]
- Requires an elongation of the fifth note to keep integrity of the embedded tresillo rhythm
- Synonymous with the Haitian 5/8 meter
- First presented in Haitian composer Occide Jeanty's book *Petite Grammaire Musicale* in 1882



[1]Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance,* 131.

Elastic Tresillo Rhythm

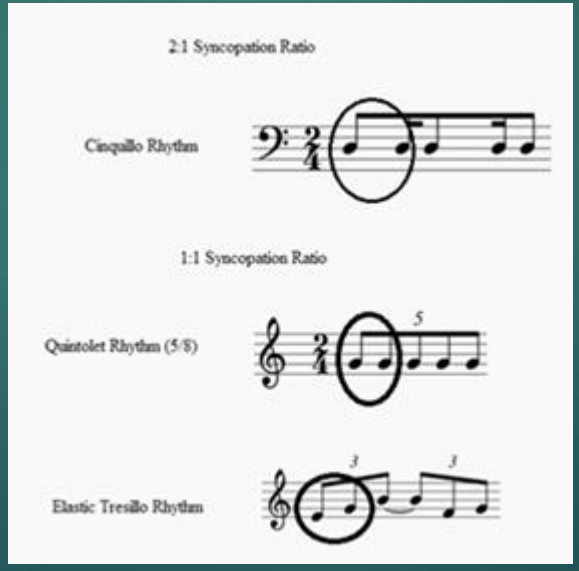
- Elastic label allows for fluctuation in its execution[2]
- Execution requires an elongated final note, like the quintolet rhythm
- First used in salon compositions of the danza in Puerto Rico[3]
- Used by Haitian composer Ludovic Lamothe



[2]Manuel, *Creolizing the Contradance,* 122.
[3]Ibid.

Syncopation Factor

- Ratio of the first two notes in the Cinquillo Rhythm indicates a 2:1 Syncopation Factor for a sharp syncopation
- Ratio of the first two notes in the Quintolet and Elastic Tresillo Rhythms indicates a 1:1 Syncopation Factor for a relaxed syncopation to evenly split the first two notes of the tresillo rhythm

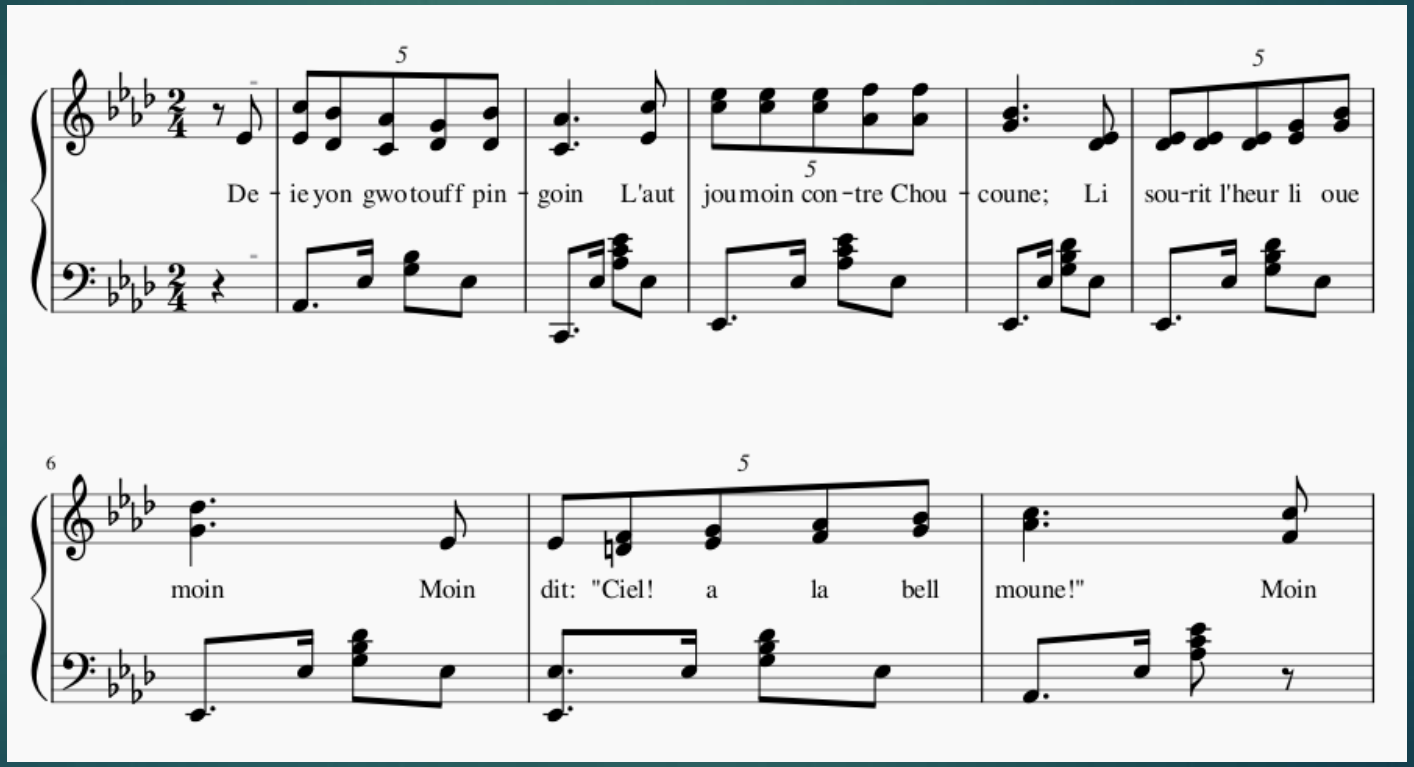


Conversion Method

- Because the quintolet and elastic tresillo rhythms do not accurately convey the embedded tresillo rhythm, I have devised a method to correct the tresillo rhythm in these notations to coordinate tresillo rhythms in the other hand
- Steps of the method
  - Step 1: Convert quintolet and elastic tresillo rhythms to cinquillo rhythms
  - Step 2: Coordinate common tresillo rhythms
  - Step 3: Return relaxed syncopation by relaxing the syncopation of the second and fourth notes

Conversion Example 1

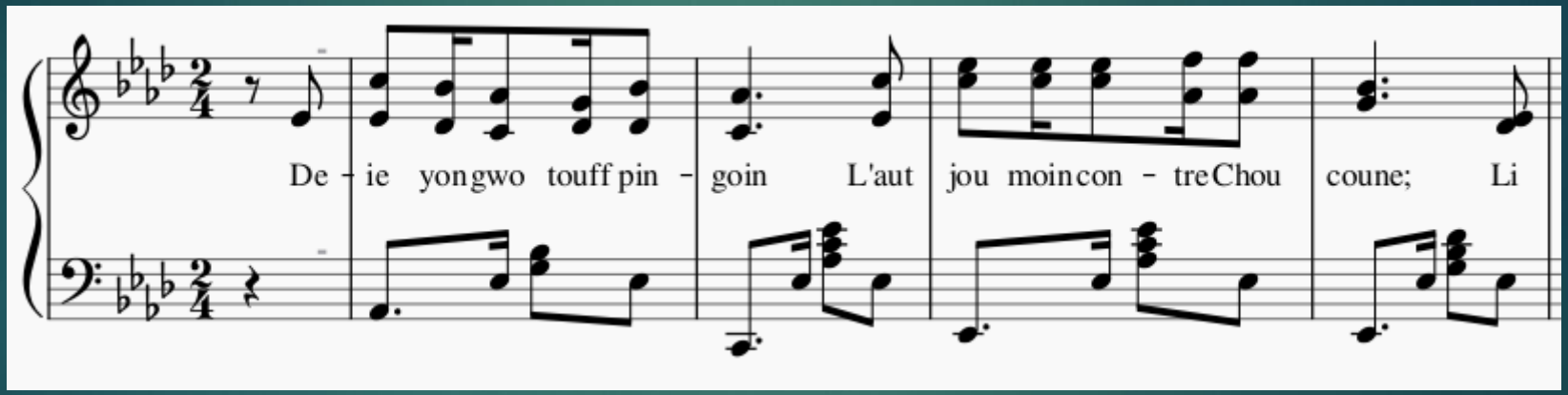
- Opening phrase of Monton's *Choucoune*[4]
  - One of the first salon méringues from 1884
  - Commonly known as Yellow Bird



[4]Mauléart Monton, Choucoune, (Montréal: Société de Recherche et de Diffusion de la Musique, 2015), 2.

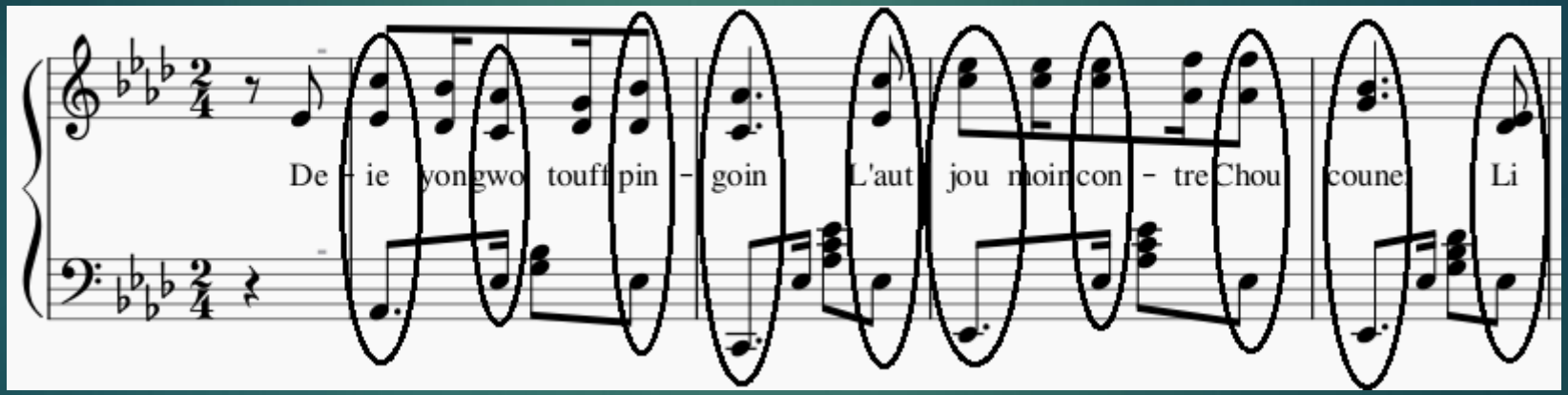
Conversion – Step 1

- Focusing on the antecedent phrase, the first step converts quintolet rhythms into cinquillo rhythms



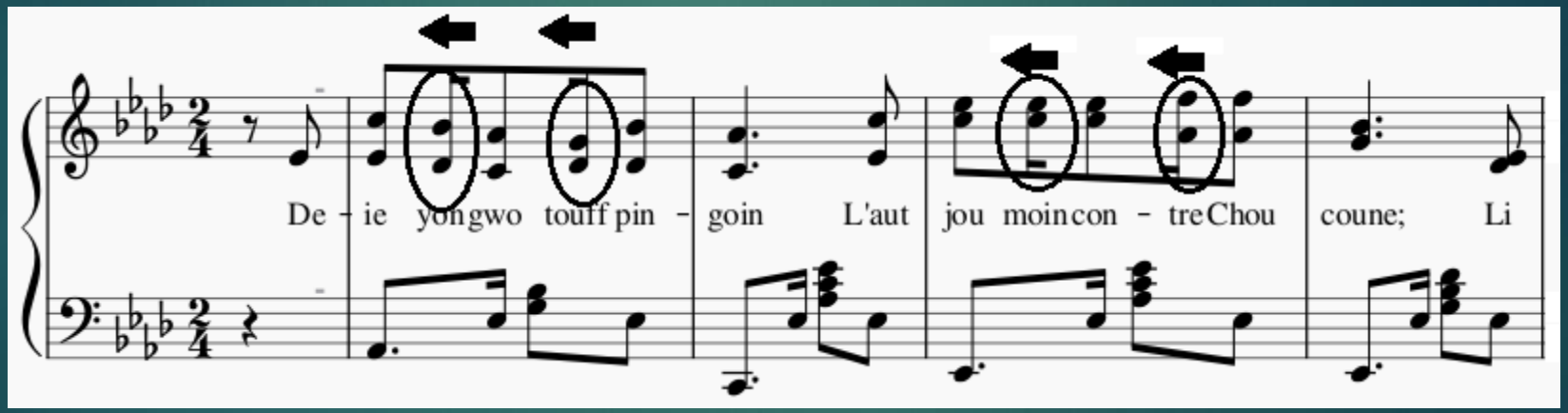
Conversion – Step 2

- The second step coordinates common tresillo rhythms to synchronize

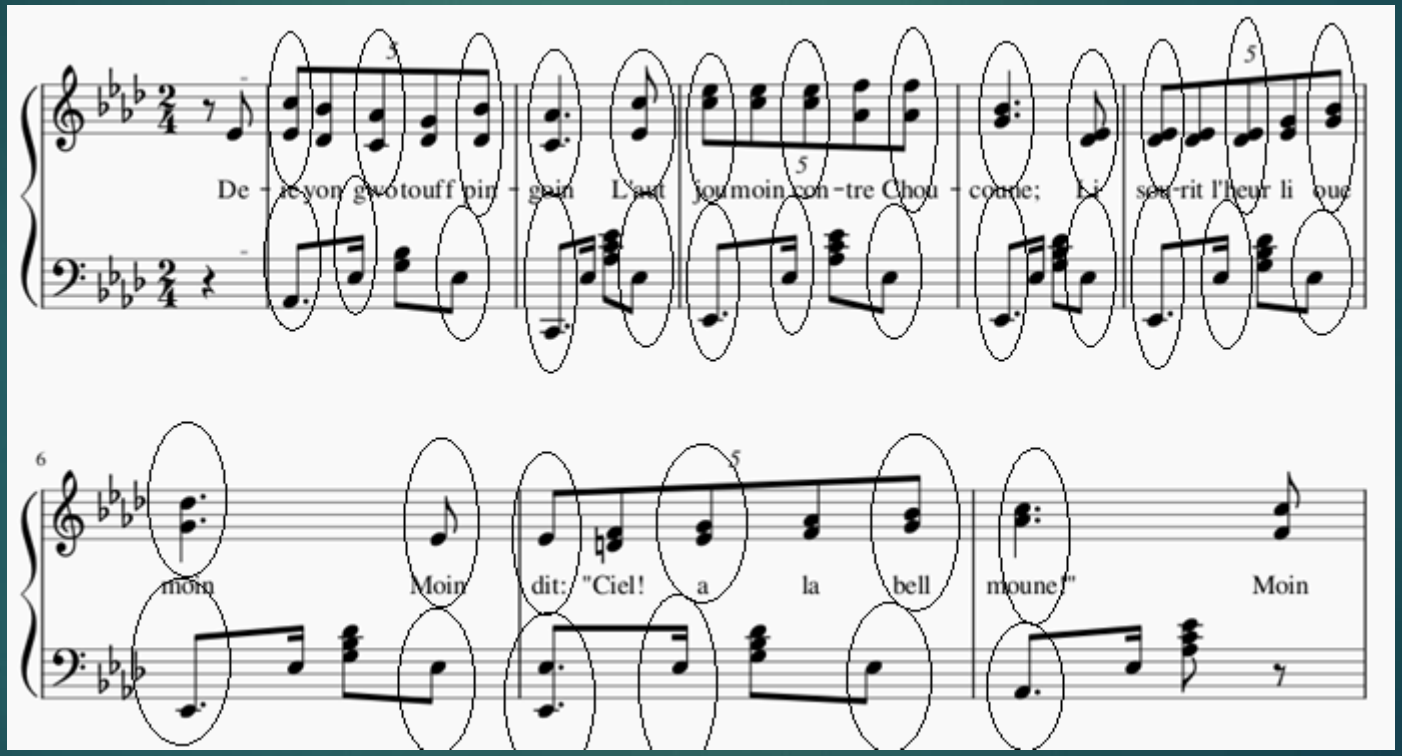


Conversion – Step 3

- The third step returns the relaxed syncopation to the second and fourth notes of the five-beat syncopated rhythm. The circled notes should be placed earlier, which will also add cross-rhythms with misalignment to the duple meter.

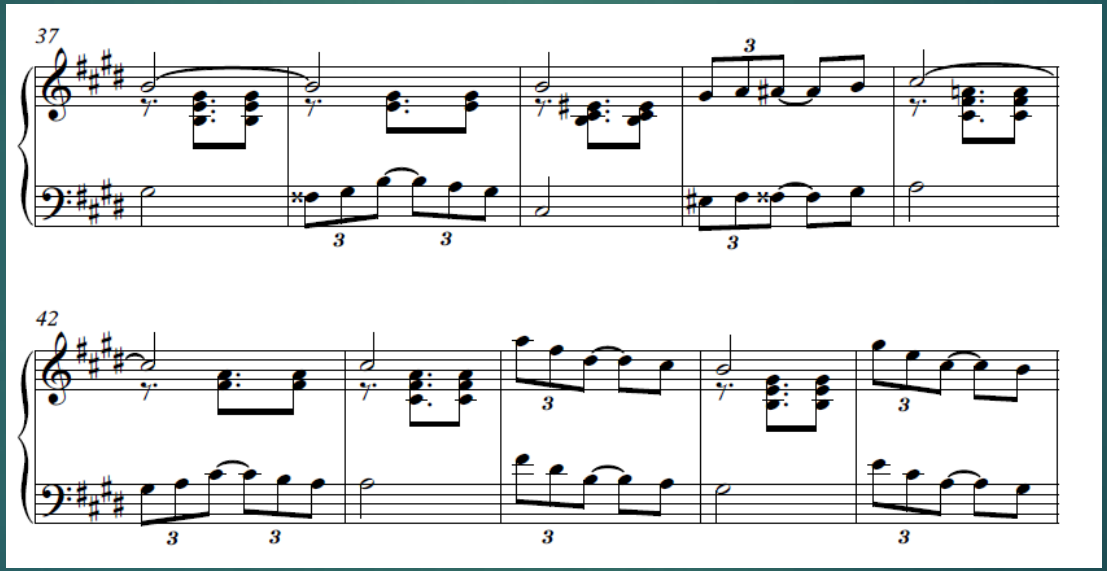


Original with Common Tresillo Rhythms Indicated for entire excerpt



Conversion Example 2 with Elastic Tresillo Rhythm

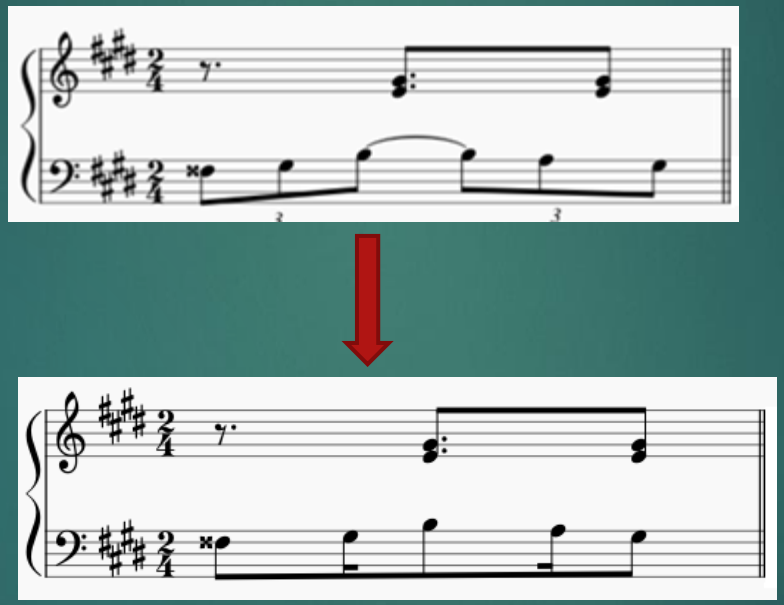
- An excerpt from Lamothe's *La Dangereuse*[5], *mm. 37-46* has questionable alignments between the elastic tresillo and tresillo rhythms in mm. 38 and 42



[5]Ludovic Lamothe, *La Dangereuse*, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, Vol. 8 (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 229.

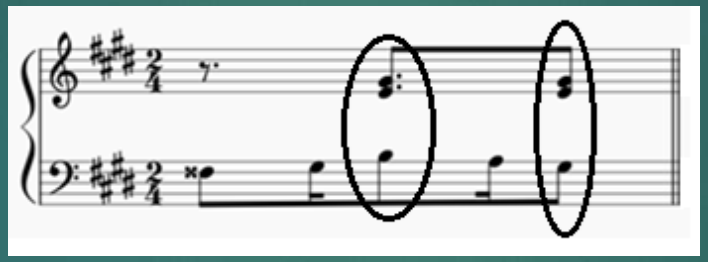
Conversion Method Step 1

- Focusing on m. 38, we apply Step 1



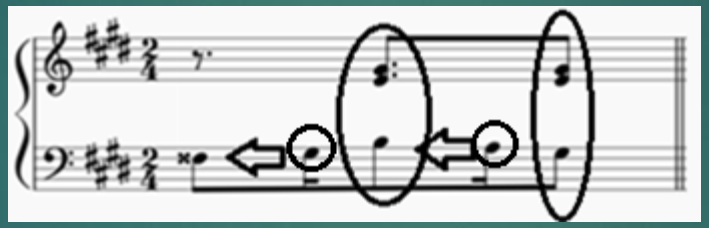
Conversion Method Step 2

- Step 2 – Coordinate common tresillo rhythms

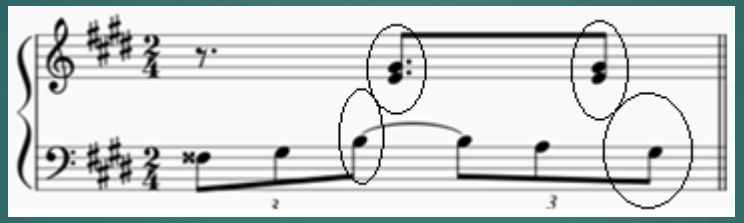


Conversion Method Step 3

- Step 3 – Return relaxed syncopation to second and fourth notes

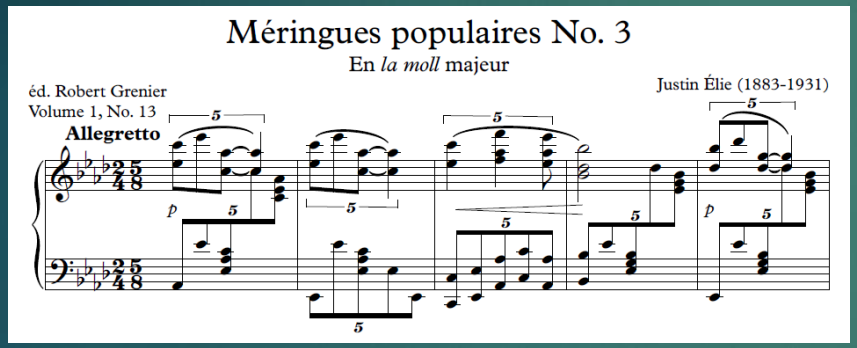


Original with Common Tresillo Rhythms Indicated

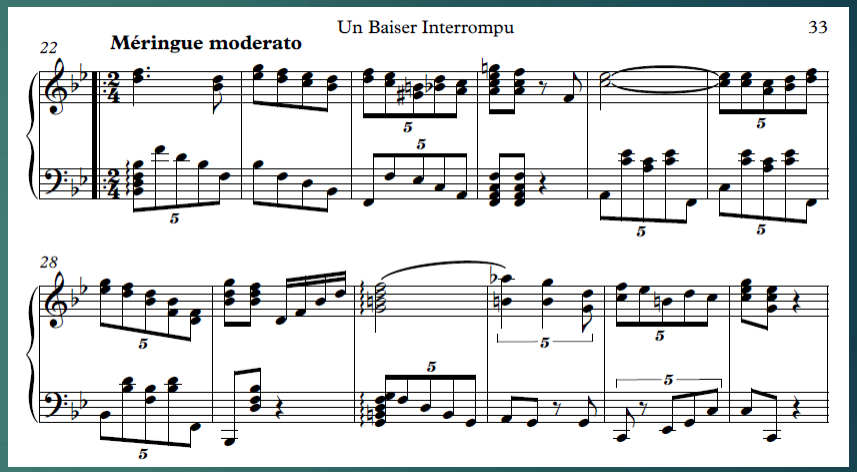


Other Repertoire

- Other pieces from Haitian composers also include these notations



Justin Élie – *Méringues Populaires No. 3,* mm. 1-5[6]



Occide Jeanty – *Un Baiser Interrompu,* mm. 22-33[7]

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

[7]Occide Jeanty, Un Baiser Interrompu, in Robert Grenier, ed., *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, Vol. 1 (City: Publisher, forthcoming), 31.

SRDMH

- All editions were retrieved from the Société de recherche et diffusion de la musique haïtienne (SRDMH) in Montreal
- They plan to release a nine-volume set entitled *Haitian Piano Music* in the next two years
- Current editions of Haitian classical music can be purchased from the catalog at http://www.srdmh.com

References

- Élie, Justin. “Méringues Populaires 1-6.” Robert Grenier, Ed. *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, 9vv. City: Publisher, forthcoming.
- Jeanty, Occide. “Les Masques.” Robert Grenier, Ed. *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, 9vv. City: Publisher, forthcoming.
- Lamothe, Ludovic. “La Dangereuse.” Robert Grenier, Ed. *The Piano Repertoire of Haiti*, 9vv. City: Publisher, forthcoming.
- Manuel, Peter. *Creolizing Contradance in the Caribbean.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.
- Monton, Mauléart. *Choucoune*. Montréal: Société de Recherche et de Diffusion de la Musique, 2015.