

## CHAPTER 10

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

From the onset of the Romantic period, and as illustrated in the works of e.g. Beethoven and Berlioz, more attention was paid by composers to the notation of slurs and articulations than had previously been the case. Nevertheless, there were tendencies in this regard during the Baroque and Classical periods, and much can be learned from understanding these tendencies.

## 10.1 The Baroque

With regard to the performance of music of the Baroque era, a very special set of circumstances exists for the modern performer.

## 10.1.1 Baroque tendencies

Essentially it was unusual for composers of this era to notate more than a hint or two of their dynamic, articulation or slurring expectations in the course of a composition. The composer expected the performer to add articulation and slurring in accordance with common practice; that is to say, what was accepted at that time and in that place. This articulating and slurring of the musical line was thus on a par with, and may perhaps be considered a sub-section of, ornamentation. Indeed in most French and French-influenced music with its intricate (albeit superficial) ornamental expectations, the two aspects of ornamentation and slurring were fully intertwined. E.g. "Neighboring notes [N] and passing tones [P] are often slurred to chord tones" (Mather 1973:42).

Example 10-1:



But in one sense slurring was, and hence still is for the modern performer, an even more important component of performance than ornamentation. This is due to the fact that only certain types of movement demanded extensive ornamentation, whereas every movement needed to be, to a greater or lesser extent, slurred in order to duly emphasise the phrases, sub-phrases and motives. Mather (1973:43) says that "[f]rom about 1730 until well into the nineteenth century, slurs - especially of ornamental passages and virtuoso passage work - were often omitted by the composer and left to be added by the performer".

Example 10-2a: Bach, Invention No. 1 in C, mm. 3-5

This is further borne out by Barra (1983:120) who writes that "[s]pecial care must be taken in Baroque music to articulate the internal subdivisions of the phrase". This articulating of the "internal subdivisions" will, obtusely, require less articulating than is printed in a virtually unslurred Urtext edition (see Chapter 4.7). Barra says, referring to Ex. 10-2a, that the articulation of these subdivisions should be accomplished by either "inserting slight pauses between the motivic patterns, or, more subtly, by delicately shading the final tones of each impulse". But the insertion of slight pauses to delineate the patterns is a keyboard technique; the wind player would use slur patterns and different articulations to accomplish the same. The delicate shading (rounding-off) of the final tone of each internal subdivision will automatically result in some degree of emphasis being given to the first note of the next subdivision. This is an interpretative technique used by any wind or string instrumentalist. Barra provides the example with his own notational symbols to illustrate this:

Example 10-2a: Bach, Invention No. 1 in C, mm. 3-5

The image shows a musical score for two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is in C major and 3/4 time. The passage covers measures 3 to 5. The notation includes slurs over groups of notes, and Barra's notational symbols (dashed lines with vertical ticks) indicating internal subdivisions. The first staff has a treble clef and the second staff has a bass clef. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes.

A wind player would notate this passage in the following way:

Example 10.2b: Bach, Invention No. 1 in C, mm. 3-5



But this does not clearly delineate the implied two-part nature of the extract. Either of the following two patterns would better accomplish this:

Example 10-2c: Bach, Invention No. 1 in C, mm. 3-5



Example 10-2d: Bach, Invention No. 1 in C, mm. 3-5



Care must always be taken (and not only in Baroque music) not to overemphasise the patterns for, as Barra (1983:120) also points out, "this must be done without disturbing the rhythmic momentum". Too much concentration on the individual groups and too much accentuating the first note of each group will result in a chopped-up phrase. Nevertheless, the performer should bear in mind that the present day practice of playing Baroque music rhythmically equal was not always the case. Harnoncourt (1982:44) writes that the "Baroque principle" requires that "the first note under a slur is stressed and *held the longest* [...]". This implies that a notated slur denotes rhythmic inequality; in French music this is called *notes inégales*.

Performers cannot know for sure how much slurring was permitted, expected and performed during the Baroque era, and have to rely on clues from the composers and writers of that era. Certain writers (e.g. Harnoncourt) clearly bring out the fact

that style was continually changing throughout the 18th- and early 19th-centuries.

In discussing the length to which notated notes should be held, Zaslaw (in Brown & Sadie 1989:213) makes the point that a more detached style of playing was expected in the Baroque, and that a more legato style gradually evolved thereafter. It was thus the slurs in Baroque music which, when notated, indicated contrasting legato areas - and thus differentiated between these more legato areas and the basic detached way of playing. Gradually this expectation reversed, so that in later music (pre-Classical and onwards) the "dots and strokes indicating detached playing" become the most important articulation marks, providing the differentiation in an evolving smoother style (Zaslaw in Brown & Sadie 1989:213).

All this begs questions like: How short is 'detached'? Is it akin to staccato? How much slurring was played? and in what patterns? In 1752 Quantz (1966:167) advised that the slurring of notes must be influenced by the intervals involved. Referring to passages of dotted notes in a *Grave* he says that "if the interval is not too great [the dotted notes] must be slurred softly and briefly to the following notes; in very large leaps, however, each note must be articulated separately". The application of this advice would result in the following slurring (author's slurs added - the dotted slur indicates possible additional slurs):

Example 10-3: Handel, Sonata in E min. for flute and b.c., I:12-13



A more cheerful slow movement, on the other hand, requires that "more of the notes must be articulated than slurred". In Ex. 10-4 all the notes will probably be tongued - in order to bring out the majestic and noble nature of this French Overture:



a single movement, then the same character is maintained and homogeneity assured. Although this may often be the case, the contemporary advice provided by Corrette should dispel the notion that it was always so. Contrast was certainly not only allowed, but formed a critical element of compositional technique - although not in the works of lesser French composers, and not in much dance orientated music. Examples abound of movements that, due to the unity imposed by the use of one important rhythmic motive throughout, exhibit the aforementioned homogeneity. A certain rigidity as to the use of one slurring pattern will then of necessity be imposed:

Example 10-5: Loeillet, Sonata in C Op. 3/1, III:13-17



But in many other cases there is a deliberate use of contrasting material that will necessitate the use of varying slur patterns. In Ex. 10-6 the articulation markings are by Bach, but the slurs are the author's suggestions:

Example 10-6: Bach, Sonata in E minor BWV 1034, II:1-16

Allegro

The image shows four lines of musical notation in treble clef, representing measures 1 through 16 of the piece. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The first line starts with a forte dynamic marking 'f'. The notation includes various slurs and articulation markings (accents) over the notes. The key signature is E minor (one sharp). The piece concludes with a piano dynamic marking 'p' at the end of the fourth line.

In any field it is the genius or mastercraftsman who is able to break the 'rules' at will and elevate his art to new heights. J S Bach in his masterful Sonata in B minor for flute and keyboard deliberately provides similar motives with different slur patterns:

Example 10-7a: Bach, Sonata in B minor BWV 1030, I:12-14



Example 10-7b: Bach, Sonata in B minor BWV 1030, I:49-50



Example 10-7c: Bach, Sonata in B minor BWV 1030, I:95-96



One can only conjecture as to whether this was to offer variety within a very long movement or to provide the performer with alternatives from which to choose one pattern; or was it a lack of consistency?

Slurring by twos was possibly the first pattern of phrasing to be used in the Baroque. Rowland-Jones (1992:85) relates that slurs were first introduced in early Baroque music "with specific expressive intent; downward slurs may represent sighs". Lumsden (in Brown & Sadie 1989:81) quotes the 17th-century writer Bismantova as stating in his *Compendio musicale* that "long slurs in the notation were performed as a succession of slurred pairs". Lumsden also notes (in Brown & Sadie 1989:82) that "slurring in pairs was exceptional and was used almost in the nature of an ornament".

In France there was a practice called *lourer* which was influenced by the attempts

of composers to imitate the musette (a French bagpipe) incorporating the drone effect. The slurred pairs of notes were, according to one Abbé Démoz de la Salle writing in 1728, played "by slurring, caressing and rolling them in such a way that the notes are continuous, joined and connected [...] while perceptibly marking the first of each pair" (quoted by Lumsden in Brown & Sadie 1989:83). Mather (1973:39) concurs with this statement and offers further details regarding its origin. Due to the drone, these instruments "were incapable of clean articulations. The only means players [...] had of defining the beat was to lengthen and strengthen the long first note of pairs fitting within a beat". Mather provides the following example from *L'Art de Préluder* (1719) by Hotteterre:

Example 10-8:



It is clear that Hotteterre uses the long slur as an indication to play smoothly; it is not a phrase-slur. In this he is using notation more accurately than many later composers and editors.

The slur patterns of the late Baroque obviously came down to the later composers. Mather (1973:43) relates the following, including quotations from Mahaut's *Nouvelle Méthode* of 1759:

As was usual at this time, *slurring by twos* was the most common articulation pattern. A note on a strong count was normally slurred to the following note on a weak count, though occasionally the reverse pattern was used. *Three slurred, one tongued* was more common than *one tongued, three slurred*. *One tongued, two slurred, one tongued* was also possible. Slurring by fours was rare and long slurs were even rarer in quick movements of this period. *Two slurred, two detached* was a new articulation at mid-century which was destined to become the absolute favourite by the end of the century.

Some of the various patterns as used in context are set out by Mahaut (Mather 1973:43-44):

#### Example 10-9: Mahaut, Study

Many fast movements, for example those by Handel and Telemann, were written and are printed in the Urtext editions without slurring. As Mather further notes (1973:43), "a long passage of sixteenth-notes was probably not intended to be played with clean and equal tongue strokes but varied instead with assorted slurrings". On the other hand "thirty-second notes were probably always slurred or were occasionally tongued very smoothly", as can be seen in the following example:

#### Example 10-10: Bach, Suite in B minor, Double, mm. 1-3

#### 10.1.4 Syllabic articulation

Performing flutist Gary Schocker (1990:11) relates that 17th- and 18th-century performers "used syllabic articulation instead of slurring to phrase fast passages". This suggests the subtlest use of a variety of tongue strokes (consonants) and

tongue/jaw positions (vowels). (See Quantz 1966:71-84 and Hinch 1991:24-7 for detailed descriptions.) The following single example from Quantz (1966:78) demonstrates the approach:

Example 10-11:

ti di ri di ri di ri di ri di ri di ri di ri di ri ti ti ti ti di di di di

Schocker (1990:11) sets out clearly the reason why fast passages in flute playing were not slurred:

The recorder and renaissance flute are not as well suited to slurring fast passages as the Boehm flute; their simpler design requires cross and fork fingerings to produce a chromatic scale. Consequently, they do not slur as cleanly, even in diatonic runs, as their modern counterparts.

He then discusses the *Allemande* from J S Bach's Partita for solo flute in A minor, and notes that "on a modern Boehm flute it is almost impossible to play musically [sic] throughout the entire first movement without developing a cotton mouth or a bruised tongue". That is rather overstating the case, as there are numerous recordings containing not a single non-tongued note, which are very successful - and musical! But the point Schocker is suggesting is that the modern flute (and hence flutist) has a much richer palette of articulation and slur patterns. It thus behoves the modern performer on a modern flute to phrase movements like these better, if it can result in a more meaningful performance. 'Authentic' performances on contemporary instruments (or replicas thereof) are in another category as the performer is deliberately attempting to re-create performance practices of earlier periods.

#### 10.1.5 Choosing slur patterns

Especially in Baroque music, which is mostly built up from simple motives, it is

critical to delineate these motives. But in most writings on the topic of slur patterns there is little or no talk of exactly what prompts a performer to decide on which pattern is best suited to a particular motive or phrase. It is only when actual music examples are provided that it becomes evident that the choice was not motivated by either whim or any vague 'style'. Slurs were chosen according to the inherent intervallic and rhythmic patterns (although there is always more than a single 'right' way to bring out these patterns). In this, the underlying harmony must always be kept in mind.

Wye (1989:8) bemoans the fact that students, in a particular masterclass, were "afraid to break the rules in baroque and classical music. By that I mean that they followed the printed page even if, for example, the breath marked was clearly unmusical, or the phrasing was unsuitable [...]." The following example shows how the slur patterns (chosen by the author of this dissertation) follow logically the musical argument as implied in the written note patterns:

Example 10-12: Handel, Sonata in E min. for flute and b.c., IV:1-16

Allegro

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The first system contains measures 1 through 8, and the second system contains measures 9 through 16. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 3/8 time signature. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes. Slurs are placed over phrases of notes, generally following the natural phrasing of the melody and accompaniment. The tempo marking 'Allegro' is written above the first staff.

A further point is brought up by Rowland-Jones (1992:160). He suggests that some Baroque passage-work was incorporated merely to "maintain impetus across a transition or modulation". In order not to bring too much attention to these bridging-passages he suggests playing them "in an almost neutral manner". This probably implies that the phrasing patterns should also be bland; in other words,

all the notes should be tongued (or perhaps all slurred) in order merely to effect the drive towards the cadence without bringing undue attention to any particular notes or pattern of notes. One therefore needs to ascertain the contextual meaning of a phrase before being able to make principled judgements as to the most meaningful slur patterns to employ.

#### 10.1.6 Summary: Baroque

Any attempt to systematize patterns of slurring in music of this era (or even later eras) can only lead to an artificial, stilted approach which negates the search for meaningful interpretations. The *music* must be the determinant, and the player must be guided by what it tells him. There should be little reliance on the printed slurring, which should merely be accepted as hints, or as one out of many possibilities. The patterns, sequences, imitations and intervals will always proffer logical and meaningful slur patterns if the performer approaches the printed notes in the manner explained in this chapter.

### 10.2 The Classical period

Contemporary performers of the Classical period were expected by composers to articulate and slur according to the patterns delineated by the music itself. As in the Baroque, composers did not, for the most part, actually provide many phrasing marks or guidelines. But where they do occur, the performer should understand *how* to incorporate them. As Harnoncourt (1982:44) states: "After 1800, the slur was used in a completely different way [from in the Baroque]."

#### 10.2.1 The Classical style

During the Classical period there was a two-way process, where a large degree of trust was established and expected between composer and performer. This did not, apparently, automatically guarantee the correct phrasing of a composer's music, as contemporary writings reveal. Then, as now, a performer may not

recognise the music's inherent patterns and phrase it otherwise.

The following passages (in Harnoncourt 1989:109), originally notated by the composer without any phrasing, require slurs as indicated below in order to bring out the inherent patterns:

Example 10-14a: Mozart, Symphony No. 35 K.385, IV:20-21



Interestingly, Harnoncourt equates these added slurs more to "emphasis signs" than to bowing (or tonguing) indications. Thus the above slurrings would emphasise the following rhythmic patterns:

Example 10-14b: Mozart, Symphony No. 35 K.385, IV:20-21



### 10.2.2 Staccato dots

The evolution from Baroque style to Classical style was marked by a change from "a more detached style of playing to a more legato one" (Zaslaw in Brown & Sadie 1989:213). Thus "dots and strokes" became "the most important marks of articulation", as opposed to the earlier slurs. In other words where slurs were previously used to cancel out the expected detached style of performing, dots and strokes came to be used to cancel out a generally more legato style.

Harnoncourt (1989:114) makes an interesting point with regard to the meaning of dots (as in staccato dots) added above or below notes in the Classical period. He first states that composers, similar to the Baroque composer, expected the

performers to add slurs, according to the patterns of notes, when none are notated; he then concludes that the most important function of the dot is that it "prevents an otherwise obligatory slur". Therefore a dot does not necessarily mean shortened and/or strongly attacked - merely separately tongued.

The following dissonance with its resolution would normally be played slurred in order to emphasise the dissonance and release its resolution in what is often called a "feminine ending":

Example 10-15: Mozart, Quartet in D K.285, III:126-130



Dots could be added by the composer in order to negate the *implied* slurs and so effect a change in character:

Example 10-16a: Mozart, Symphony No. 35 K.385, III:25



Thus Ex. 10-16a requires the dots in order to cancel out what would be the natural tendency (as generally expected of performers in this era) to play it with the following slur pattern:

Example 10-16b: Mozart, Symphony No. 35 K.385, III:25





Example 10-18: Mozart, Flute Quartet in D K.285, I:151-152



Example 10-19a: Mozart, Flute Quartet in D K.285, I:117-118



Surely then, Mozart expected Ex. 10-19a to be slurred in the following way:

Example 10-19b: Mozart, Flute Quartet in D K.285, I:117-118 (author's slurs)



#### 10.2.4 Long notes

Another Classical compositional and performing trait is the expectation that long individual notes were to be expressed as an attack which then gradually dies away, like a bell's tone fades. This bell-like manner of playing longer tones rendered the texture more transparent, and made acoustic room for subsequent new entries to be more easily heard and recognised. "[Slurred] groups of notes were treated dynamically like individual tones of the same duration." (Harnoncourt 1989:111.) Thus a group of notes as slurred in Ex. 10-20a, will infer an intensity curve as shown. Ex. 10-20b simplifies the musical effect of the slur pattern.

Example 10-20a:



Example 10-20b



Similarly, for the following two groups the long notes would be played bell-like:

Example 10-21: Mozart, Concerto in D K.314, I:134-135



### 10.3 General slur pattern tendencies: Baroque and Classical

The author has undertaken a study of slurs in Baroque and Classical music. For the purposes of this study only Urtext editions and examples of original slurring in various sources were consulted. The numerous examples throughout the books of Quantz (1966 - originally 1752) and Tromlitz (1991 - originally 1791) were examined in detail. A large number of tendencies were discerned.

The following list of tendencies has been drawn up in order to aid the performer in his choice of where and how to slur. It should be borne in mind that these are only 'tendencies' and are not intended to be definitive or prescriptive. Also, the tempo of any piece has a direct influence on the performer's choice (see 10m below). Each 'tendency' is numbered for easy reference, but the numbering does not reflect any degree of importance.

#### 10.3.1 List of slur tendencies

10a Embellishments and written groups of notes indicating embellishments are played slurred:



- 10b In combinations of large and small intervals the large interval will be articulated and the small interval(s) will be slurred:



- 10c Dissonances are slurred to their resolutions:



- 10d Semi-tone steps (especially involving leading notes) are slurred:



- 10e Arpeggio patterns can be either slurred or tongued; but where arpeggios and smoother groups exist in combination the arpeggio will usually be tongued, while the other notes are more likely to be slurred in some way:



- 10f Patterns of consecutive thirds can be slurred or tongued, but this should be consistently applied throughout the passage. They are more likely to be slurred:



- 10g Intervals larger than a fifth are generally tongued: while fifths can be slurred or tongued, according to the context:



- 10h Repeated notes imply slurring in pairs, with the last repeated note to the next (different) note:



- 10i Dotted groups are slurred or tongued according to their character and placement in the music. But the following pattern will be slurred as follows:



The following more intricate groups will also be slurred:



- 10j The Scotch snap (Lombardic style) is played slurred:



Similarly, the following group is also played slurred:



- 10k Flourishes, e.g. as in cadenzas, preludes and fantasies, are played slurred, especially if grouped by beats:



- 10l Echo effects and terrace dynamics are best effected by playing the soft group tongued or even staccato, while the loud group will be slurred or, at least, more slurred:



- 10m The tempo of a piece will have a great influence on the slur patterns. For example Quantz (1966:220) suggests that this pattern of slurs is suitable for a quick tempo:



Such a phrasing would suggest to a string player a down-up bow change for each group.

But for a slow movement he says that the following pattern is "more charming"; being less detached and thus smoother. The string player would execute this "in one stroke, but with a slight detaching of the bow-stroke after the first note".



### 10.3.2 Re-slurring - a practical example

The following sections from two movements of the Sonata in A minor for solo flute by C P E Bach has been re-slurred by the author in an attempt to provide a working example of a fresh approach to slurring. Although certainly neither a pure Baroque work nor a typical Classical work, it provides many characteristic patterns that can be slurred (or re-slurred) in order to bring out principal notes, melodic patterns and implied contrapuntal areas. Such a concept is applicable to many Baroque works - although there will seldom be such variety within a single movement as there is

in this example. The same principles of slurring also apply to Classical works. Adding to the challenge of selecting the most meaningful slur patterns, the identification of motives and sub-phrases, essential to the interpretation of both Baroque and Classical music, is made difficult throughout this work by frequent octave shifts - both upwards and downwards, and in both directions within a motive or sub-phrase. The different characters of the various motives and sub-phrases also require dynamic shading - especially in respect of question and answer patterns. These have been notated, by the author, by means of *f* (strongly played) and *p* (more gently answered).

Example 10-22: C P E Bach, Sonata in A min. for solo flute Wq. 132 (extracts)

Poco adagio

The musical score consists of four staves of music in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'Poco adagio'. The score includes various dynamic markings (*f* for forte, *p* for piano) and slurs. Circled letters (n, P, q, r, d, s, s', d) are placed above the notes to indicate specific motives or sub-phrases. The first staff contains measures 1-4, the second staff contains measures 5-8, the third staff contains measures 9-12, and the fourth staff contains measures 13-14. The music features frequent octave shifts and dynamic shading.

Allegro

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff contains circled annotations 't', 'b', and 't'. The second staff contains circled annotations 'c' and 'k'. The third staff contains a circled annotation 'e'. The fourth staff contains a circled annotation 'f'. Trills are indicated by 'tr' above notes in several places.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. The top staff contains circled annotations 'g' and 'u'. The second staff contains circled annotations 'b', 'v', and 'f'. The third staff contains circled annotations 'b', 'e', and 'c'. The bottom staff contains a circled annotation 'b'. Dynamic markings 'f' and 'p' are used throughout the system. Trills are indicated by 'tr' above notes.

### 10.3.3 Reasons for the choices of slurs

While certain slurs in Ex. 10-13 have been added in very logical and obvious places, there are a number of 'controversial' slurs that require explanation. In order to clarify the reasons for their addition, a letter of the alphabet has been placed in certain places under or over a note or a group of notes. This letter (e.g. (h)) refers to the list in Chapter 10.3.1, where each listed tendency is referenced by a number and a letter (e.g. 10h). Additionally letters from (n) to (v) have been added; these are explained below.

(n) Despite the tendency referred to in 10l of tonguing a softer answering motive, here the two fanfare-like repeated notes must be tongued; contrary to 10b, the gentleness of the answer is here enhanced by slurring the larger falling interval.

(p) A two-note 'bass-line' is emphasised by articulating both notes; the answering rising group is slurred as at (n).

(q) Octave displacements of the F# and D disguise the fact that this is basically the same rising group as at (p).

(r) The higher E is slurred from the lower in order not to unduly emphasise it.

(s) The chromatically falling 'bass-line' is emphasised by tonguing these notes. The interpolating F at (s') is slurred for the same reason as at (r).

(t) The commas show that the sub-phrases must be audibly delineated - especially when sequences are involved.

(u) These sequences of question and answer patterns are differentiated as at (n) and (p). This also concurs with the basic 10b tendency.

(v) As at (r).

#### 10.4 Summary: Baroque and Classical

As with all the music under discussion in this dissertation, the addition, whether by composer, editor or performer, of articulations and slurs to the written notes is merely an attempt to make the character of the music clear to the performer. They should never be considered as separate entities to be performed either just because they are written or just because they are 'stylistic'. The music itself can reveal its intrinsic patterns - either through investigation and analysis, or through conscious listening in practice and performance. This then guides the performer as to the best phrasing. Nevertheless, a knowledge of the history of performance practice can provide important insight, and this should be studied by all serious students and performers. Tendencies of any single era, if based on the music's intrinsic patterns, will very likely be relevant, and hence applicable, in music of other eras as well.