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Source: Davenport, L. G. (1991, Winter). Slurring versus tonguing: Questionable articulation practices in the Mozart Clarinet Concerto. *The Quarterly*, 2(4), pp. 38-41. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(2), Autumn, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme>

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Slurring Versus Tonguing: Questionable Articulation Practices In The Mozart Clarinet Concerto

By Linda G. Davenport

Alton, Illinois

The Mozart Clarinet Concerto, K. 622, is a major work, one which is frequently performed.¹ Mozart wrote it in 1791, just a few months before his death, for his friend Anton Stadler, a virtuoso performer on the clarinet and basset horn.

Twentieth-century scholars have diligently sought to reconstruct the original text of the solo clarinet part after discovering that Mozart wrote it with Stadler's special clarinet in mind. This instrument, now called a "basset clarinet," has an extension allowing it to reach notes a third below those of the normal clarinet. One thing the researchers discovered was that an unknown editor apparently altered certain passages prior to the first published editions in 1801, so that the work could be played by a regular clarinet. It is in that altered form that the concerto has always been known. As a result of the new insights about the piece, new editions which restore certain passages to their original low range have been issued, and a number of basset clarinets have been built so that the concerto can be played as originally written.

Much less attention has been paid, however, to performance practice considerations concerning the concerto. Through tradition, perhaps, certain aspects of interpretation, such as tempo, seem to have become standardized to the point where nearly all performances are similar within a surprisingly narrow range. In other areas, such as the length and placement of appoggiaturas, types of ca-

denzas and trills, and choice of articulation, divergent interpretations can be found.

This article focuses exclusively on the articulation in the concerto, since this is the area in which most modern performances are blatantly contrary to the practice of Mozart's day. With such diversity of articulation among the various editions, it is certainly understandable that performers are uncertain whether certain passages should be slurred or tongued. My goal is to discover Mozart's intentions regarding articulation, since my *a priori* assumption is that the best performance is the one which comes closest to realizing them.

The clearest indication of Mozart's intentions for this particular piece is a 199-bar autograph sketch for the beginning of a basset-horn concerto. The work never appeared in a form for basset-horn, since Mozart apparently changed his mind sometime after doing the sketch and decided that the solo instrument should be a clarinet (albeit one with an extended range). A facsimile of the sketch was first published in 1977 at the end of the *Neue Mozart Ausgabe* volume (hereafter referred to as *NMA*) which contains the clarinet concerto.² The sketch comprises approximately half of the first movement.

The autograph is helpful in dealing with the most troubling articulation question: how to articulate the many sixteenth-note runs which extend over several measures in the first and third movements, both allegros. In this autograph sketch, as well as in the old and new Mozart complete works editions, such passages have no articulation markings. The only

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exceptions are some chromatic scale runs, which are slurred.

The assumption by most performers and editors seems to be that the absence of articulation markings means that the performer is free to decide how to articulate such passages, which results in great diversity of interpretation. In reality, however, the lack of articulation markings indicates that the sixteenth notes are to be articulated as written: that is, they should be tongued individually. This assertion is based on the otherwise explicit nature of Mozart's articulation markings in the autograph sketch and on the late eighteenth-century norm of a non-legato performance style.

One might think that in the haste of doing a sketch, Mozart simply did not bother to mark the articulations, with the idea of adding them at some later point. If so, the sketch should be rather devoid of articulation markings. In fact, just the reverse is true.

Articulation markings for the soloist's first entrance (measures 57-64)³ are clearly indicated. In the next phrase, the two measures of sixteenth notes (measures 66-67) are divided into two slurs, each one measure long. However, the descending clarinet arpeggio in measure 69 has no articulation markings in the autograph sketch. Some editors, though, add dots and slurs, using a pattern such as two slurred and two tongued. However, I would suggest that if Mozart had wanted that, he would have indicated it, since he marked the articulation of the previous sixteenth notes.

The next two pages of the autograph (NMA, pp. 169-170) show detailed articulations for most of the clarinet part except for the sixteenth notes. The series of sixteenth notes in measures 73-74 and measure 83, for example, have no articulation markings. Another passage worthy of note is measures 86-89 (the last four measures, NMA, p. 169). These measures consist of a two-measure, repeated pattern. Mozart calls for a slightly

different articulation for the second measure on its repetition.

On the following page of the autograph (NMA, p. 170; measures 94-96), is a passage which Mozart rewrote several times (rewrites are shown above the solo line). Following its repetition (measures 96-98), the celli and basses have the same pattern (measures 98-100). In modern performances, most clarinetists slur the sixteenth note passages, or use a combination of slurring and tonguing here, even when the low string passage following it is performed *detaché*. For consistency and a unified interpretation, the clarinet should also play the notes *detaché*, tonguing each note.

The next page of the autograph (NMA, p. 171) is the most striking of all in its long series of sixteenth notes for the clarinet with no slurs on any of them (measures 107-111).

Certainly slurring is easier than tonguing for the performer, and doing so produces a smooth, liquid sound. However, a legato style was not the norm in Mozart's day, at least in keyboard music. In his *Clavierschule* of 1789, Daniel Gottlob Türk indi-

cates that notes without a specific slur or staccato are to be played somewhat shorter than indicated, followed by a short rest to complete the note length.⁴

Several important twentieth-century writers on keyboard performance practice in the classical period, such as Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda⁵ and Sandra Rosenblum,⁶ conclude that the most used keyboard touch in the eighteenth century was non-legato: It was the style that was assumed when no articulations were indicated. The Badura-Skodas believe that while Mozart expected a legato style for melodic passages, in virtuosio passagework he almost always wanted a non-legato style, regardless of instrument. The clarinet passages in question would certainly qualify as virtuosio passagework, as op-

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posed to melodic passages.

The Badura-Skodas⁷ also state that long legato slurs were apparently desired only in rising chromatic scales in quick tempo. Such a passage can be found in the clarinet concerto in the third movement (measures 95 and 105). The autograph sketch is of no help here because it does not extend this far into the piece. However, the *NMA*, which is based on the earliest printed editions, uses the following articulation markings: slurs on the two chromatic passages, but no markings for the other sixteenth-note arpeggios and other runs. Most performers slur all of the sixteenths.

According to Leonard Ratner, it was not until the turn of the nineteenth century that there was a change to a more legato style of performance and a preference for melodies with more continuous and broader sweep.⁸ Haydn and Mozart apparently wrote in the older style, Beethoven in the newer. In fact, Beethoven was critical of Mozart’s piano playing on the grounds that he played with a delicate but choppy touch, with no legato. Beethoven’s remarks are often used to confirm a change in musical style and performance practice sometime between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Certainly one must be cautious about applying principles of keyboard touch to clarinet articulation. However, without any specific information to the contrary, one can assume that a non-legato norm or sound ideal for keyboard music would carry over to wind music as well.

One treatise which does deal specifically with the playing of a woodwind instrument is the one by Joseph Joachim Quantz, entitled *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*; its English translation is called *On Playing the Flute*. By giving examples of various articulation patterns such as sixteenth notes slurred in pairs or groups of one tongued and three slurred, Quantz confirms that such combinations, similar to those used by modern performers of the Mozart clarinet concerto, were in use in the mid-eighteenth century. However, he advises adherence to

whatever markings are given:

Slurred notes must be played as they are indicated, since a particular expression is often sought through them. On the other hand, those that require tonguing also must not be slurred.⁹

He demands distinct articulation for fast passage-work:

In the allegro the quick passage-work must be played above all roundly, correctly, and distinctly, and with liveliness and articulation.¹⁰

Quantz’s writings certainly do not support the slurring of runs in a fast movement unless so indicated.

In a slow movement, though, the notes should be more legato. Quantz states that one must be careful to sustain the melody constantly in an adagio. All the notes must be caressed and flattered, and none should be tongued harshly.¹¹ The second movement of the Mozart clarinet concerto is an adagio. The slurs over the thirty-second notes here appear to be stylistically appropriate for the more legato ideal of a slow movement. The tempo is also a key factor in determining how staccato or legato to make articulations. Still another factor is the general character of the movement. The final movement of the Mozart clarinet concerto is a rondo allegro. Here a light detached style seems in order for the notes with dots over them.

Quantz makes an analogy between tonguing and bowing. He says that the tongue serves the same purpose on the flute as the bow-stroke on the violin.¹² In fact, Mozart and other classical period composers did model their slurring practices on violin bowing style, even when writing for instruments other than strings.

Mozart’s slurs rarely extend beyond the bar line, a practice consistent with bowing. The slurs are obviously not intended as phrase markings since they usually serve to connect only two to four notes. Rather, these short slurs provide punctuation in the rhetoric of the music and indicate where gentle emphasis should be placed. The first note of a slur received a slight accentuation; the last note

of the slur was somewhat shortened, the amount depending on style, tempo, mood, and other qualities of the passage.

The slurs in the *NMA* of the clarinet concerto are mostly of the short type. The only slurs which extend over the barline connect sustained chords in the accompanying instruments. Slurs for melodic lines never extend beyond a single measure.

On the other hand, various other modern editions, such as Alan Hacker's,¹³ call for long slurs over several measures. In many ways, Hacker's is an excellent edition since it seems to be closer to Mozart's Urtext than most. Hacker attempted to reconstruct the original solo part with its low register passages wherever possible. Where articulation markings are concerned, however, Hacker's editorial indications appear to be stylistically inauthentic. He includes a number of slurs which are not found in either the old or the new Mozart complete works editions.


One suspects that the use of long slurs is a product of nineteenth century, rather than eighteenth century, style preferences. The tradition has undoubtedly been passed down from teacher to student for many generations and is hard to break, especially since articulating the rapid sixteenths is more difficult. Still, it can be done, and I believe it is worth the effort.¹⁴

In conclusion, I feel the autograph sketch of the Mozart clarinet concerto and the non-legato norms of the eighteenth century should cause performers to rethink their articulation practices for this famous work and perhaps other woodwind works of the period. Since Mozart was so careful to mark other articulations, it seems unlikely that he had no preference in sixteenth-note passages where articulation markings are lacking.

Notes

1. This article is adapted from a paper read at the Rocky Mountain Chapter meeting of the American Musicological Society in Tempe, Arizona, March 3, 1990.
2. W.A. Mozart, *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, Serie 5, Werkgruppe 14, Band 4, ed. Franz Giegling (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1977). The facsimile is on pp. 165-176.
3. *NMA*, p. 168. The measures are not numbered in the sketch (and thus the facsimile); however, I

will refer to passages by measure numbers to make it easier to find them in one of the many editions which do contain measure numbers.

4. As cited in Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), p. 191.
5. Eva and Paul Badura-Skoda, *Interpreting Mozart on the Keyboard*, trans. Leo Black (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 54.
6. Sandra P. Rosenblum, *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music: Their Principles and Applications* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 149.
7. Badura-Skoda, p. 55.
8. Ratner, p. 190.
9. Johann Joachim Quantz, *On Playing the Flute*, trans. of *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* by Edward R. Reilly, Second edition (New York: Schirmer Books, 1985), p. 133.
10. Quantz, p. 129.
11. Quantz, p. 166.
12. Quantz, p. 70.
13. W. A. Mozart, *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra*, K. 622, reduction for clarinet and piano, ed. Alan Hacker (London: Schott & Co., Ltd., 1974).
14. Of the dozen or so recorded performances of the Mozart clarinet concerto which I have listened to, the soloist who comes the closest to articulating the solo part the way I think Mozart intended is Antony Pay (accompanied by the Academy of Ancient Music, directed by Christopher Hogwood) on a compact disc produced by L'Oiseau Lyre, Decca Record Company Ltd, in 1986. 

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