

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the study

The author is a flute player whose playing career encompassed the areas of orchestral playing, chamber music, solo recitals and light music. He is now mainly an academic - teaching flute and lecturing in a variety of subjects.

Working on the level of preparing University students for performing and/or teaching careers has led to an increasing interest in accuracy of performance. With this has come the realisation that certain aspects of the printed music, from which a musician teaches and learns, incorporates mistakes and anomalies that hinder performers in their attempts to most meaningfully interpret music. These printed anomalies and mistakes are in the subtle areas of interpretation, namely articulation, slurs, dynamics and written expressive indications (e.g. dolce). The aspects of articulation and slurs are commonly summed up in the general term 'phrasing'.

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the nature of phrasing as it concerns wind players, concentrating on slurs and the patterns of slurs as they affect the interpretation of a phrase. Guidelines will then be suggested for guiding wind players in selecting more meaningful phrasing.

The investigation will incorporate articulation in as much as it of necessity affects the performance of the first notes of all slurs and usually other notes within that phrase. Effective and defective phrasing from various works will be discussed and compared.

By means of testing a number of professional wind players as regards their own way of phrasing, it was hoped to prove that players themselves not only have the ability and insight to effectively phrase where this has not been accomplished by the composers and editors, but are usually better able to phrase meaningfully.

1.3 Sources

A large amount of flute music served as the sources of both the defective (containing mistakes and anomalies) and the effective examples used. Background material relating to phrasing was obtained from both books and magazine articles.

1.3.1 Flute music

Four extracts were selected as test pieces (see Chapter 6). The author has prepared three re-phrased extracts from the Sonata for solo flute in A minor by C.P.E. Bach (see Chapter 10). In addition, mistakes and anomalies in a number of flute pieces have been investigated and discussed throughout the dissertation.

1.3.2 Books

Most authors generally only touch on phrasing in the course of addressing other topics. A large number of books were therefore scoured in order to find relevant discussions. Thus from many sources only a few lines or paragraphs were utilised.

The book *The Dynamic Performance: A Performer's Guide to Musical Expression and Interpretation* by Donald Barra (1983) proved a source of inspiration. Similarly the two books by Nikolaus Harnoncourt *Baroque Music Today: Music as Speech* (1982) and *The Musical Dialogue* (1989) provided the starting place for much of the investigation. There is also an excellent and thought-provoking book *Bach Interpretation: Articulation Marks in Primary Sources of J.S. Bach* by John Butt (1990).

A book that specifically addresses wind playing is that by Tromlitz, *The Virtuoso Flute Player* (1991). The *Practice Book for the Flute* Volume 3 by Trevor Wye (1983) clearly lays out the basic tenets of slurring.

1.3.3 Magazine articles

The main source of magazine articles is the American publication *Flute Talk* - in particular those articles by Michel Debost. *PAN: The Journal of the British Flute Society* and the two American publications *Flutist Quarterly* and *The Clarinet* also carry appropriate articles.

1.3.4 Other sources

The author's BMus(Hons) thesis entitled *Flute Articulation: A Study of Techniques and Teaching Methods* (1991) is frequently referred to in the text. Details of articulation that were covered in this earlier dissertation have not been reiterated here.

1.4 Research methods

Initially much background reading was done in order to more fully understand the nature of phrasing in general, and the slur in particular. This was approached both from historical and practical points of view.

A number of flute pieces were investigated in great detail with regard to the printed slurs and articulations. Motives and phrases that appeared more than once were compared, as were sequential and imitative passages. Where there were mistakes or anomalies these were listed, played by the author, and the best patterns noted.

A test was devised to ascertain the ability of fellow professional wind players to provide passages with slurs and articulations. Four unslurred pieces were sent to twenty players.

1.5 Problems encountered

The main problem encountered during the course of this study was that of terminology. It was discovered that most terms employed in discussing and describing details of interpretation are used, both in speech and print, in a very vague way; the term 'phrasing' being the least consistent of all. Thus Chapter 3 is devoted to defining the terms used in this dissertation. Hopefully this will lead to a better understanding and usage of these terms generally.

1.6 Organisation of this dissertation

Chapter 2 traces the development of the author's interest in this topic and is intended to stimulate a similar quest in other wind players.

After the terminology has been discussed and defined in Chapter 3, the problems encountered by both composers and performers due to the nature of music notation is discussed in detail, with emphasis on the slur and articulation (Chapter 4). This leads to a detailed investigation into the nature of the slur in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 introduces the test done on selected wind players, and lists conclusions that can be drawn therefrom.

In Chapter 7 the influence of dynamics, articulation, breathing and technique on the performance of slurs are discussed.

Chapters 8 and 9 draw parallels between wind phrasing and both language and the bowing techniques of string players, in order for the wind player to better understand phrasing by considering these analogies.

The specialised cases of wind phrasing in the Baroque and Classical periods are addressed in Chapter 10. The re-phrased sections of movements by C.P.E. Bach are included here.

The final Chapter includes a summary of conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The appendices provide the test pieces discussed in Chapter 6, together with the original printed phrasing and examples of re-phrasing selected from those submitted by the testees.

During the author's musical career, experience gradually taught that the field of notated phrasing (which here includes slur patterns and word-accents) was neglected by most players, conductors, editors, arrangers and composers, as shown by reports like playing in the correct historical 'style' in the presence of the printed implementation of huge melodic arcs. This was confirmed by the historical writing of a great many artists, whose 'books' by diverse writers (in a variety of disciplines) appeared that the historical question, more than any other, was the status quo of printed arrangements.

The theory evolved in the author's mind that, given free rein, that part of the performing wind player's talent would adopt their own patterns of phrasing and articulations that would not only be more practical than most of the printed scores, but would also be more musically effective in bringing out the essential elements hidden within the written score and rhythms. It was felt that professional wind players were more able to naturally 'feel' the most appropriate phrasing of the music than editors, arrangers and composers, and that the performance of their own slurring and articulation patterns would result in more meaningful performances.

In practice, the author's theory is that wind players would, given this freedom, erase many of the slurs, especially the long phrase-slurs, from the written page, provide more subtle slur patterns that bring out intrinsic groups, sub-phrases, accompaniments and two-part elements.