

## Articulation in Mozart's piano and violin Sonatas

Alina-Maria NAUNCEF<sup>1</sup>, Elena-Mihaela MANAFU<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The first approach of Mozart's chamber music genre is the duo for piano and violin, especially the sonatas for piano and violin, as these also are his first publications. Mozart, although only 6 years old, has been attracted by the chamber music duo genre ever since the time when he stayed in Paris, being influenced by the sonata creation of his contemporaries J. Schobert, L. Honauer, J.G. Eckard and Raupach. In researching the performing skills within the chamber duo, we will follow the practical methods through which the two instruments unfold their phrasing, articulation, and legato elements, which must coincide and be perfectly assimilated in the so different performing techniques of the two instruments.*

Key-words: *sonatas, articulation, phonetic, consonans, vowels*

### 1. Introduction

This Mozart's composing style was influenced by the various stages in his private life, and the 26 sonatas for piano and violin show the evolution of his style during his youth, his intermediate years and his maturity period.

For understanding Mozart's style and reaching high performing skills, the study of one aspect, namely *articulation*, is extremely important. „The art of articulation embraces myriad aspects of vocal/instrumental technique that determine how notes succeed one another, notably fingering for most instruments, tonguing patterns for winds, categories of touch for keyboards, breathing and enunciation for the voice and bow-management for the violin family” (Stowel 1996, 374).

Articulation can be indicated by the composer in the form of pauses or by means of signs, or it is left at the music teachers' or instrument players' decision, based on their experience and musicality. „Articulation in performance is the delineation of motives or musical ideas by the grouping, separating and related accenting of notes” (Rosenblum 1989, 144).

---

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Music, Transilvania University of Braşov; a\_nauncef@unitbv.ro

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Music, Transilvania University of Braşov; manafuem@yahoo.com

It is responsible for the internal outline of the musical phrases, setting their length and drawing the various internal motifs, all these granting the music work its own shape and clarity while performing it. Both accent setting and articulation have almost the same functions, especially in defining the musical structure.

By noticing the manner of articulation with maximum attention, how certain musical notes are grouped, the instrument player can obtain that fineness in performing, without which the authentic Mozart style would be missing.

Short articulation refers to several manners of attack: *staccato* noted with a dot above the note, which is performed with a light accent, by separating the notes from one another; *staccato* with a line above the note, called *portato*, moderately short and performed with an accent. In the maturity sonatas, starting with KV 301, Mozart differentiates through notation the various forms of staccato/staccatissimo (either through the specific signs, or through the Italian term *staccato*).

Fig.1. Sonata KV 403, First part

„The oft-quoted view that legato touch was employed only when indicated (by an appropriate Italian term or slur) was not universally endorsed. It had effectively become the norm well before 1800, Türk (1789) making a distinction between articulation and legato slurs and warning that the annotation slurs in the opening bars of a movement implied a legato interpretation until otherwise indicated by dashes or rests”, (Stowel 1996, 375).

## 2. Elements of articulation in piano performance

The late 18<sup>th</sup>-century theoreticians distinguished between three types of touch: staccato, legato, and the “usual manner” (non-legato). Tenuto, portato, legatissimo as well as extending the note value were variants of the three touch types.

“Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Marpurg and Türk recommend that when playing with ordinary touch, the finger must be lifted before the next note is played; for legato the finger remains on the key for the full note-value” (Stowel 1996, 375).

From a performing perspective, we can talk of a “hard” and a “light” touch; the “hard” touch requires a firm sound, maintained during its entire value, while the

“light” touch implies a less consistent sound, which lasts shorter than its preset value. This differentiation in the touch refers more to sustaining and separating the notes than to their intensity.

„In performance of detached notes one must especially take into account the prevailing character of the composition, the tempo, the prescribed loudness and softness, etc. If the character of a piece is serious, tender, sad, etc. then the detached notes should not be played as short as in pieces of a lively, playful, etc. character. The notes that should be shortly detached, that are mixed into a melodious Adagio, should not be made as short as in a Allegro. In forte one can generally staccato more shortly than in piano. Leaping notes are, as a whole, played with a shorter staccato than intervals that progress stepwise, etc.” (Brown 2002, 215).

In the piano and violin sonatas, Mozart relates the awareness of the “hard” or “light” touch with tempo indications; e.g. in the Sonata KV 454, the indication *Largo* imposes a majestic character and sustainment in performing (the same character also lies in the introduction to part I of the Sonata KV 379, in *Adagio*).



Fig. 2. *Sonata KV 454, Largo*

The notes below the legato imply a delicate performance, “except for the chromatic passages or the passages where the bass is moving in small values” (Gavrișiu 2006, 57).

The piano articulation issue is of great interest, as the requirement of clarity, of a “clean” performance raises problems for every instrument player. The clear performing and precise phrasing implied by piano articulation require good technical mastery (they talk of the “Mozart pearl string”), as well as knowledge and a clear distinction of this style.

Even though the legato had started to be more and more adopted by the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century performers, Mozart's piano style was regarded as “subtle, but non-legato”, as Beethoven put it.

„From his usually sharp criticism, we learn the principles he considered most important in keyboard performance: natural posture, light hand, precision, a thoroughly trained left hand, general abstention from rushed tempos, keeping strict time, and, most of all, taste and expression (*Geschmack und Empfindung*).” (Komlos 2006, 52).

### 3. Musical phonetics

One cannot discuss Mozart's articulation without approaching the phonetic language. As linguistics has a branch that studies the production, acoustic structure, transmitting, audition and evolution of sounds within articulate language, musical phonetics refers to the articulate musical language (articulation of sounds). Thus, according to the linguistic model, one can catalogue the various articulation forms of the musical discourse, according to the consonants and vowels in the spoken language. This is a form of verbalization of the musical text, which leads to a closeness as much as possible to the inflexions of the human voice.

#### 3.1. Piano phonetics

In piano performance one encounters a wide range of vowels and consonants, each requiring a specific touch. The **vowels (A, E, I)** require an attack on the rear part of the key, putting the arm weight slowly on it, which leads to a high-quality sound that is connected to the next one through a sustained movement of the arm. For the different performance of vowels, the sound is initially created inside the inner hearing, then expressed according to the desired timbre and colour.

Regarding the consonants (sounds of the **P, M, N, T, Ț, R** type), we speak of richer (**M, N**), and strong sounds (**P, T, Ț, R**). Sounds of the **M** and **N** type require a "light" touch, with no pressure on the key, but sustaining the arm during the breaths; the atmosphere created expresses calm, feelings of melancholy, sadness, resignation, generally, the lyrical parts (e.g. theme I from KV 304, e minor).



Fig. 3. Sonata KV 304, Theme I

Like in the case of the violin, the use of sounds of the **P, T, Ț** and **R** type implies a precise attack, with a prepared tip, for a simultaneous effect of brightness, strength and liveliness.

The graphic signs for this attack type are the staccato dot, the staccatissimo sign, accompanied or not by accentuation through short horizontal lines.

### 3.2. Violin phonetics

In violin phonetics one can identify the following types of articulation:

- **Vowels** – sounds of the **A, E, I** type, which determine a right hand attack with a soft, calm sound, led with constant speed, without any start impulse. These are used especially for links, when a smooth passage with no accents from one sound to the next is desired. In the left hand performance, the difference between the three vowels is achieved with the aid of timbre change (this can be obtained by introducing the sourdine, by shifting from one string to the next, which leads to creating a different sound effect, by using the free strings, by shifting strings in high-pitched positions to the detriment of low-pitched positions, by using the non-vibrato.

- **Consonants** – sounds of the **P, M, N, T, T̄, R** type.

- **P type consonants** – refer to a very precise attack, with opening the sound after the moment it is produced, which achieves a prompt, clear and precise sound. These consonants are encountered very often in trumpet performance, but also in violin attacks, on dynamic sounds, in full and generous nuances. In the right hand, the consonant **P** is achieved through a short and prompt attack of the bow on the string, followed by pushing the sound through its relaxation and the high bow speed. If we wanted to draw the **P** sound trajectory, we could imagine a funnel where the beginning of the sound is short, after which it opens up and fills the hall with harmonics. In the score, the **P** is noted as: accents, *fp* on a longer note value.

- **T type consonants** – are very much like the **P** type, but the timbre effect is more closed, the sound being attacked as promptly as the **P** type, but on a shorter value. The graphic representation in the score is the accent, the nuance of *fp*, *sf*, the “nail”.




- **R type consonants** – are encountered especially on the notes with a trill or mordent, when the attack is very short and energetic, like an electric shock.





- **TS type consonants** – used for the shortest attacks, very prompt and stung. These are represented in the score by staccato dots.

- **M and N type consonants** – are very much alike, and, as in the case of the vowels mentioned above, they are differentiated through timbre changes. **M** and **N** type sounds are very soft, warm and require to lead the bow on the string without any start attack. Unlike the vowels, these two consonants create a much more inward atmosphere, with a feeling of deep introspection. In the score one finds them on the long, warm, maybe non-vibrated sound in the nuances of *pp*, *p*.

#### 4. Conclusions

In Mozart's music, due to its freshness, clarity and dynamic diversity, one can successfully apply the concept of phonetic articulation. Thus, we can notice a few examples of phonetically categorizing the sounds of Mozart for piano and violin.

Phonetic type: (vowels / consonans / combinations)	Examples from Mozart's sonatas
A	<p>KV 377, partea II, THEMA</p> <p><i>Andante</i><sup>20</sup></p> 
AP	<p>KV 378, partea I</p> <p><i>Allegro moderato</i></p> 
T	<p>KV 377, partea I</p> <p><i>Allegro</i></p> <p>Entstanden Wien, Sommer 1781<sup>21</sup></p> 

Phonetic type: (vowels / consonans / combinations)	Examples from Mozart's sonatas
<p><b>P</b></p>	<p>KV 306, First Part</p> <p><i>Allegro con spirito</i></p> 
<p><b>M</b></p>	<p>KV 306, Second Part</p> <p><i>Andantino cantabile</i></p> 
<p><b>MT</b></p>	<p>KV 454, Largo</p> <p><i>Largo</i></p> 
<p><b>MN</b></p>	<p>KV 304, First Part</p> <p><i>Allegro</i></p> 


Phonetic type: (vowels / consonans / combinations)	<b>Examples from Mozart's sonatas</b>
<b>PT</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">KV 378, third part</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RONDEAU Allegro</p> 

Fig. 4. *Examples from Mozart's sonatas*

Of course, one can find all variants of attacks in every sonata, but also various combinations of these attack types: vowel–vowel, vowel–consonant, consonant–consonant. These are just a few orientation examples for illustrating the various manners of attack and musical articulation. Of course, the examples and combinations are countless and may undergo small differences of perception between one performer and the next. „...What is remarkable in Mozart's music is the rapidity of change of articulations and dynamic levels...” (Breene 2007, 79).

## References

- Breene, S. 2007. „Mozart's violin sonatas and the gestures of embodiment: The subjectivities of performance practice”. In PhD Thesis: *Music in the Graduate School of Duke University*, Durham.
- Brown, C. 2002. *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gavrişiu, C. 2006. *Similaritatea interpretării textului muzical în cadrul duo-ului vioară-pian* [Similarity interpretation of the musical text in violin-piano duo]. Cluj Napoca: Editura Mediamusica.
- Komlos, K. 2006. „Mozart the fortepianist”. In *Cambridge Studies- Perspectives on Mozart Performance*, ed. by R. Larry Todd and Peter Williams, No. 1, XIV, p. 98. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenblum, S. P. 1989. *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music. Their Principles and Applications*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Stowel, R. 1996. „Performance Practice”. In *The Mozart Compendium*, ed. by H.C. Robbins Landon, p.374. London: Thames and Hudson.