

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

2.1 The author's theory on wind phrasing

During the author's musical career, experience gradually taught that the field of notated phrasing (which here includes slur patterns and articulation) was neglected by most players, conductors, editors, arrangers and composers, as opposed to aspects like playing in the correct historical 'style', methods of tone production, improvement of finger technique, etc. This was confirmed by the copious reading of a great many articles, tutors and books by diverse writers from a variety of disciplines. It appeared that few musicians question more than superficially the status quo of printed phrasing marks.

The theory evolved in the author's mind that, given free rein, most professional performing wind players would adopt their own patterns of slurs and various articulations that would not only be more practical than most 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. It was felt that professional wind players were more able to naturally 'feel' the most appropriate phrasing of the music, than editors, arrangers and composers, and that the performance of their own slurring and articulation patterns would result in more meaningful performances.

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

2.2 The process of learning an instrument

The student of music in general, and of a practical instrument (in the author's case, the flute) in particular, usually feels no need, and probably no desire, to question the teacher's authority - indeed this is usually tacitly disapproved of. After all, if one comes by choice to a person (or an institution) in search of knowledge then that person (or persons) obviously has your respect. And it would probably be considered disrespectful to question the superior knowledge and experience of one's teachers. (The enquiring student is often acknowledged, in theory, as being the ideal student, but especially when studying a musical instrument, will probably be considered precocious.) In short, the music student in general accepts the information provided to him at face value - as irrefutable fact.

The same type of considerations apply to the written word and the printed music. The young student occasionally comes across anomalies where two or more text books provide differing information. Either the most probable is accepted, or else a discussion of the anomaly used as a contribution to the essay or thesis. The instrumental teacher may also occasionally bring out a pencil and correct a blatant printing error in a piece of music.

Later in life, as a purely performing musician, the situation will probably not differ very much. There will not be time, with the business of earning a professional living, to enter into any in-depth inquiry into the validity of that which is printed on the page. This is especially true with regard to those pieces of music, the basic repertoire associated with a player's own instrument, which were previously studied as a student in the manner suggested above, and are now being offered on a professional basis to the general public in performance.

The notes, rhythmic patterns and all the other subtle nuances initially learned from the printed page and considered irrefutable and generally not to be tampered with, and which had entered and been fixed in the sub-conscious as learned patterns of fingerings, embouchure changes, articulations and nuances, remain the basis upon

which these same and similar pieces continue to be performed. All that the composer notated, and which was then faithfully transcribed and printed by the publishers, must, at all costs it seems, be revered and re-presented in performance. The experience and refining of technique gained in the interim will usually lead only to more polished performances - but usually not essentially *different* performances based on a more discerning and discriminating mind searching ever more deeply for hidden truths. The rote-type learning, through assiduous practice, of the various patterns of technique (fingers, tongue, breathing, etc.) will continue providing the subconscious matrix which generates and guides the physical processes upon which one relies in performance.

2.3 The printed page

Music publishers, in preparing an edition of a musical work for publication, often show great integrity in desiring to produce good performing editions, and obtain the services of renowned performers or musicologists to assist in editing their publications. This editor will ensure that any compositional inconsistencies, discrepancies and actual mistakes will be ironed out; and he will check before the actual printing run begins that there are no typographical errors. Thus, on the surface, one need have no qualms about regarding an edition of, for example, the Sonata for flute and piano by Poulenc, edited by the renowned flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal, as being definitive - and hence above any reproach and suspicion.

Not only will such pieces be performed using this printed music, but in turn a further generation of budding flutists will be taught using the same printed music. Thus a tradition is established, strengthened and perpetuated.

But the above scenario encompasses one enormous myth; based on one very serious flaw.

2.4 The myth of the infallibility of the printed page

For approximately fifteen years the author earned his living as a purely performing musician in the fields of orchestral, chamber and solo music and in radio recitals and broadcasting sessions of much music in a great variety of styles. Like all his professional performing colleagues, he never seriously questioned the printed page except where there were blatant mistakes.

Occasionally in chamber music rehearsals there was time for discussion on subtle changes to the strength of a crescendo or a sforzando; on the addition of a slight accelerando; on changing a trill to a mordent; or on playing more staccato.

The arranger of "light music" might be guilty of leaving out three bars from the oboe part, of leaving only two bars of fast tempo in which to change from flute to piccolo, or might write a bottom B flat for the flute. But this was relatively acceptable because it was acknowledged that the arranger was working under the pressure of a deadline and being only an arranger one did not expect him to know as much as a true-blooded composer.

One accepted, under silent protest, the conductor who thought he knew better than Beethoven and Mozart and changed all the dynamic markings in Beethoven's Symphony No 4 and some of the wind slurrings in Mozart's Overture to the *Magic Flute*. The conductor/orchestra relationship is, at root, a power struggle in which the conductor's will *must* prevail, so essentially one did as one was told. Nevertheless one often felt that this type of tampering with the composer's thoughts should not be allowed. It was not the conductor's right to alter the perfect thoughts of a master composer. The fact that Beethoven wrote for instruments whose range of dynamics differed enormously from those used today in the modern orchestra, although realised by all orchestral musicians, did not alter the view that the conductor was tampering. The fact that Mozart himself did not write all the slurs as printed in the published part on the orchestral player's music stand did not occur to him. The name "Mozart" printed on the top right-hand

corner ensured a certain blind reverence.

Similarly with the Sonata for flute and piano by Poulenc, as edited by Jean-Pierre Rampal. Poulenc must have known exactly what he wanted, and Rampal gave the first performance - they even played it together. What greater pedigree could any piece of printed music enjoy?

2.5 Becoming less passively accepting of the printed page

After the aforementioned fifteen years of basic acceptance of the status quo and the perpetuation of this status quo through teaching numerous influenceable young flute pupils, cracks appeared in the author's 'passive acceptance'. Acceptance of both the printed music and of the tradition, as passed on and taught by performers and teachers, attached to performing of the basic flute repertoire.

The author became a performing-academic at a university; further becoming, as time progressed, more and more the academic and less and less the performer. And as the roles reversed, so the mind became more enquiring and less passively accepting. It was seen, without initially bothering to delve too much into it, that when teaching well-known pieces, both small hitherto unnoticed mistakes and large blatant anomalies became increasingly obvious.

2.6 Printed mistakes

It came to be realised that the development of an advanced ability to read at sight any new music, a prerequisite for any successful professional musician, had one serious drawback. The player often does not actually see what is notated. The printed mistakes are often glossed over because the mind, and hence the fingers and tongue, translate on some unconscious level any illogically notated pattern into a known logical pattern. Thus the following two passages in Ex. 2-1 will automatically, and correctly, be played as in Ex 2-2:

Example 2-1a: Chaminade, Scarf Dance, mm. 28-32

Example 2-1b: Bodinus (ca. 1700 - 1760), Gigue, mm. 26-28

Example 2-2a: corrected version of Ex.2-1a

Example 2-2b: corrected version of Ex. 2-1b

But the conscious mind, hearing the corrected version, somehow accepts that the notation is thus also correct. Henceforth, as the piece is learned better and better, the printed page is actually read less and less. Thus any printed mistakes become less and less liable to be noticed at all. As a consequence the printed page is not

further questioned.

This, in itself, holds little impediment; one might even call it a fail-safe device that ensures a more accurate realisation than would occur if the conscious mind played what was (incorrectly) printed. But it does encompass the obvious draw-back of allowing more than just these mistakes through what would be the sieve of conscious discrimination.

2.7 Printed anomalies

This automatic correction in situ occurs mainly with the notes (itches) and the rhythms, both of which are (for most musical intents) accurately notatable. As far as the other parameters of music notation are concerned the position is both much more subtle and much more inaccurate. There is here not only the element of correct versus incorrect, but the whole area of interpretation of that which is virtually unnotatable - at least with any true degree of accuracy. It is in this realm, that of articulation, phrasing, dynamics and the like, that anomalies and inconsistencies are legion.

It was noticed that as the author became more sure of his own interpretative abilities certain personal 'tamperings' were *allowed* to occur. Disagreement was found more and more with the printed tempo; dynamics needed more careful attention and often differed from that which was printed; accelerandos and ritardandos would be felt to begin either earlier or later than printed; the indicated articulation and slurs became more unsatisfactory or limited in fully portraying the character and mood of a phrase.

Increasingly, more and more anomalies, inconsistencies and mistakes were discovered. Differences in the printed dynamics, articulations and slurrings between the performer's flute part and the piano score were discovered to be evident in most repertoire pieces. More than that, gross inconsistencies were discovered between different sections of the same work. Some of these had for

many years actually been noticed, but had been accepted and readily incorporated into the nuance structure of the works. For example, in the last movement of the Sonata for flute and piano by Poulenc two different articulations of the same motive occur (Ex. 2-3); first in the initial exposition material and secondly in the recapitulation of the same material:

Example 2-3a: Poulenc, Sonata for flute and piano, III:26



Example 2-3b: Poulenc, Sonata for flute and piano, III:202



This particular difference (unlike most of the ones being discussed in this dissertation) had already been pointed out by the author's teacher while first learning the work as a student, with the explanation that it was Poulenc's subtle variation upon the re-entry of the opening material. In the light of all the 'subtleties' now being discovered, an in-depth investigation of this subject was considered, with regard to the parameters that appeared to be the most often misrepresented on the printed page - namely that of slurs and articulations.

2.8 The music behind the printed score

It was further realised that the music, while being played and heard, would suggest its *own* subtleties of performance - including patterns of articulation and slurring - if the performer allowed himself to *feel* the music, as opposed to just playing what is written under the guidance of some learned and memorised tradition (sometimes

called "style"). And to this end the various nuances would, in the light of an open knowledgeable approach, automatically *present* themselves to the performer - even when this clashed with the printed score.

The printed notation is, by its limiting nature, only a partial representation of the totality of the music - as if it were crystallised in stasis, until revived and given breath in actual performance (this would include a mental realisation of the music). The composer is presented with a workable yet very limited notational system through which to communicate his musical conceptions to the performer. As he *cannot* notate his exact intentions, he has to leave enough guidelines to ensure that the performer will be able to decipher his intentions.

Just to slavishly follow these printed clues does neither the composer nor the music full justice. The composer has to trust that the performer will at least attempt to read 'between the lines' and fully realise (release) the subtle intrinsic, yet unnotatable, nuances, the addition of which are necessary to ensure a full transmission of notes and rhythms into meaningful sound. One might say that music has a hidden power to reveal its full meaning only if the performer allows full play of his natural musical instincts in interpreting the music.

The word "interpret" comes from the two bases "inter", meaning "between", and "prath" meaning in Sanskrit "to spread abroad" (Little et al:1031). Thus the interpreter stands between the composer and the audience, and "spreads abroad" the composer's musical intentions. In order to do this in as human a way as possible, as opposed to an automated, mechanical playing of the notes, the interpreter needs to become as one with the composer's intentions. As, in most cases, an intervening hundred or so years precludes the possibility of direct knowledge of a composer's intentions, one has to rely, besides contemporary writings and letters, on a traditional oral transmission of these intentions - in the sense that the subtleties of performance, as mentioned above, are passed on from teacher to pupil. This has the obvious draw-back of needing to rely on the objectivity and discrimination of the purveyors of this oral tradition.

Many cultures, of Africa for instance, still rely on their Storytellers for the transmission of their cultural heritage. But any oral transmission can only be successful and meaningful if the Storyteller (or Teacher) ensures that in relating the story, with its intrinsic interest value, the meaning *behind* the story is transmitted - as in the re-telling of an Aesop fable or a parable from the Bible. If the Storyteller (Teacher) fully understands the true meaning of the story (music) then he will know which words to emphasise and where to modulate his voice; he will know which notes to articulate more clearly and where to alter the timbre. He will know because he is interpreting under the same natural laws, the same first principles, as the first Storyteller and the Composer were when originally creating.

An idealistic situation might be envisaged where the composer need only notate the notes and their rhythms; with the music, under the light of these natural laws, revealing all the rest - including tempo, dynamics, nuances, articulations and phrasings. Composers would, under these conditions, need only notate deviations from the natural patterns.

2.9 Does the composer know best?

The next stage in the author's perception of the enormity of the myth of the printed page came with the realisation that perhaps composers themselves do not fully comprehend the potential of what they conceive in their minds. Here, a performer, through his involvement in the physical translation of the notation into sound, may actually come to 'understand' the work 'better' than the composer himself, thus unlocking a new, different and better set of intrinsic nuances.

Or perhaps composers do not translate the sounds/music in their minds accurately into the standard notational system. For instance, the inner phrasing of a single phrase of music, although known and felt by the composer, may be inaccurately notated, causing some confusion on the part of the performer as to the intended character of the phrase. This being the case, there is a communication gap in the transmission of this mind-music onto paper and, hence, on to the performer. It

would thus become the performer's duty to re-phrase or re-articulate the passage in order to circumvent the composer's muddying phrasing (either due to lack of insight or to inaccurate transmission through notation).

2.10 A composer's second thoughts

The confusion over phrasing, and the respective stances of composer and performer, all came to a head one day while the author was playing for the South African composer Stefans Grové his piece for solo flute *Pan en die Nagtegaal* (Pan and the Nightingale). The author had requested that he listen to an informal performance of the piece before the actual concert performance; it was also to be recorded at the concert. Being a piece in a modern idiom, albeit relatively conservative, the handwritten indications were followed as accurately as possible.

After hearing the piece through, the composer took out a pencil and changed two slurs in m. 3, saying that these would be more effective. He was completely correct - the second thoughts were more effective in realising the character he intended. On hearing the piece realised in sound he had immediately re-evaluated the efficacy of what he had notated. Example 2-4 shows the composer's own pencilled changes in m. 3:

Example 2-4: Grové, *Pan en die Nagtegaal*, mm. 1-3

The author of this dissertation then resolved in future to keep in mind the concept that any composer; on hearing his own work being played (realised in sound), might possibly have second thoughts regarding the efficacy of his notated nuances. This strengthened the author's decision to research the efficacy of notated phrasing in wind music.

2.11 Delimitations of this study

It must be stated that this investigation has only taken into consideration works for solo wind instruments - including concertos, sonatas and recital pieces. In symphonic music and much chamber music, most of the phrasing that might be considered in a solo context to be suspect and needing some form of re-phrasing, will still work well - because in a group context the clean and unanimous articulation of the ensemble is of paramount importance. Equally, no avant-garde music has been included because the whole *raison-d'être* of contemporary compositional strivings is to rise above the restrictions imposed by progressions of notes suggesting further progressions of notes and forming themselves into phrases; hence the interpretation of avant-garde music is on a different plane.

All of the examples used in the text are taken from the flute repertoire; but the principles as laid out in this dissertation are equally applicable to all wind instruments.

[...] "phrasing" is one of those words that, in a more perfect world, would probably be outlawed, so meaningless has it become. It might be possible to salvage some definite meaning for the word, if it could be clearly defined and then rigorously used. But I fear that its degradation is too deeply entrenched for that.

Consequently Rothstein outlaws the word from his discussions. Rothstein also uses terms like "phrasing" without any degree of vagueness; they must be clearly defined before successful critical analysis and discussion can begin. The