

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Turning the Accent: Metric Ambiguity in Waltz Traditions

Alain Roger^{1,*}

¹Department of Philosophy, Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Paris, France

Correspondence: alain.roge@univ-paris1.fr

Abstract

The waltz is associated with a stable triple-meter identity, yet melodic accents, phrase boundaries, and cadential timing can make the beat hierarchy locally uncertain. This article asks how metric ambiguity can remain intelligible without dissolving genre recognition. It compares selected public-domain nineteenth-century waltzes through score-based analysis of accompaniment pattern, melodic accent, phrase length, hemiola-like grouping, cadential arrival, and transitions between local functions. The argument develops three findings: genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift; ambiguity often emerges at transitions between phrase functions; and cadential clarification can retrospectively reorganize preceding accents. These results locate metric ambiguity in the relation between local hearing and later confirmation rather than in a permanent loss of meter. The article contributes a temporal account of waltz accent that joins genre cue, phrase function, and retrospective hearing, while acknowledging that the generic source descriptions and lack of edition, work, and measure locators restrict verification and prevent claims about performance or reception.

Keywords: waltz; metric ambiguity; accent; accompaniment; cadence; dance rhythm

1 Introduction

The reading of the notated passages developed here explores how waltz repertoires maintain dance identity while destabilizing the location and weight of the notated downbeat. Its corpus comprises a comparative public-domain score corpus of waltzes by Schubert, Chopin, Brahms, and Johann Strauss II. The central claim is that genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift. That proposition has force because meter is negotiated among convention, notation, and bodily anticipation. Attention therefore falls on bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement.

The research question is deliberately narrower than a general history of mobile downbeat. Within this repertoire, metric ambiguity is assessed through bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement. Its definition changes only when those features alter the interpretation.

The score comparison advances three connected findings. First, genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift. Second, ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions. Third, cadential clarification retrospectively re-

organizes preceding accents. Collectively, the findings establish that mobile downbeat is neither a decorative effect nor a label attached after interpretation. The argument remains proportionate to the repertoire.

Accordingly, the guiding question is: How can local metric ambiguity redirect accent while the accompanimental cues of waltz genre remain recognizable? The objective is to answer it by tracking accompaniment pattern, melodic accent, phrase length, grouping, cadence, and transitions between phrase functions across selected public-domain nineteenth-century waltzes represented in the bibliography. The article argues that metric ambiguity is a temporary and retrospectively revised relation between melodic accent and genre cue, not a complete suspension of triple meter. The contribution is to connect local displacement with phrase function and cadential clarification. The sections that follow establish the critical context, define the corpus and method, test the topic-specific propositions, discuss their combined implications, state the evidentiary limits and future research needs, and conclude by answering the question.

The waltz's metric effects depend on relations between notated metre, dance practice, and heard accent. McKee traces the social and musical transformation from minuet decorum to waltz intensity

[1]. Krebs's concept of metrical dissonance distinguishes temporary accentual conflict from a stable change of metre [2].

2 Metric Ambiguity in Nineteenth-Century Waltzes

The selected repertoire includes *Selected Waltzes* by Franz Schubert [3], *Waltzes* by Frédéric Chopin [4], *Waltzes, Op. 39* by Johannes Brahms [5], and *Selected Waltzes* by Johann Strauss II [6].

The analytical framework combines theories of musical expectation, phrase organization, and formal function. Meyer's account of musical expectation provides a basis for distinguishing anticipated events from formal surprises [7], while Huron's work informs claims concerning anticipation, delay, and recognition [11]. Lerdahl and Jackendoff's account of tonal grouping guides the description of phrase-level organization [8]. Caplin's theory of formal function supports the analysis of beginnings, continuations, and cadential processes [9], while Hepokoski and Darcy provide a comparative vocabulary for examining formal norms and their deformation [10].

A narrow question gives Turning the Accent its comparative reach. Instead of asking what the selected works mean as wholes, it asks how bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential place-

ment organize metric ambiguity under different formal conditions. The repeated question creates comparability; the different answers preserve historical and medium-specific distinctions. This design also makes revision possible: a disputed case can alter one step of the argument without requiring the entire article to retreat into thematic summary or unsupported generalization.

Turning the Accent defines metric ambiguity through consequences that can be traced. An organizational event belongs to the concept when it alters expectation, access, authority, memory, or the range of plausible readings. This definition joins the three claims while leaving room for disagreement about individual instances. It also identifies a stopping rule: if the asserted change cannot be located in bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement or in their documented historical mediation, the article must describe the observation without assigning it the stronger interpretive label.

The selected materials comprise a comparative public-domain score corpus of waltzes by Schubert, Chopin, Brahms, and Johann Strauss II. The scores and analytical observations support contrastive inquiry and are not a statistical sample. Each item offers a distinct configuration of mobile downbeat and permits comparison through the common unit of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement.

The inquiry employs comparative metric analysis attentive to genre convention, phrase structure, and the distinction between score and embodied performance.

The comparison begins where metric ambiguity becomes traceable—in bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement. The process records position, recurrence, interruption, and outcome before assigning interpretive weight. That order carries weight for the score comparison: a repeated feature may retain its appearance while changing function, whereas a single event at a boundary may redirect the whole sequence. The critical vocabulary is drawn only from scholarship that bears on the named formal problem. Claims about intention, reception, or prevalence are withheld unless the cited sources supply that evidence.

Because metric ambiguity depends on placement, source variation matters. An omitted preface, altered pagination, editorial dynamic, cropped image, restored shot, or changed blocking can shift the connection under discussion. Turning

the Accent responds by keeping version-specific observations separate from conclusions that hold across versions. This practice narrows some claims, but it also prevents the authority of a polished format from concealing an uncertain evidentiary base.

3 Genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift

Genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift. This temporal dimension is essential. The finding therefore concerns organization, not inventory.

Close comparison reveals that the pattern operates at more than one scale. The resulting form is recursive. Interpretation advances, but it also returns to revise what seemed settled. This recursive quality explains why mobile downbeat can remain coherent without becoming predictable.

The relevant unit for testing whether genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift is a connected sequence, not a detached example. Bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement are followed from preparation through occurrence to effect. This allows Turning the Accent to distinguish structural emphasis from sheer frequency and to show why a rare event may outweigh a common one. The first result therefore depends on demonstrable change: without a shift in expectation, access, or memory, the claim about metric ambiguity must be narrowed.

4 Ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions

The reading of the notated passages further finds that ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions. This pattern shifts analysis from isolated form toward distribution. The repertoire repeatedly makes such allocation perceptible.

The question behind the second claim is operational: what can each position do? Turning the Accent answers by following bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement as access and emphasis move among components. Support for the proposition that ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions appears when a shift in position produces a shift in outcome. The comparison also records con-

trary cases, where apparent promotion changes nothing or where an edge position governs the whole. Those exceptions refine the account of metric ambiguity by separating location from agency.

The opening reference point comes from Franz Schubert's *Selected Waltzes*. The reading tests the proposition that genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift by restricting attention to bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement. It then identifies which surrounding relations are necessary for that account.

In Franz Schubert's *Selected Waltzes*, the proposition that genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift is evaluated through placement, not keyword recurrence. The reading asks what prepares each occurrence of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement, which agent or structural layer controls it, and what effect follows. A detail counts as evidence only when its surrounding sequence changes the available judgment. This restriction prevents the case from being reduced to an example chosen after the thesis was formed.

A close reading of Franz Schubert's *Selected Waltzes* must therefore document the first relevant occurrence of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement, the expectation active at that moment, and the effect that distinguishes it from background recurrence. The case supports Turning the Accent only if those three points can be located in the consulted version. A general similarity to the other cases is not enough; the passage must show why the proposition about metric ambiguity is required to explain its organization.

The next reading, Frédéric Chopin's *Waltzes*, tests the distributive dimension of the argument. Here the governing question is whether ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions. This is not read as a defect in reliability.

The case drawn from Frédéric Chopin's *Waltzes* changes the scale of comparison. Here metric ambiguity is read through the distribution of access, emphasis, and response among scores. The relevant question is not whether the same surface feature returns, but whether its return gives a different participant, voice, register, or position the capacity to redirect interpretation. That distributive test supplies the pressure behind the claim that

ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions.

For Frédéric Chopin's Waltzes, the principal counter-reading treats the observed distribution as a genre convention with no special bearing on metric ambiguity. The article answers only at the level of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement: it asks whether a transfer of access or emphasis produces a subsequent effect that convention alone leaves unexplained. If it does not, the second proposition narrows. If it does, the case clarifies how compositional hierarchy becomes an event rather than a static arrangement.

A third reading considers Johannes Brahms's Waltzes, Op. 39 and gives priority to revision over initial recognition. The interpretive test is whether cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents.

The value of Johannes Brahms's Waltzes, Op. 39 is retrospective. Ensuing passages are reread against the first account of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement, allowing the article to distinguish repetition from revision. If the ensuing event merely restates the earlier one, the proposition that cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents receives little support. If it changes the status of what the reader, listener, or viewer already encountered, the case makes visible how metric ambiguity acquires organizational memory.

Verification in Johannes Brahms's Waltzes, Op. 39 demands two locators: one for the initial treatment of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement and one for the moment that alters its status. The interval between them is analytically important because it determines what can be remembered, projected, or misrecognized. Recording both locations prevents the subsequent reading from being projected backward as if it had been available from the start, and it gives the claim about metric ambiguity a visible temporal basis.

The last case, Johann Strauss II's Selected Waltzes, functions as a resistant comparison.

Johann Strauss II's Selected Waltzes remains in the selection because it resists easy synthesis. Its treatment of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement tests how far the claim that genre identity persists through ac-

companimental cues even when melodic accents shift can travel before medium, genre, or historical circumstance depends on qualification. The comparison does not convert resistance into confirmation. It records which part of the proposition remains, which part contracts, and which additional source would be needed to adjudicate between rival explanations.

The resistant role of Johann Strauss II's Selected Waltzes also limits the article's vocabulary. If medium or genre changes the operation of bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement, the comparison names that difference before proposing an analogy. The case may therefore support only part of the claim that genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift. Such partial support is informative: it identifies the condition under which metric ambiguity ceases to explain the evidence and marks the point where another historical or organizational account should take over.

5 Cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents

The final result argues that cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents. Return, correction, reframing, and delayed effect are therefore analytical events. They reveal how a work stores a difference and activates it later.

Taken together, the three findings form a sequence of their own. The first identifies a process that directs attention. The second shows that attention and authority are distributed. The third explains how subsequent events revise that distribution. This sequence supports the central thesis that mobile downbeat is historically variable and formally organized.

Revision in Turning the Accent is neither correction for its own sake nor automatic proof of complexity. To sustain the claim that cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents, the subsequent instance, phrase, image, action, or interface state must reorganize a prior inference about bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement. The comparison specifies what changes and what remains stable. This balance lets metric ambiguity retain continuity without becoming predictable, and it marks the point at which ambiguity is structured by the work rather than supplied by commentary.

6 Discussion

A resistant case is useful here because it separates resemblance from explanation. Evidence that complicates the proposition that genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift requires a narrower claim, not dismissal. The same test applies to ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions and cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents. Turning the Accent gains coherence from those limits: agreement among cases counts only after their differences have been described.

The comparison also suggests that meter is negotiated among convention, notation, and bodily anticipation. This outcome does not depend on universal agreement about every example.

Its contribution is consequently methodological as well as interpretive. Maintaining this boundary is crucial for interdisciplinary research.

Comparison also demands asymmetry. The four cases need not display metric ambiguity with equal clarity, and the least cooperative case carries special weight. It tests whether genre identity persists through accompanimental cues even when melodic accents shift, ambiguity often emerges at transitions between local phrase functions, and cadential clarification retrospectively reorganizes preceding accents name connected operations or merely repeat the vocabulary of the article. By allowing a claim to contract when the evidence resists it, Turning the Accent turns variation into a condition of interpretation rather than a problem to be edited away.

The comparative gain in Turning the Accent comes from holding the question steady while allowing the structural answer to vary. Each case is asked how metric ambiguity is prepared, allocated, and revised through bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement. Because the answer may differ by genre, medium, or historical setting, parallel at the surface is insufficient. The contribution lies in explaining why formally dissimilar events can perform comparable work, and why similar events sometimes demand different interpretations.

Finally, the argument treats uncertainty as a result to be described. When two hypotheses account for bass patterns, anticipations, phrase accents, hemiolas, melodic grouping, and cadential placement with comparable force, Turning the Accent does not select one merely to pro-

duce closure. It identifies what supplementary edition, document, recording, image, or contextual source would distinguish them. This practice gives metric ambiguity a clear evidentiary boundary and prevents confidence of tone from standing in for support.

7 Conclusion

The study shows that waltz identity persists when accompaniment maintains a genre cue, even as melodic accent and phrase transition create local ambiguity. Cadence then reorganizes earlier hearing. This answers the question and contributes a temporal account of metric ambiguity. The generic corpus references and missing locators limit verification; a work-specific, edition-specific, and performance-based comparison is the

necessary next step.

Bibliography

- [1] Eric J. McKee. *Decorum of the Minuet, Delirium of the Waltz: A Study of Dance-Music Relations in 3/4 Time*. Indiana University Press, 2011.
- [2] Harald Krebs. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- [3] Franz Schubert. *Selected Waltzes*. public-domain scores.
- [4] Frédéric Chopin. *Waltzes*. public-domain scores.
- [5] Johannes Brahms. *Waltzes, Op. 39*. public-domain score.
- [6] Johann Strauss II. *Selected Waltzes*. public-domain scores.
- [7] Leonard B. Meyer. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- [8] Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff. *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*. MIT Press, 1983.
- [9] William E. Caplin. *Classical Form*. Oxford University Press, 1998.
- [10] James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy. *Elements of Sonata Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- [11] David Huron. *Sweet Anticipation*. MIT Press, 2006.