CHAPTER 6

THE TEST GIVEN TO 20 PROFESSIONAL WIND PLAYERS

As outlined in Chapter 4 some aspects of the notational system, and especially the symbol used to denote slurs, are not always objectively ideal. This causes confusion when performers interpret the symbols according to subjective notions. The situation is compounded when composers and editors use slurs in an inconsistent, ambiguous and sometimes completely incorrect manner.

6.1 The theory behind the test

The theory outlined in Chapter 2 was that professional performing wind players could discern patterns of slurs and articulations that would not only be more practical than many of those printed in scores, but would also be more musically effective in bringing out the subtle elements hidden amongst the written notes and rhythms. In practice, the theory states that wind players would, given free rein, erase many of the slurs, especially the long phrase-slurs, from the printed page and provide more, and subtler, slur patterns that bring out intrinsic groups, sub-phrases, accompaniments and two-part elements, leading to more meaningful phrasing in general.

6.2 The method of testing the theory

A method was evolved to test out this theory. To this end extracts from four pieces of flute music were selected and sent to twenty professional wind players. They were asked to add their own "phrasing marks" to these extracts, which had been doctored by the author by removing all the slurs (see Appendices A-D).

6.2.1 The testees

The twenty professional wind players included one with a doctorate, three with

masters degrees, two with B Mus Honours, three University lecturers and two ex-lecturers, nine current members of symphony orchestras (of which five are regular solo recital players) and one high school music teacher. All are involved in practical teaching in some way or another, and all are or were performers in their own right. Of the twenty, sixteen were flute players, three were clarinet players and one was an oboist. Replies were received from sixteen.

6.2.2 The pieces used for the test

The pieces chosen were as follows (see Appendices A-D):

* *Intermezzo* by Edward German (mm. 1 - 110)
* *Madrigal* by Louis Aubert (mm. 1 - 52)
* *Sicilienne* by Marcel Poot (mm. 1 - 13)
* *Country Dance* by Yuill-Smith (mm. 1 - 15)

These particular pieces were chosen for the following reasons:

* They are relatively obscure, and hence probably not known to the testees.

* They are relatively difficult to categorize; and hence leave the testees an open choice, i.e. they will not phrase in 'Classical style' or 'like *Syrinx.'*

* There are a wide number of possible choices.

* The articulation and especially the slur patterns as originally notated (probably by the composers themselves, as no editors are mentioned on the printed scores) are definitely not, in the author's opinion, good examples of meaningful phrasing.

Two slurs were left in the Aubert (mm. 3 and 18), as were five tenuto signs, in order to provide a few clues as to the piece's character. The passage beginning

at m. 18 would have a totally different character, lighter and more dance-like, if the sixteenth notes were tongued. All printed dynamics were left intact. Tempo indications and expressive markings such as *calme* and *dolce* were also not excised.

It is realised, although not one of the testees complained on this basis, that a definitive selection of slurs and articulations cannot be made without recourse to the accompaniment. This would provide harmonic, textural and dynamic clues that could influence the choice of patterns. The harmony of three of the pieces (the Aubert is more complex) is relatively easy to understand from the flute part alone. The texture of the accompaniment is only at odds with the flute part in the *Piu vivo* section of the German where it is more flowing than the flute's material. The dynamics of both the flute part and the piano part consistently follow the same patterns.

6.2.3 The correspondence with the testees

A letter was sent to each testee, along with the four musical extracts, requesting their cooperation. In this letter certain points were emphasised, as the following extracts show:

> I have embarked [...] on my M Mus and have chosen as the topic of my thesis "Phrasing". Having discovered many examples of phrasing excesses and anomalies by composers, arrangers and publishers alike [...] I have decided to test out certain theories on you all.

> I would like you please to add your own phrasing marks to the enclosed six pages of music [...]. I have excised as carefully as possible all slurs and staccato marks; but I have left in all other composer's directions. So, PLEASE could you [...] play through the pieces, assess them, and then carefully write in (in pen or sharp pencil) how you feel/sense the pieces ought to be phrased (using slurs, staccato dots, tenutos and whatever). I say "carefully" because often with hand written phrasing the exact note on which a slur begins and ends is not clear. I have deliberately not enclosed the accompaniments as [...] I want you to rely solely on your inherent feel for melodic line.

This is <u>not</u> a test; there are no <u>correct answers</u> and I do <u>not</u> wish you to try and work out what the composer probably wrote. The aim is, roughly, to prove that practising professional musicians can phrase works <u>better</u> than composers who do not play that instrument. Should you know, or even just vaguely recognise, any (all!) of the pieces, please just phrase the one's you <u>don't</u> know. Anonymity will be observed and none of your names will appear in the thesis or in any article derived from this research. I would prefer it if you would also <u>not</u> write your names on the returned music as I will jumble them all up and compare them without considering who wrote what.

6.3 The results

Despite the casual, and perhaps ambiguous, use of the words "phrasing" and "phrase" (used as a verb) in the letter, only one of the testees pointed this out. To this end a rhyme was enclosed:

> I never could resist temptation
> To make each Altercation into a Recitation!
> Please give me further Information:
> Do you mean "PHRASE" or "ARTICULATION"???

Nevertheless, all four examples were returned reslurred with some articulation marks. All the other testees apparently understood what was requested without questioning the terminology used.

One testee used only slurs, while all others also used staccato dots and tenutos as mentioned in the letter. Staccato dots were much used.

An important fact emerged, namely that not one testee used the so-called mezzo staccato notation . There are two probable conclusions that can be drawn from this:

* The notation is open to misinterpretation and therefore deemed best avoided.

* Both an unmarked tongued note and the tenuto sign can be satisfactorily used to describe the note lengths between staccato and legato.

One testee used the notation of a tenuto under a slur ; apparently wishing to ensure that the notes will not actually be separated, but that the tongue will be used within the airstream.

Only one testee, and only in one piece (Poot), used a phrase-slur to show the joining together of two sub-phrases to make a single phrase. All others deemed the phrase-slur as unnecessary.

Breathing places, V, were marked by about half the testees, but not in a very consistent way. In most cases these were used to delineate phrase-endings, as much as actual breathing places - perhaps in place of the phrase-slur. One testee used both the V sign and the ' sign to signify breathing places. It would appear that the ' signified a quick breath; another testee used the (V) sign to signify this.

Only two testees used accents ➤ ; and these were only in the Yuill-Smith. Apparently accents are not considered a part of the world of phrasing; they are probably considered a part of dynamics. No dynamics at all were added.

No additional words, either in English or Italian, were deemed necessary by anybody.

Slur and/or articulation patterns were applied extremely consistently by all testees. Very occasionally (e.g. German mm. 9 and 12) similar patterns were not noticed, and were slurred differently.

A few testees appeared to have favourite slur patterns - slurred in pairs:

and two-slurred/two-tongued:

Most, though, used a variety of slur and articulation patterns in the more complex pieces (Aubert and German).

Obvious embellishments of a single note were grouped under a slur; the best example of this being in m. 69 of the German (see also m. 81):

Example 6-1: German, Intermezzo, mm. 69-70

The largest number of possible options were encountered at linking passages and at changes of tempo, e.g. these two linking bars (mm. 45 and 108) in the German where the following options were provided:

Example 6-2: German, Intermezzo, mm. 45-46

Example 6-3: German, <u>Intermezzo</u>, mm. 108-110

Similarly at the change of tempo:

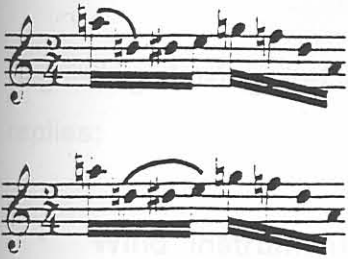Example 6-4: German, <u>Intermezzo</u>, mm. 55-57

In the Aubert, greatest variety appeared at the *cédez*:

Example 6-5: Aubert, <u>Madrigal</u>, mm. 10-12

Sequences were almost always treated consistently, but a few of the testees did not recognize some of the less obvious recurring patterns; for example mm. 9, 10 and 11 of the German. It is worth remembering that the composer also did not apply his slurring consistently.

Example 6-6: German, <u>Intermezzo</u>, mm. 9-12

The motive of a large rising interval followed by a descending scale sequence (or the opposite), in whatever music of whatever period, has basically two slurring options (as shown in Ex 6-7): either the large interval is slurred and the other notes tongued or the large interval tongued and the other notes slurred. Wherever this motive appeared in the test pieces these options were chosen almost equally:

Example 6-7a: German, <u>Intermezzo</u>, m. 22

Example 6-7b: German, <u>Intermezzo</u>, mm. 51-52

Example 6-7c: Aubert, <u>Madrigal</u>, mm. 10-11

One testee slurred all the notes and one tongued all the notes in Exx. 6-7a and 6-7b.

Apart from in the Aubert, which is essentially melodic, all sections which appeared dance-like were provided with many more tongued notes than in the original printed editions. This applied to the Poot, which although called a *Sicilienne* is also melodic, the *Piu vivo* section of the German (mm. 60 - 95) and, mainly, the *Country Dance* of Yuill-Smith.

6.4 Summary

Regarding slurring and articulation, the following can be inferred from the testees' replies:

* Wind instrumentalists can successfully add slurs and articulations to previously unknown and unheard music.

* All testees produced slur patterns that deviated markedly from the originally printed patterns.

* Virtually all the slurs and articulations added, are, in the author's opinion, markedly better than those notated - presumably by the composers.

* Each testee was individually consistent throughout a piece: in the choice of which slur patterns best suited the music, in the relative number of notes left unslurred, and in the selection of which articulation marks to use.

* All testees preferred to articulate (tongue) many more of the notes than were originally indicated in the printed copy.

* Most testees sought out patterns, and slurred them as such.

* Composers would do well to consult performers on matters of phrasing.

* In the absence of structurally meaningful phrasing printed in the music, performers should feel free to judiciously change or add phrasing where appropriate.

It would appear that the number of slurs and the actual patterns chosen were guided by both what was seen on the printed page and what was heard and felt in playing the pieces.

Having chosen the most meaningful phrasing, be it that which is printed or the player's own, the next step must be the successful performance thereof. The various parameters that influence the efficacy of phrasing in performance will be addressed in Chapter 7.