

## CHAPTER 5

## THE SLUR

In the performance of music by a wind instrumentalist all notes, whether articulated or slurred together, are welded into phrases. The basic aim of this dissertation is not to decipher and define all phrasings, but to examine their role, especially that of the slur, in the shaping of phrases and, hence, on the interpretation of musical works in general.

## 5.1 The slur

As Baines (1962:39) succinctly puts it: "The general rule is that every note written in the music is to be tongued unless there is a slur to it from the preceding note." This much is accepted by all wind players. But our point of departure must be the basic question: What is the nature of a slur and what role does it play? (The 'phrase-slur', as defined in Chapter 3.2.11, is another entity, another concept.)

## 5.2 The basic rule about a slur

Wye (1983:5) states baldly that on a wind instrument (his capitals) "A SLUR OVER TWO NOTES RAISES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST NOTE AND DIMINISHES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND NOTE." He provides (1983:7) the following notational/performance guide:

## Example 5-1:



*phrase* it like this:



Michel Debost's statement (1991a:2) that a two-note slur "does not mean that the first note is louder than the second but that the second one is softer than the first" may at first sight appear to mean the same as Wye's statement, and be merely playing with words, but his insight draws one's attention not only to the relative strengths of each note (as Wye does), but, equally important, to the fact that the first note of a slurred group of notes does not necessarily have to stick out from the surrounding general dynamics by automatically being emphasised or accented to any undue extent.

There are occasions where a slur merely indicates that the second note is a release from the first, while the basic flow of the phrase is maintained, as in the following pattern:

Example 5-2: Briccialdi, Carnival of Venice Op. 78, mm. 27-30





Wye does, though, immediately modify his stated rule (1983:5) by admitting that "there are countless examples of how that rule can be broken". But can his initial statement be taken as our basic rule?

Generally Wye's rule, which allows for some kind of stress on the first note and subsequent release on the second, will suffice. As a specific case Mather (1973:39) describes the 18th-century practice of slurring in pairs (*lourer*) as giving "the first note of each pair a little more length and a little more strength than the second note". Taken to an extreme this leads in 18th-century French music to the often misunderstood performance practice of *notes inégales*. Although this will not be addressed in this dissertation, the practice was originally merely an extension, under the influence of French national characteristics, of the rules of stress combined with the rules of embellishment. (See Mather 1973:40.)

One can test Wye's basic rule, as he himself does, by taking a simple phrase and applying a series of varying slur patterns to it, thereby bringing out into relief certain notes and diminishing the importance of others. He provides (1983:6) the following six examples of how to bring out the given notes by the addition of six different slur patterns:

Example 5-3:

The image displays six pairs of musical notation, each pair separated by an equals sign. Each pair shows a simple phrase on the left and a more complex version on the right, where various slur patterns are used to emphasize specific notes. The phrases are written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notes in the phrases are: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The slur patterns include: 1) a slur under the first four notes; 2) a slur under the last four notes; 3) a slur under the first two notes and another under the last two notes; 4) a slur under the first three notes and another under the last three notes; 5) a slur under the first two notes, another under the last two notes, and a third under the middle note; 6) a slur under the entire phrase.

It is interesting to note that he resorts to two articulation markings, the tenuto  and the accent , and a short diminuendo (see Ex. 5-1) in order to clearly delineate his rule. Some composers and editors similarly, perhaps fearing the wrong interpretation of their intentions, crowd their score with similar markings. In a sense they are then therefore duplicating the already notated patterns of stress and release as implied by the subtle combination of metric accent (i.e. placing of notes within the regular periodic pulse as implied by the time signature) and slur patterns. The following is an example where there is no ambiguity as to the placing of stresses in the music:

Example 5-4a: Ganne, Andante et Scherzo, mm. 1-6

Andante (moderato)  
2  
*p doux et simple*

The following additions to the slurs would therefore be superfluous, merely duplicating what, to the performer, is obvious:

Example 5-4b: Ganne, Andante et Scherzo, mm. 1-6 (superfluous accents)

Andante (moderato)  
2  
*p doux et simple* *mp*

But this rule of stress and release, like any rule, needs to be fully understood and appreciated for the basic guideline that it is, so that it can be meaningfully incorporated into differing contexts. What may seem like a 'breaking' of that rule is merely the basic rule being temporarily superseded by a shifting of the stress patterns:


Example 5-5: Ganne, Andante et Scherzo, mm. 103-110


*p dolce*

### 5.3 Stressed notes

Wye (see Chapter 5.2) resorts to using two notational markings, an accent and a tenuto, to make perfectly clear his intentions regarding the effect of slurring pairs of notes. He implies that merely using slurs is not enough to make the superimposed patterns of measured beats and important notes unambiguous. But

even the addition of these, and any other indications as to the patterns of stressed notes, will not guarantee that any two performers will interpret the phrase in exactly the same way. As discussed in Chapter 4, the nature of all musical notation (excluding, perhaps, graphic and computerised notation of electronic music) includes a relatively large element of uncertainty - and hence, choice.

The accent over or under a note  will present the lesser amount of variety, being most likely interpreted by the performer as indicating that that note must, to some degree, stick out from the surroundings; this would mean playing the note with a louder volume, a more focused tone-colour and, if tongued, a sharper attack. Cooper and Meyer (in Rothstein 1989:37) bear this out by stating that an accent is a "stimulus (in a series of stimuli) which is *marked for consciousness* in some way. It is set off from other stimuli because of differences in duration, intensity, pitch, timbre, etc."

The tenuto , which literally means 'to hold a note for its full value', will usually be interpreted, even by the same performer in a single piece, with greater variety. The interpretation will greatly vary according to the style of the composition, the type of ensemble, the acoustic, the tempo and the general dynamics, in addition to the character of the passage.

As Weisberg (1975:128) points out:

In addition to being sensitive to small changes in volume, the ear is also sensitive to small changes in time; not in an absolute sense, however, but rather in comparing one sound with another. In a series of notes, the one which is longest will stand out from the others.

In order for it to be "marked for consciousness" the tenuto note may be merely lengthened, merely stressed by being played relatively louder or, more likely, some combination of the two. As with an accent, a strengthening of vibrato and/or tonecolour are regularly (and often unconsciously) used as more subtle yet very effective ways of stressing certain notes by bringing the attention to them. The tenuto marking has three characteristics:

- \* it has a more melodic connotation than has the accent,
- \* it is more subtle than the accent, and
- \* it is very flexible (which also means inaccurate, from the composer's point of view).

Both the accent and the tenuto usually occur on separated, i.e. tongued, notes. But they can also occur under a slur:

Example 5-6: Tomasi, Sonatine for solo flute, mm. 3-5



In both cases, due to the slurs, the performer is expected to emphasise the note without recourse to a tongue-stroke. Accenting a note under a slur presents no problem to a wind player who uses his breath to either strengthen the note or to swell on it, < > fashion. With tenutos the wind player may merely lengthen the note.

The amount of stress given to a note and the methods employed are further discussed in Chapter 7.1.

#### 5.4 Longer slurs

Most of Chapter 5.2 was concerned with slurred two-note groups. As a general rule for a slur over a few notes (up to four) the author has no hesitation in supporting Wye's proposition regarding the implied stress on the first note. It is when one comes to longer slurs (i.e. over larger groups of more than four notes) and complex articulation patterns that confusion can arise, especially as more and more possibilities open up as the length of the phrase increases.

## 5.5 The performer's choice

Where few or no slurs are written or printed, how does a performer choose his own pattern of slurs from the many possibilities? Or, equally, how does he decide whether the printed slurs, either the composer's or an editor's, are the best of all possibilities?

Wye (1983:8-9) presents an example which in the Urtext edition is unslurred, and then imposes three different slur patterns, each of which brings out a different pattern of "important" notes:

Example 5-7: J.S. Bach (attrib), Sonata in G minor, I:17-18

The image displays four staves of musical notation for the same passage of J.S. Bach's Sonata in G minor, I:17-18. Each staff shows a different slur pattern applied to the notes, illustrating how different slurs can highlight different "important" notes. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 3/4 time signature. The first staff shows the original unslurred notation. The second staff shows a slur pattern that emphasizes the first and third notes of each group. The third staff shows a slur pattern that emphasizes the second and fourth notes of each group. The fourth staff shows a slur pattern that emphasizes the first and second notes of each group. Each staff ends with the word "etc." to indicate that the pattern continues.

Wye (1983:7) does not decide which one is 'best', and leaves the performer to decide. The performer's decision should be prompted by what he decides is the composer's intended "skeleton, or basic tune". An inexperienced student will possibly be left confused by Wye's next two bits of advice; namely, to use "good judgement" and to rely on one's teacher to "advise you on what is good taste" (1983:7). It is precisely because these latter two are often at a premium that students (and too many others) rely on someone else's judgement and taste, and play from dubiously edited scores.

The phrasing of a passage can vastly alter the melodic and/or rhythmic meaning thereof. Zuckerkandl (1959:131) provides a simple theme by Bach and phrases it in two different ways in order to demonstrate this:

Example 5-8: J.S. Bach, Organ Fugue in A, BWV 536

The image shows two musical staves, labeled 'a)' and 'b)', representing different phrasings of a theme. Both staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of eight notes: A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, and E4. In staff 'a)', the notes are grouped into four pairs, each pair connected by a slur. In staff 'b)', the notes are grouped into two larger phrases, each consisting of four notes connected by a slur.

McCaskill and Gilliam (1983:64), like Wye, refer to "individual taste" as being the determining factor, but offer a set of guidelines that can be followed. The first is vaguely described as "stylistic influence", but the rest demand insight into the musical structure itself (usually lacking in young wind players, and all too often sidelined by professional wind players).

On what musical basis would a performer decide which one of the patterns delineated by Wye best serves the music?

### 5.6 Inherent phrasing patterns

The above-mentioned guidelines of McCaskill and Gilliam (1983:64) offer sound, fundamental practical advice, and initially involve considering the contour of a phrase with its "rising and/or falling intensities from climax to resolution", as well as the "underlying harmonic structure". This will lead to defining the fundamental tones of the phrase and the relative strengths of the other tones proportional to them. Then the sub-divisions of the phrase, the motives and the sub-phrases, must be identified. Here the "structural connectives such as phrase groupings, statements of themes, rhythmic sequences, melodic repetitions" must be noted and understood. This leads to the determining and understanding of the relative

importance of that phrase in the overall musical context.

Once a phrase is "understood" in this manner, the actual matter of its phrasing can be addressed.

### 5.6.1 Stressed notes

It is generally agreed by all writers, and felt by all performers, that a dissonance usually requires to be stressed in some way, whereas its resolution is relatively unstressed. Harnoncourt (1982:41) equates this to a sudden physical pain which then subsides into relief. Music, he says, has a main hierarchy "like a scaffolding, a skeleton" with a definite order; and this is "breached over and over again by stresses of dissonances".

Therefore one's first step in understanding the nature of a particular phrase, and how it should be phrased, is to determine where these stresses occur, and their relative strengths - relative to each other, and relative to all others in the surrounding phrases. This surrounding territory is, in Western music, largely defined by the harmonic background and movement. This can either be understood by analysis, or it can be gauged by involvement, by feeling, in actual performance (and while practising). Even in unaccompanied solos there will usually be an underlying, and inescapable, harmonic structure that guides the phrases, through various cadences, to an overall meaningful formal whole. (The re-phrased movement from the Sonata by C P E Bach in Chapter 10 is an example thereof.)

Having proposed this counter-hierarchy of stress and accent upon the main musical flow, Harnoncourt (1982:41) further suggests "two additional sub-hierarchies which modify the major accent hierarchy in an interesting way: rhythm and emphasis". The first, rhythmic accent, he summarises as: "If a longer note follows a short note, the former is normally stressed, even if it falls on an unstressed, 'bad' position in the measure". This is commonly expressed in the terms 'syncopation' and 'cross rhythms'. For example:

Example 5-9: Doppler, Fantaisie Pastorale Hongroise, mm. 170-173

The second, emphasis or emphatic stress, "falls on the top notes of a melody":

Example 5-10: Donjon, Pan!, mm. 13-16

One must, of course, not apply this to all top notes of phrases. For example, the following notes marked \* do not require any kind of special emphasis:

Example 5-11: Bizet, Minuet de L'Arlésienne, mm. 3-6

Harnoncourt sums up his proposal and relates it to slurring and articulation in the following statement (1982:41):

It is clear that a large number of counter-hierarchies are superimposed on the basic framework of the hierarchy of measure. In this way, otherwise very dull order is constantly circumvented in interesting ways and enlivened at a number of levels.

The application of the rules of stress [...] to eighth and sixteenth-note

groups result in the actual articulation. Joining and separating individual tones and the smallest groups of tones or figures are the means of expression.

If one analyses the slur patterns used in the following passage it is clear that the "very dull order" that would be created by constantly emphasising both beats of the bar is avoided by two very simple means: In bars 64, 68 and 69 the syncopations avoid any stress coming on the second beat; and in bars 66 and 67 the second beat is slurred over from the previous group, thus effectively de-emphasising the second beat.

Example 5-12: Doppler, *Fantaisie Pastorale Hongroise*, mm. 64-69

64 A tempo  
mf

67  
f pp

This type of change of accentuation rate is usually coupled to the rate of change of the harmony - sometimes called the 'harmonic rhythm'. Where the harmonic rhythm changes pace the rate of accentuation also changes - influencing the choice of slur patterns. "Very dull order" is in this way also avoided:

Example 5-13: Mozart, *Flute Quartet in D K.285*, I:85-87

Thus the harmonic aspects must be taken cognisance of before a phrase can be fully understood and meaningfully slurred.

### 5.6.2 Implied two-part lines

The example by J S Bach (attrib.) used by Wye, and quoted in Chapter 5.5, is an example of the attempt, by means of selected slur patterns, to bring out the implied two-part character of a phrase. Pleeth (1982:65) provides the following example, showing how selected bowing patterns can bring out the notes of what he calls the "hidden tune" (indicated by x):

Example 5-14: Bach, Suite in C for solo cello BWV 1009, Prelude

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a cello prelude. The notation includes various slur patterns and 'x' marks above notes, indicating a 'hidden tune'.

He compares this with an example of modern editing (he calls it a "tragedy") which forces the musical line into a "false mould of arbitrary bowings", thus creating a "distorted facade":

Example 5-15: Bach, Suite in D min. for solo cello BWV 1008, Prelude

The image shows a single staff of musical notation for a cello prelude. The notation includes a different slur pattern compared to Example 5-14, illustrating a 'distorted facade'.

This does not bring out any particular voice or "hidden tune", and "makes no more sense [...] than it does to group the letters in this sentence in even groups of four (thel ette rsin this sent ence inev engr ouns offo ur)!".

Example 5-17b: Bach, Partita in A minor BWV 1013, Allemande, mm. 17-18



A 20th-century composer such as William Alwyn may choose to notate two voices in a more obvious way, leaving the performer in no doubt as to the inherent two-part structure. This example comes from his solo flute *Divertimento*:

Example 5-18: Alwyn, *Divertimento*, II:88-92

Sometimes the duality is not so obvious and hence overlooked by a performer - especially when it is obscured by a slur (or is this merely a 'phrase-slur?):

Example 5-19a: Godard, *Valse*, mm. 130-133

The ascending 'bass' line (G-A-B) can be brought out by slurring thus:

Example 5-19b: Godard, *Valse*, mm. 130-133

The following passage from Bach's Partita in A minor for solo flute shows an obvious two-voice structure:

Example 5-16a: Bach, Partita in A minor BWV 1013, Allemande, mm. 38-40

This passage could, in order to more clearly define the two voices, be slurred as follows (one of a number of possibilities):

Example 5-16b: Bach, Partita in A minor BWV 1013, Allemande, mm. 38-40

In this example the duality suggested in the descending line could be brought out by phrasing as follows:

Example 5-17a: Bach, Partita in A minor BWV 1013, Allemande, mm. 17-18

In order to give the passage more energy in its descent to the cadence point, and so as not to make the passage sound too fussy, it is usually played with all the notes tongued. The advanced performer can make use of subtle gradations of tonecolour and dynamics to suggest a type of two-part writing. The two parts can also be brought out by applying two different articulations:

### 5.6.3 True counterpoint

Sometimes true counterpoint is written for a single wind instrument. In these situations slurring is used as one of the main means of audibly separating the lines (see Ex. 5-18 mm. 90-92).

### 5.6.4 Accompaniment figures

In the 19th-century especially, the following type of accompaniment figure was often written, usually slurred:

Example 5-20: Köhler, Papillon Op. 30/4, mm. 163-170

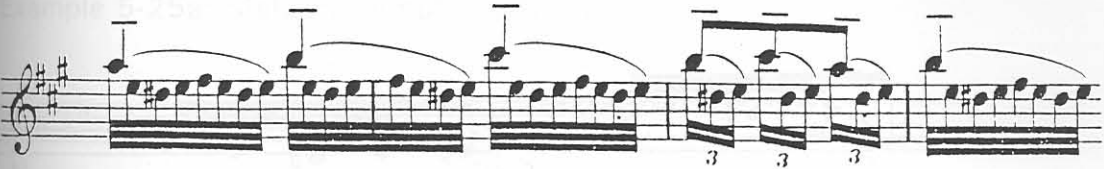
The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff begins at measure 163 and is marked 'a tempo, vivo'. It contains a slurred accompaniment figure of eighth notes with upward accents, and a melody line with slurs and accents. The second staff continues from measure 167, showing the same accompaniment figure and melody line.

An accompaniment figure could also be written tongued, in which case the melody note will probably be played tenuto:

Example 5-21: Genin, Carnaval de Venise, Variation 8, m. 1

The image shows a single staff of musical notation. The melody note is marked with a tenuto line, and the accompaniment figure is slurred.

Where the whole group of the melody note and its accompaniment figure is written slurred, then the melody note is usually emphasised by being played tenuto. Exx 24a and 24b show two different notations for this effect:

Example 5-22a: Doppler, Fantaisie Pastorale Hongroise, m. 193Example 5-22b: Ganne, Andante et Scherzo, mm. 103-108

If the interval between the melody note and its accompaniment is large enough then the dual nature will be clearly heard as such whether the group is slurred or an articulation is added:

Example 5-23: Briccialdi, Il Vento Op. 112, mm. 65-6

But where the melody note and the accompaniment are in the same register then (besides the slur patterns) variations in tonecolour, dynamics and articulation have to be subtly employed in order to bring out the lines:

Example 5-24: Alwyn, Divertimento, II:57-62

### 5.6.5 Interpolations

A temporary effect, similar to the two-part phrase, is outlined by Toch (1977:118-119). He calls it the "encircling approach to the main harmonic tone before hitting it". He provides the following example:

Example 5-25a: Mahler, Symphony No. 2



Example 5-26: Gaubert, Nocturne, mm. 17-18 (re-slurred by the author)

Example 5-27: Burkhard, Suite Op. 98 for solo flute, III:1-2

Andante (♩ ca 84)

## 5.7 Phrase-endings

Players should always give attention to the length and strength of the final note(s) of a slur, as, even having phrased a passage accurately and effectively, it is still possible to ruin the effect by including incompatible effects at the ends of the slurs. Indeed, Barra (1983:41) calls the ending of a phrase its "most sensitive spot". At phrase-endings there are two extremes, from endings which are rounded-off (tapered off) by allowing the energy level to flag, to abruptly ended phrases which propel the energy level over into the next phrase (or perhaps even into silence). And then, of course, there are all the interpretative subtleties between the two.

Clarinetist Weston (1976:90) provides the following general rules: "Weak endings on unaccented beats or parts of beats should be dynamically tapered off and finished short of the following beat, whereas strong endings on accented beats of the bar must be held full length *over to the beginning* of the next beat".

### 5.7.1 Forward momentum

In the following example the energy level of the ending of each sub-phrase needs to be carried over to the first note of the subsequent sub-phrase, causing a feeling

of forward movement and gathering expectation (indicated by the arrows):

Example 5-28a: Fauré, *Fantaisie*, mm. 1-10

Here, the initial entry of the B need not be accented to emphasise the first beat of the bar as this is done by the accompaniment; instead the flute can float above, entering gently and propelling the phrase down to the lower B and ending off with a similar gentle articulation on the A. The carrying forward of the momentum can be notated with the usual crescendo and diminuendo. So while the phrase ends with a degree of tapering off, the ending of the initial B needs careful attention in order to propel the phrase onwards.

The insertion of a breath, as indicated in Ex. 5-28b, need not have any deleterious effect on this situation provided that the performer does not suddenly punch out the breath at the end of the note in order to facilitate a quick, deep breath.

Example 5-28b: Fauré, *Fantaisie*, mm. 1-10

Equally, the intensity must not be allowed to dip as the breath pressure weakens:

Example 5-28c: Fauré, *Fantaisie*, mm. 1-10

The taking of a breath needs always to be integrated into a phrase so as to maintain the character. In the following example the last note before each breath needs to be held as long as possible:

Example 5-29: Gaubert, *Nocturne*, mm. 1-12

### 5.7.2 The note before a stress

It is sometimes suggested that, as a means of emphasizing syncopated notes, the preceding on-beat note should be shortened (D. Charlton in Brown & Sadie 1989:415).

Example 5-30: Gaubert, *Allegro Scherzando*, mm. 45-47

This type of description is often used in teaching situations; but it is not an accurate description of the process. A note does not automatically sound emphasized just because the previous note was shortened. It depends on how this shortening is executed.

In any musical context (apart from some avant garde music) notes are so interlocked that a note is, to a large degree, defined by the previous note. Thus if the note on the beat is not only shortened, but also 'leant-on', as if 'leaping' in the air, it naturally leads to 'landing', relatively strongly, on the following note (especially if syncopated). The strength of the leap naturally determines the strength of the landing - according to Natural Laws. The shortening and leaning-on the on-beat note causes a natural reflex, as the strength of spring from a diving board automatically determines the height of ascent and velocity of entry into the water. Words like 'shortened', 'emphasis' and 'syncopation' are often used to describe what is a *fait accompli* once the 'leap' is effected.

Moyse (Bogorad 1991:12) amusingly, but with due effect, related that the word "syncopation" comes from the Latin for "a missed heartbeat, a heart attack, or fainting spell, evoking an image of falling backward in a dead faint". He said that a syncopated note should be preceded by a silence, be emphasized, then fade away. "Of course, you should not vibrate on the syncopation. Can you imagine a man falling back in a faint going *eh-eh-eh-eh*?"

The rhythmic and phrasing structure of much jazz-influenced music is almost entirely based on various patterns of shortened and stressed notes. In analysing Ex. 5-31 it should be borne in mind that in the field of jazz the first note of each slur is usually strongly accented, also the last note of a slur marked with a staccato dot is accented:

Example 5-31: C. Norton, Swing Out Sister, mm. 1-7Rhythmically ( $\text{♩} = c.136$ ) [ $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$ ]

## 5.7.3 Shortening the last note of a slur

While Wye (1983:9) insists that one should not shorten the last note of a slur, Hauenstein (n.d:11), amongst many others, states that the passage in Ex. 5-32a should be played as in Ex. 5-32b:

## Example 5-32a:

## Example 5-31b:

Both writers are partly correct. It must surely be that the musical context and character of the passage will dictate the appropriate length of the last note of a slurred group of notes. As quoted in Chapter 5.7 Weston (1976:90) states the case for both extremes: "[...] weak endings on unaccented beats or parts of beats should be dynamically tapered off and finished short of the following beat, whereas strong endings on accented beats of the bar must be held full length *over to the beginning* of the next beat".

Baillot, writing in 1835, and who was surely in touch with performance practice of that era, goes one step further than Hauenstein and provides an example (Ex. 5-33b) of how the phrase in Ex. 5-33a should be played (1991:289). Besides shortening the last note of a two-note slur, he also shortens the long note (marked \*), for, as he correctly points out, "slight separations - rests of very short duration - are not always indicated by the composer":

Example 5-33a: Viotti, Violin Concerto No. 27, II:11-15

*Adagio non troppo*



Example 5-33b: Viotti, Violin Concerto No. 27, II:11-15



Consider how short the last notes of the slurs in Ex. 5-34 need to be played in order for the light character to be best brought out:

Example 5-34: Prokofiev, Sonata Op. 94, II:1-10



It must be mentioned that the following notation means only that the last note under the slur must be shortened; it must not be tongued:

Example 5-35: Messaien, *Le Merle Noir*, m. 3



## 5.7.4 Rounding-off

In the next example the first sub-phrase needs to be subtly rounded-off (the low Eb in m. 3), with the subsequent sub-phrase beginning with a relatively gentle articulation; this lends a feeling of repose and calmness:

Example 5-36: Widor, Romance Op. 34/3, mm. 1-5

Andantino.



*p sostenuto*

The author uses the following symbol to explain diagrammatically to students how the rounding-off of the last note(s) of slurs should 'feel':



In phrases which follow one another directly as in Ex. 5-37 or, especially, which elide, then the ending of one phrase has an intimate bearing on the beginning of the next; this in turn has a ripple effect on all the surrounding phrases. An incorrectly ended phrase can mar the overall meaning of an entire section by drawing attention too much towards, or away from, that particular area. The notes marked \* in this example consequently need to be carefully shaped and articulated:

Example 5-37: Hübner, Fantaisie, mm. 20-24



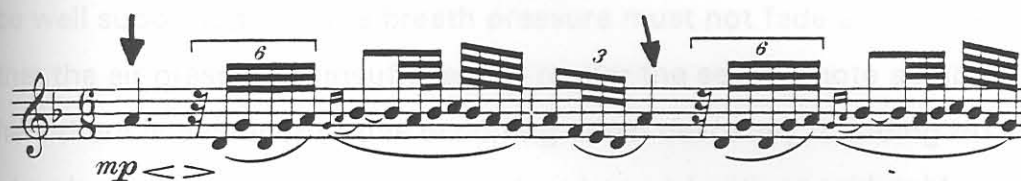
*p*

Harnoncourt (1982:31) carefully considers the ending-off of long notes, relating that the piano and plucked instruments cannot help but produce notes that fade away. On occasion the note fades completely leaving the mind to imagine it still sounding (and still fading). He adds that the note "continues to be heard by the 'inner ear' and is cancelled only by the onset of the subsequent note". While this

may seem a disadvantage, there are, he says, circumstances where sustained sounds (especially on the organ) can "mask and interfere" with busy textures, especially the complexity of a fugue. His statement (1982:31) that "[t]he reality of a sustained sound is not better than the illusion of the sound" needs careful consideration by any wind player.

In order for this to be the case, the wind performer needs not only to be in perfect control of his sound production, but also to be hearing the departed sound with his "inner ear". The concentration thus engendered is critical in the audience sharing in the "illusion". The first note (the long A) in the following example can be ended in this way, with the short 'silence' heard as part of the fading note:

Example 5-38: Doppler, Fantaisie Pastorale Hongroise, mm. 9-10



With phrases whose "primary thrust has been fulfilled" it is, Barra (1983:41) says, "particularly easy to neglect these points of declining energy in anticipation of the forthcoming phrase". He uses this particularly appropriate example in order to show (by means of his unique symbols) how the last note of a slur (the Bb in m.3) needs to be rounded-off in order for it not to be emphasised in any way:

Example 5-39: Mozart, Symphony No. 40, I:1-3

The image shows a musical score for a piano part, specifically for strings. It is marked "Molto allegro". The score consists of three measures. The first measure has a dynamic marking of *p*. The second measure has a dynamic marking of *p*. The third measure has a dynamic marking of *p*. The score includes several slurs over the notes. There are two downward-pointing arrows: one above the first measure and one above the final note of the third measure, which is marked with a circled 'U'.

Any rounding-off of the last note of a slur must be judiciously used. Tromlitz (1991:157) issues a warning with regard to the second note of a slurred group of two notes bemoaning the fact that it is "frequently very unclear, sometimes quite inaudible". In other words, one must not treat the following groups as excessively as indicated here:

Example 5-40: excessive rounding-off



Being a pragmatist Tromlitz provides a solution, saying that the group must be articulated with a "taa", the second 'a' being made "with the chest". What he is, in essence, suggesting is that, in modern parlance, both notes of the group must be well supported; i.e. the breath pressure must not fade away to such an extent that the air pressure is insufficient to render the second note audible. As inferred here there is a danger of this occurring when delicately rounding-off the last note of a phrase. Although it must therefore be used with considerable care, this type of figure when played in this way is reminiscent of a sigh and, as such, has its definite interpretative place.

Barra (1983:44) acknowledges what he calls "secondary forms of accentuation". He uses the following example (Ex. 5-41) to show that the final note (marked \*) of a phrase (here the first sub-phrase) should not always be played short, but sometimes "gently reinforced" by means of a "subtle increase of duration":

Example 5-41: Mozart, Eine kleine Nachtmusik, I:1-4

Barra says that this subtle accentuation by means of slight lengthening adds "grace and beauty" to the phrase. In Ex. 5-41 it launches the first sub-phrase over the printed rest and leads into the concluding sub-phrase.

## 5.8 Choosing slur patterns

Pleeth (1982:63) says regarding the string player's choice of bowings that "the real determining factor" must ultimately be "only the shape of the musical phrase, and of the units within that phrase". Referring to the conceptual approach by performers to performing music in the early Baroque era, Meylan (1988:76) states that they "adhered to a clear way of ordering the individual elements of a whole musical sentence" guided by "an ever-present feeling for the place of the elements in the progress of the musical discourse".

The extent to which a wind performer can legitimately modify, re-interpret or actually alter a composer's slurrings and articulations varies according to the style period and the particular composer. Any modifications will be tempered by one's own 'taste' and what is perceived to be currently 'acceptable'. (Two other possibilities, where one either does not bend to such things and consequently merely goes with one's own whim, or is limited by one's own technical deficiencies, will not be addressed here.)

The general situation in the Baroque and the Classical eras is addressed elsewhere in this dissertation (see Chapter 10), but the matter is to some extent compounded by the reverence (rightly) shown to certain composers. Certainly, Bach and Mozart were great creative geniuses, but for anyone (whether critic, musician or audience) to therefore insist that their flute works, for instance, be played exactly as per copy merely on the strength of the fact that the composer's name appears on the title page, does everyone a disservice (see Chapter 4). On the other hand the same people would probably allow one to mutilate Loeillet as in this example as edited by P F Scherber and A Kutz:

## Example 5-42: Loeillet, Sonata in D min. Op. 3/10, I:1-9

Allegro

*f marcato* *p*

For all his depth of musical understanding and insight, can one honestly submit that Mozart understood the capabilities of the contemporary flute better than did player/composers such as Devienne or Wendling? And yet few are heard to complain when some editor re-phrases one of *their* works. (One has to admit that the state of affairs has improved over the years.)

Rowland-Jones (1992:140) discusses the two possibilities for slurring the following passage:

## Example 5-42a: unslurred

Allegro

The ascending notes may be "paired as rising thirds (trochaic) or as falling pairs across the beat (iambic)". This provides us with the following patterns:

## Example 5-42b: trochaic

Allegro

## Example 5-42c: iambic

Allegro

Clarinetist Orlando (1992:26) makes the point that Classical and even Romantic composers "usually leave a good measure of freedom to performers in articulation [and slurring]". He makes out the case for an intelligent and "creative" use of articulation and slurring in order to clarify the structure of the music for the listener, and "make a difference between a technically correct but mediocre performance and a gripping performance". Orlando presents a series of examples from the clarinet repertoire and provides each with "supplementary [slurrings] to provide sub-phrases". These additions are entirely pragmatic and are intended to both

- \* make the melodic line clearer for both the performer and the listener, and
- \* help the performer overcome "technical problems interfering with the flow of the music".

His first example (1992:26), Ex. 5-43, brings out two important aspects of the effect on elements of a phrase when a note is tongued. Firstly (notated by a 1 over the rephrasing in Ex. 5-43b), tonguing a note under a slur will slightly emphasize it without recourse to lengthening it, which might lead to an overemphasis. Although he does not say as much, it also stops too much 'romanticising', in other words incurring a feeling of rubato, which might easily occur when notes are lengthened. Secondly (notated by a 2 in Ex. 5-43b), gently tonguing a particular note can subtly strengthen it and give it prominence over nearby higher notes which, by their nature, easily assume undue prominence:

Example 5-43a: Spohr, Concerto for Clarinet Op. 26, III:19-22 (original slurs)



Example 5-43b: Spohr, Concerto for Clarinet Op. 26, III:19-22 (slurred by Orlando)

His next example (1992:27) is from the same work (the longer slurs are original):

Example 5-44: Spohr, Concerto for Clarinet Op. 26, III:56-60

At 1 he shows the tonguing of grace notes in order to make them "crisper and cleaner". The composer added the grace notes for a reason - and that reason is negated by slurring them all together as indicated. It must be clear by now that Spohr, or perhaps some editor, has indulged in the dangerous occupation of supplying the music with slurs according to visual precepts. A closer look at the music will reveal the way in which the notes must be grouped. The long slurs admittedly give a good visual impression of the smooth legato approach that is needed, but deters the performer from delineating the sub-groups by tonguing them. Orlando rectifies the matter.

At 2 Orlando also shows that tonguing the C's emphasizes the main harmonic tone of this area. From 4 onwards he departs from the preceding reasons for adding tonguings, and suggests these additional tongued notes in order to help the performer "avoid speeding up or fumbling the runs". It may also make the sub-structure of dynamics, and the general forward movement of the phrase easier to bring out. But he does temper this last addition of tonguings by saying that "the use of the tongue should be very light, barely audible - the runs should be heard as groups of eight, not four".

A similar approach can be applied to the following passage:

Example 5-45a: Schubert, Introduktion und Variationen über ein Thema Op. 160, mm. 169-170

The following slurring makes the note groupings, and thus the theme and its 'accompaniment', clearer:

Example 5-45b: Schubert, Introduktion und Variationen über ein Thema Op. 160, mm. 169-170 (re-slurred by the author)

Orlando's next example (1992:28) shows how (at 1) the addition of an extra tongue-stroke facilitates playing the larger interval cleanly (see Chapter 7.4.1):

Example 5-46a: Mercadante, Concerto in Bb for Clarinet, I:37-39 (original phrasing)

Example 5-46b: Mercadante, Concerto in Bb for Clarinet, I:37-39 (re-phrased)

Orlando provides further examples, but mostly along the same lines. At one point he advises one pattern of slurring for practising, and another, with fewer tonguings,

for performance; the aim being to guide the fingering of the notes as evenly and rhythmically as possible during practice. In this he is suggesting that the tongue is a more trustworthy rhythmic agent than the fingers. It is the author's opinion that this method of practising yields positive results.

At the close of his article (1992:28) he encourages the performer to "experiment with different forms of [slurring] as part of one's inquiry into a piece under study". As he rightly says: "Trying out different forms of [slur patterns] would be useful if it served no other purpose than to grapple with a piece, to come to understand the structure of the melodic line". This must surely lead to a more meaningful performance.

Any particular performer's choice of slurs, like all other parameters of interpretation, is not entirely dictated by objective influences. The question of subjective 'taste' has already been alluded to. This vague term must include the performer's own sense of musical shape, proportion and flow. As Auer writes (1980:72), "there will always be delicate distinctions, minute variations, qualifications, differences" between the phrasings of various performers due to "individual temperament, the individual quality of their inspiration, and - not to be forgotten - their knowledge and skill as well as their instinct". Not only that but "the mood of the moment, the accidental influence of temper and disposition" results in the same performer providing different interpretations on different occasions. The question is: How much influence may "the mood of the moment" and "accidental influence" be allowed to have on phrasing before the dividing line of objectivity/subjectivity is overstepped?

There is no one easy answer and it is impossible to appease all varieties of prejudice - from the subjective insistence on the printed page to the subjective insistence of individual taste. Although true objectivity is hard to achieve, a deep understanding of all aspects of phrasing will go a long way towards creating objectively meaningful performances.

## 5.9 The phrase-slur

As defined in Chapter 3.2.11 the phrase-slur is "the long notational arc written above or below a series of notes to indicate a self-contained phrase". The question arises: is it ever necessary for a composer to delineate for the performer the extent of a phrase?

A large part of a performer's student years are spent learning how best to interpret the printed page. The basic rules of phrase structure are learnt, not only so that phrases are understood and performed in a meaningful manner, but also so that deviations can be recognized.

There are certainly places, especially in twentieth-century music, where phrases (or sub-phrases) are deliberately disguised in order to, using Bernstein's terminology (1976:162), violate our expectation of a clearly logical phrase structure. Such unusual detours can surely benefit from some form of notational signposting. But it is one of music's enigmas that the symbol that developed in the nineteenth-century to show the extent of a phrase (i.e. the phrase-slur) is the same as the symbol used to denote legato playing (i.e. the slur). In keyboard music, where the phrase-slur probably originated, its use does not produce the same degree of confusion as it can in wind music.

Except in avant-garde circles, where composers often invent new notational symbols, the two most logical options to the continuous arc of the phrase-slur have never been accepted. These are the arc of dashes (or even dots - although this could, in complex scores, cause confusion) and the square horizontal bracket:



As it is, a true phrase-slur cannot unambiguously be used over any phrase that includes articulation patterns (for example Ex. 5-28a). Especially, it cannot be applied to a staccato phrase, otherwise the staccato is automatically transformed

into mezzo-staccato. Either the above-mentioned arc of dashes or the square bracket could, on the other hand, be used without altering the articulation.

But the long arc that is being called the 'phrase-slur' is often used for another purpose.

Example 5-47: Hüe, *Fantaisie*, mm. 7-10

The musical score for Example 5-47 consists of two staves. The first staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a long slur over measures 7-10. The dynamics are marked *p*, *cresc. molto*, and *ff*. The second staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with a long slur over measures 7-10. The dynamics are marked *dim.* and *ff*. The score is in 3/4 time and features a long phrase-slur over measures 7-10.

In Ex. 5-47 the longer arc does not truly delineate an exact phrase or sub-phrase. It is, surely, used to denote a legato approach to performing the passage. In much wind music this type of 'double-slurring' is the composer's attempt to show that the notes should be articulated within the airstream (i.e. without breaking the continuity of the flow of notes). Some composers attempt to provide the same advice through the use of words like *legato*, *cantabile*, *dolce*, *espressivo* and *sostenuto* - sometimes in addition to the phrase-slur:

Example 5-48a: Rhené-Baton, *Passacaille*, mm. 68-76

The musical score for Example 5-48a consists of three staves. The first staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a long slur over measures 68-76. The dynamics are marked *dolce* and *poco più f*. The second staff is in bass clef and contains a bass line with a long slur over measures 68-76. The dynamics are marked *poco più f* and *poco a poco dim.*. The third staff is in treble clef and contains a melodic line with a long slur over measures 68-76. The dynamics are marked *poco a poco dim.*. The score is in 3/4 time and features a long phrase-slur over measures 68-76.

Seen in this light, the phrase-slur in Exx. 7-1 or 3-8a will be seen by most

performers as an indication to play as legato as possible, while gently articulating the repeated notes. Thus 'double-slurring' is an acceptable visual aid to ensure a legato approach.

To the composer the suggestion can be offered, when writing for wind instruments: use a phrase-slur only where the phrase structure is not clear; otherwise its use will infer a legato approach to the notes under the long slur.

Ex. 5-48a is an example of the exaggerated use of a long slur. In this case, not only is it difficult for the younger student to perform this in one breath, but the lack of slurs differentiating various patterns usually results in bland, monotonous performances. It would, in the author's opinion, be worthwhile considering adding appropriate slurs under the phrase-slur:

Example 5-48b: Rhené-Baton, *Passacaille*, mm. 68-76 (slurs added by author)

9 Tempo 1<sup>o</sup> (♩=63)

*dulce*

*poco più f*

*poco a poco dim.*

10

### 5.10 The slurred flourish

Throughout the wind repertoire there are two ways in which the 'slurred flourish' is notated: the final note (usually ending on a strong beat) can either be written as included in the flourish, or as separated from it (see Ex. 5-49). The latter will usually result in a stronger accent on the final note (especially in ascending flourishes). With this in mind - did Prokofiev really intend the third beats of the bars to sound more accented than the first?

## Example 5-49: Prokofiev, Sonata Op. 94, I:81-83



Where the flourish is extremely fast and the final note is notated as being tongued (separated), the attempt to tongue this final note may result in a fractional delay that lessens the impact of the flourish up to this final note. In these situations the author suggests that it not be tongued, but included in the line of the flourish. The opposite may hold true where the flourish is of a moderate speed. It is, after all, always the correct musical effect that is important. It should also be borne in mind that the printed slur could have been inaccurately notated (for reasons discussed in Chapter 2.3 to 2.10).

## 5.11 The one-note phrase

The direct opposite of the flourish that leads into a long note is the phrase that begins with a one-note statement and leads directly into a flourish-like passage. The opening of the *Fantaisie* by Fauré (Ex. 5-50) begins with such a one-note phrase (the B); this leads directly to the winding two bar introduction to the next principal note (the A in bar 5). The one-note phrase must be recognised as such and given its own independent character; the proceeding passage must not be considered as part of the first one-note phrase, as is often the case, but played as a lead-in to the next long note. Fauré separates each one-note phrase from the proceeding passage by articulating them separately.

Example 5-50: Fauré, Fantaisie, mm. 1-10

But an initial one-note phrase is often included with the preceding passage under a slur or phrase-slur - this often leads to confusion. In Ex. 5-51a the long phrase-slur disguises both the initial one-note phrase (the E, with octave shift) and the later one (the G). The passage is re-slurred by the author in Ex. 5-51b to better reflect the implied sub-phrases:

Example 5-51a: Rhené-Baton, Passacaille, mm. 72-76

Example 5-51b: Rhené-Baton, Passacaille, mm. 72-76 (re-slurred by author)

5.12 The *Morceau de Concours* pieces

The pieces written for the yearly examinations at the Conservatoire in Paris are renowned for their tricky slur and articulation patterns. James Galway (1982:123)

has the following to say in this regard:

The French really go to town on [articulation] and work out all sorts of permutations to drive their students crazy. They invent patterns that no composer ever uses - unless in an examination piece for the Conservatoire. For example the *Fantaisie* for flute that Fauré wrote for the Concours: it has articulations in it that he never used anywhere else. I guess he just went along to the flute professor at the Conservatoire and asked what was difficult for the flute. So the professor listed a few problems [...] and Fauré noted them down, thanked the professor, and went off and cooked a musical soup. Well, if you can get the better of the *Fantaisie* you will be equal to most articulations, with a few never otherwise required of you.

There may be more than a grain of truth in this, but the best of the Concours pieces are often included in programmes - especially the Fauré piece maligned by Galway. Thus every aspiring flute player must be able to negotiate their intricacies. Besides this, such articulation patterns are excellent exercises for developing independence of the tongue from the fingers. Some of these patterns are shown in Ex. 5-52:

Example 5-52: Fauré, *Fantaisie*, extracts

The image displays four staves of musical notation for Fauré's *Fantaisie*. The first staff shows a sequence of eighth notes with slurs and accents. The second staff continues with similar rhythmic patterns, including some sixteenth notes. The third staff begins with the dynamic marking *cresc.* and features a more complex rhythmic pattern with many slurs and accents, ending with a forte *f* dynamic. The fourth staff continues with intricate articulations and slurs, also marked *cresc.* at the bottom.

## 5.13 The triplet-slur

One of the anomalies of music notation is the manner in which triplets are often notated in non-compound time signatures. A triplet group is most simply notated by a 3 over or under the appropriate group, as shown in Ex. 5-53:

Example 5-53: Rutter, Suite Antique, IV:65-68

The second phrase (mm. 36-38) is more confusing because the third and fourth triplet-slurs are over rests. Two bars later (mm. 38-40) Widor shows by means of unambiguous notation that he meant the first notes of the triplets in mm. 34-36 to be tongued. This last phrase is wholly slurred and includes a triplet.

Thus caution must be employed when the triplet-slur notation is encountered. The character of the music must be allowed to dictate whether the groups are to be tongued in threes, slurred into the line of the phrase, or all separated (tongued).

#### 5.14 Compromise slurring

Bearing in mind the anomalies and inconsistencies brought to light in Chapter 2 and thus far in Chapter 5 the conclusion could be drawn that composers and editors often resort to a type of 'compromise slurring'; a compromise in the sense that, although they realise that what they notate is not entirely accurate, it is nevertheless more accurate than the alternatives.

Given the basic rule (see Chapter 5.2) that the first note of a slur is usually accentuated in some way, composers and editors may often be wary of notating too many slurs in music that is either gentle, soft or in a basically melodic style for fear that interpreters may accent these first notes too strongly. Thus, for example, Rhené-Baton in his *Passacaille* (see Exx. 5-48a and 5-51a) may have used the long slurs, neither to denote the phrase structure (i.e. as phrase-slurs) nor as legato instructions, but merely to forestall the tendency to articulate too strongly the notes that begin the slurs in Ex. 5-48b and especially 5-51b. Similarly with bars 8 and 9 in Ex. 5-47. If this is the case it merely underlines the fact that the notation of slurs in particular and phrasing elements in general is an imprecise art; and that performers need to be continually aware of the need to interpret these 'compromises' in as meaningful a way as possible.

## 5.15 Conclusion

The violin player/teacher Auer (1980:71) puts the case for proper phrasing very strongly indeed:

The dead level of monotony which we notice in the performance of some [instrumentalists] is, in the main, due to a lack of proper phrasing. They seem content to play the notes as they are written, and apparently do not realize that a melody is something more than a long string of tones to be sounded in succession. In all music there is an underlying skeleton of form. The melody is not a projection of successive notes; it is carefully and consistently built up of melodic units, each of them independent, yet all dependent on each other, and calling for varying degrees of rhythmic and emotional accentuation. Even in the short melodic phrases of the modernists, which are not subjected to the balance of classic formal rules in their inception, there is an inner musical law of proportion which makes their proper phrasing all the more imperative.

The slur is an imprecise notational symbol with regard to the portrayal of the amount of stress given to the first (tongued) note of a group, the subsequent relaxation or release, and the length and strength of the last note. But it is this very imprecision that provides the performer with the leeway to incorporate and perform his own slurs so as best to serve the music.

Pleeth (1982:65) emphasises the point that while, for the string player, it is the bowing patterns that shape the phrase it is (his italics) "*always the shape of the line that must determine the bowing*". Where for the string player it is the choice of bowing patterns, for the wind player it is the choice of slur patterns. It is critical to fully understand the phrase itself, and its context in the larger structure, before determining the most meaningful patterns of slurs. (The types of articulations used, and the subtler aspects of tonecolour, vibrato, rubato, etc. come with the actual playing of the music.)