

ARTICULATION IN GUITAR MUSIC

By LEX EISENHARDT

FROM many controversial publications in several guitar magazines it appears that the appreciation of the 19th century repertoire for the guitar is rather diverse. Often we come across articles or interviews in which this music is strongly defended while in others it gets a very negative approach. No one expects Dussek to sound like Mozart or Weber to sound like Beethoven, yet it is often said that Giuliani and Sor cannot be compared to their illustrious contemporaries, as if such comparisons prove their worthlessness. Yet these composers seem to be worth listening to, and their music worth performing.

In my opinion the discussion is obscured by the lack of really convincing stylish executions from which the quality of these compositions can be judged. Such performances should pay attention to the actual content of the music, though for a majority of the works this is not the romantic aspect. A guitarist who, in spite of that, tries to play it like romantic music only shows it up as being thin and uninteresting. A performer who, on the contrary, takes into consideration the characteristics belonging to the style of the era could obtain a result that places this repertoire in a different light. A historically correct interpretation should not depend on the use of old instruments or copies of old instruments: a modern 'wrong' instrument can do justice to this music, too. To realise such an execution, however, the player should have knowledge of the elements that compound a certain style, and the ability to transpose this knowledge to his own instrument and his own playing. Too often it seems as if our music comes from another planet with its own musical history. There are great differences in the way of phrasing and the rhythmical performance, but it is determined most perhaps by the way guitarists do or, rather, don't, articulate. One could say that the guitarist speaks a universal language with a very peculiar accent.

I want to emphasise something many people found out long before I did: that to play what is written is an impossibility. Musical notation only ever gave the necessary information, especially up to the period of the later romantics. To achieve a good performance the player had to have a good basic understanding of musical conventions – rather like a jazz performer would have, today. The notes were never of equal length or intensity when played; on the contrary, the aim was to obtain all kinds of subtle shades.

In many publications from the second half of the 18th century concerning the 'true art' of playing the flute, violin or harpsichord, there is a description of a performance practice which can be characterised as very transparent and open. This taste held a strong influence into the first decades of the 19th century, the time in which the guitar flourished. One determining factor in this practice is the so-called 'non-legato'. Many of the sources speak of the development of an instrumental technique for separating the notes, so that they didn't run into each other. Non-legato (or articulation in general) always has both a musical and a technical side. String players obtain this effect by the 'spiccato' technique, detaching the notes by bouncing the bow on the strings in a short, separate movement for each note. A flautist obtains a similar result by

producing different sounds in his articulation, like the well-known 'tu-ru-tu-ru' (Hotteterre) or 'did-dle did-dle di' (Quantz). Against this general background of non-legato playing, in several places notes were slurred intentionally to increase the expressive range. Thus a way of playing evolved which could well be compared to rhetoric in language.

There is not only one way of playing staccato. In fact, there is an endless number of possible nuances between staccatissimo and (almost) legato. In some cases it would be better to speak of 'untying' the notes. Character as well as tempo are the main factors which determine the matter.

In summary, we can say that slow pieces (adagios, etc.), cantabile lines and sections with longer notes in general require a more legato approach while faster and more lively pieces yield more to staccato.

Towards the end of the 18th century it became customary to add many articulation marks in the scores. (For evidence of this, compare a Bach partita for harpsichord with a Mozart piano sonata, in original form). It is possible that this was done for an increased need to 'fix' all the elements of the composition. This fixation of the articulation was also important because it always had a certain ambiguity. Moreover, the deviation of unwritten rules like displaced accents and unusual slurs, which were felt to be exciting, became part of the composition.

In the transition to another era the non-legato approach disappeared eventually. According to a certain opinion in musical sociology the French revolution from 1789 onwards brought 'égalité' in the social sense, and the newly founded Conservatoire brought 'égalité' in music. At the turn of the century, as we can see in several methods and other books for the pianoforte another opinion is gaining ground:

Muzio Clementi (1802): *Wenn der Komponist das legato und staccato dem Gefühle des Spielers überlässt, so ist die beste Regel, hauptsächlich und am mehesten legato zu spielen, und das staccato für besondere Fälle aufzusparen, um gewisse Passagen herauszuheben und ihnen mehr Leben und Energie einzudrücken. Wo aber höhere Schönheiten diese Spielart erfordern, da muss das gebundene Spiel natürlich weichen.*¹

Carl Czerny (about 1842) describes the lessons he had with Beethoven in the first decade of the century. In his view articulation was directly connected with the instruments:

er...machte mich vorzüglich auf das Legato aufmerksam, das er selber in einer so unübertrefflichen Art in seiner Macht hatte, und das zu jener Zeit alle andern Pianisten auf dem Fortepiano für unausführbar hielten, indem damals (noch von Mozarts Zeit) das gehackte un kurz abgestossene Spiel Mode war. Auch hat mir in späteren Jahren Beethoven erzählt, dass er Mozart mehrmals spielen gehört und dass dieser, da zu seiner Zeit die Erfindung der Fortepiano noch in ihrer Kindheit war, sich auf den damals mehr gebräuchlichen Flügeln ein Spiel angewöhnt hatte, welches keineswegs für die Fortepiano passte.²

It seems Beethoven was far ahead of his time; for most players a change like this takes quite some time to settle. Finally, this development leads to a statement by Czerny in 1842:

Das gewöhnliche Legato wird durch Bindungen angezeigt, muss aber auch überall angewendet werden, wo der Autor gar nichts andeutete. Denn in der Musik ist das Legato die Regel, und alle übrigen Vortrags-Arten nur die Ausnahmen.³

In Beethoven's music there are still very many articulation marks. It is likely, though, that in his legato playing he did not aim to connect all notes in the same way.

Is the early 19th century guitar music Mozartian or Beethovenian in the way it is to be articulated? The content and the style of the works have to be decisive in this matter. The guitar music and the guitar technique of the late 18th and early 19th centuries still bear the rudiments of well-articulated playing. If we compare the guitar technique to that of other instruments, such as the harpsichord, flute or violin, there are similar problems. If we want to play any form of staccato the note has to be stopped consciously. In this respect it has to be considered that individually touching the notes that lie on one string causes a (often hardly perceptible) non-legato. Since the romantic era, the notes must link together as much as possible. Over the last century we have endeavoured to transform this non-legato into legato. It is likely that in the past some composers used this technical non-legato intentionally.

To obtain a real legato, there are only a few technical solutions. Making connections between the notes in the baroque period was done by the left-hand slurring technique as well as by producing the notes on two different strings successively. These two ways of legato playing were often seen as equivalent and interchangeable, especially in the literature for the baroque lute and the baroque guitar. This 'two-string' legato might still have been present in the music of Mauro Giuliani and others. Properly executed it should be prevented from being over-legato, which means that the first note has to end as soon as the second has come to sound. In our modern fingerings, tone colour – no open strings! – is a primary goal. But in choosing positions on the fingerboard of the guitar other than the original fingerings there will be an entirely different articulation as a result.

In my investigations I would have preferred to use the theoretical works of our composers, but because these contain few clear statements on the subject, I will mainly base my case on that of which we have plenty: the scores. I looked for some analogous passages in music for other instruments and also for arrangements or transcriptions, expecting these to produce valuable information:



Ex. 1a From the Sonata for Piano, No. 12, by Ludwig van Beethoven



Ex. 1b From the Livre d'or

An interesting comparison can be made between a part of the first movement of the twelfth piano sonata by Ludwig van Beethoven and a transcription Napoléon Coste made of this in his *Livre d'Or* (Op. 52). The difference in articulation is striking. Beethoven's score is full of slurs and dots, whereas with Coste there is just one slur in the last bar. On the one hand the conclusion can be drawn that the guitarist (or, more precisely, Coste) was much less preoccupied with articulation than the pianist (Beethoven). On the other hand, for the sake of completeness, it needs to be mentioned that this transcription dates from a period (1880) in which the interest in old-fashioned articulation had greatly diminished. At that time the attention was turned much more to things like individualistic rubato:



Ex 2a



Ex 2b



Ex 3

When we take a closer look it is remarkable that Beethoven's notation for a suspension plus its solution, one of the beloved formulas in those days, is as in Ex 3a, while Coste writes it as in 2b. In fact, this articulation is something similar to the appoggiatura in the later baroque. In the examples it is to be seen that this 'appoggiatura' can appear in various forms. What they have in common is that the suspended notes, by being dissonant in the prevailing harmony, attract all the attention while the solution is considered less important and is intended to be played more softly. These two notations can both be found in guitar music and in principle they mean to say the same thing. Only if there is a rest placed explicitly could one assume that it has to be silenced for a time, as in the example from the second variation from Sor's Opus 9 (Ex 3).

From many sources it appears that the two notes could always be connected. In this respect it can be considered a fault in interpretation to break the chord of the solution (if it is in a chord), unless this is indicated by the composer; in this way the solution is set apart from the suspension. In fact, the contrary is the case: breaking the chord of the suspension was quite usual in the baroque era.

Apart from the two notations mentioned the third way to indicate the same phenomenon is the ordinary slur. The difference is that for some instruments it gives musical and technical information at the same time. With Coste, as we could see, there is a slur. It seems the choice for slurring is partly dependent on the articulations of the left hand: in more melodic sections or guitar duets (eg, by Sor), where a single melody is played on one guitar, the use of slurs is often more consistent.

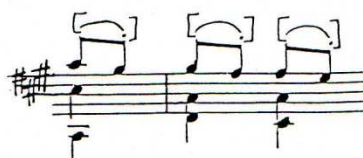
The note standing before the suspension can be involved as well. As a heritage from the baroque, this note is sometimes an anticipation of the appoggiatura, a suspended note, and while this note is repeated it will generally be untied from the suspension. Thus an articulation model can be set up consisting of a non-legato (anticipation-suspension) followed by a legato (suspension-solution). On the guitar, all three notes can be played, for preference, on the same string. In analysing the music for two guitars by Fernando Sor it can be found that this was considered to be a very good solution. Thus the anticipation becomes a 'natural' non-legato by the second right-hand touch and the next two notes will be perfectly legato by slurring.

Finally, there are a great many places left in which

none of the indications mentioned is given. Yet it is possible that a similar execution is asked for, so it is important to find out if there is a consistent use of articulation in the edition (Urtext or facsimile). If not, you can add your own; a truly good player like Sor would probably have done the same.

There are further places in which slurring was not intended. As I mentioned earlier, the limited possibilities of the left hand are partly determining in this but there could have been other motives for a composer to choose not to slur. For instance, he could wish to obtain a more even progress of the movement. An example without slurring can be found in the theme (Ex 4) by G F Handel that Giuliani used in his Opus 107. This is a 'seufzer-type' of melody writing (which can be compared to the second bar of Ex 15, in Part 2) in which I would have preferred slurring. But, while no slurs are indicated this is somewhat problematic. However the technical execution may have been achieved, the dynamic relation and the articulation have to be right.

An example of 'two-strings' legato is to be seen in the second variation of Opus 9 by Sor (Ex 5). The suspension and the solution are on different strings and it is necessary to damp the suspended notes directly after touching the solution.



Ex 4



Ex 5

In the next example there is the opposite situation to the Handel variations; here there are slurs indicated but it is doubtful if Sor meant slurs to be executed with the left hand. Many editors have deliberately omitted these signs!



Ex 6 From Opus 9 by F Sor (*Introduction*)

To be concluded

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PART 2

AS I mentioned in Part 1, the slur has a musical and a technical side. There is a slightly different situation with the dot. In the tablatures for the old plucked instruments the dot has been used in most cases to indicate the forefinger of the right hand (two dots were used for the middle finger).

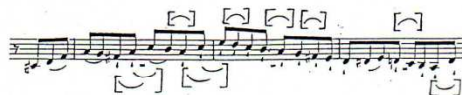
This practice was still in use with some composers in the second half of the 18th century. It may seem far-fetched but it occurs to me that some of the composers in the early 19th century mistook the technical for the musical use. However this may be, the dot seems to have been used for different purposes. With Sor it is probably meant as a real staccato, while the dots with Giuliani are generally understood to mean that the note has to be touched instead of being slurred. Yet there is the possibility that Giuliani also meant to express in some cases that the notes should not intermingle. The dot suggests a staccato playing or at least tells the player to avoid 'over-legato'. Assuming that Giuliani did not distinguish clearly between the musical and the technical side of this notation it is still possible that in his playing the influence of his familiarity with the technique and interpretation on other instruments was to be heard. By ear he could have striven for a result equivalent to the musical norms of his time. It will be very hard to prove that Giuliani used the dot for staccato in some situations, but nevertheless I would like to make some remarks on this subject. In the first place, the dot was generally accepted as a means to indicate staccato. Most composers of guitar music used it in that sense, but it is clear that in some situations, as in arpeggio forms, for instance, there can be no other explanation for his dots than that they are simply a right-hand instruction for touching every single note. Secondly, the guitar is, as we saw in the discussion on the suspension, a musical instrument on which the articulation achieved depends on the place on the fingerboard where the notes are played. In fact, Giuliani could have chosen to write other melodic formulas than he did; also, the notes could have been placed in other positions. It seems he was influenced in his composition by the possibilities suggested to him by the instrument. In most of the passages where

articulation is indicated the notes are very much suited to the instrumental technique. All this gives the impression that Giuliani established a kind of synthesis of his musical ideas and a way of fingering which was based on the possibilities he attributed to the instrument.

In analysing where Giuliani placed dots in his music I discovered that there are at least three possibilities:

1. When there are several notes placed on one string successively, the dot clearly indicates a contrast with the slurs that usually occur in these sections. Here the result will be any form of staccato.
2. Most of the time dots appear where the melody is going from one string to another. This arrangement can be played both legato or non-legato. In my opinion, the context would be the determining factor in deciding how it is to be played. In a situation with seufzer-motifs ('sigh-motifs') or suspended notes, I would prefer legato, while in sections like Ex 7 or in longer scale-runs (Ex 10) I would play staccato.
3. In triad forms many composers used both arpeggio and slurring techniques. Though dots often appear here, I don't think these notes should be staccato. It has to be noted that there is a difference in the functions of real arpeggios and slower, more thematic triad forms, which, by contrast, often have to be played non-legato.

It is easy to see that Giuliani and some others were not always consistent in their use of slurs and dots. Still, I would prefer not to regard them as nothing more than opportunistic fingerings, overlooking the possibility of a musical intention. Indicated in Ex 7 are the places that are often played over-legato, even though there are dots. The left hand would have some difficulty in damping all these notes.



Ex 7 From Sonata Opus 15 by M Giuliani

Some of Giuliani's works, like the *Concerto* (Opus 30) are generally played so fast that nuances in articulation can hardly be made. This can be one reason for the guitar being no match for the orchestra. Well-articulated playing gives clarity to the guitar part and the contribution of the guitar player becomes more interesting, almost like a fortepiano. Instead of an unobtrusive evenness attended by all sorts of rhythmical vagueness, a clear musical message can be heard. In such an ensemble, tone colour is not the most important element (you almost always lose that, anyway). Only good timing and phrasing can help, and of course an ensemble with old, 'baroque' strings gives far more room to the guitarist by its openness of sound.

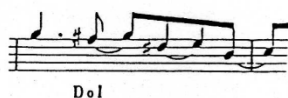
Slurs can demand different executions, depending on their placing. Normally, the first of the two (or more)

notes is on the stronger beat, and should be played louder. But in the next example (Ex 8) the stronger notes have to be produced by slurring. When played carefully, the accents can be produced satisfactorily.



Ex 8 From Sonata Opus 15 by M Giuliani

Chromatic leading notes are sometimes slurred, as well. In the next example, (Ex 9,) also taken from Giuliani's Opus 15, the leading notes can be found on weak beats. They still have to be accented, nevertheless. This effect, which can sound rather trite to modern ears, was very popular in Giuliani's day. I suppose that this displaced accent was felt to be very exciting at that time. Its solution should also be played strongly, and the result is a somewhat bold accentuation, even though the whole section has to be *dolce*. Though the second note has no staccato dot, it is worthwhile keeping it short.



Ex 9 From Sonata Opus 15 by M Giuliani

Only sporadically in the early literature for guitar do we meet longer melodic lines (scales, for example) that have to be played staccato. The second example below (Ex 10b) from Opus 9 by Fernando Sor seems a contradiction to what he had already said. In his method, we can read:

As to the right hand, I never aimed to play scales staccato, nor detached, nor with great rapidity, because I have been of the opinion that I could never make the guitar perform violin passages satisfactorily, while, by taking advantage of the facility which it offers for connecting or slurring the sounds, I could imitate somewhat better the passages of an air or melody. (...) Should the reader wish to learn to detach notes with rapidity in a difficult passage, I cannot do better than to refer him to the method of Mr Aguado, who, excelling in this kind of execution, is prepared to establish the best rules respecting it.⁴

To play with great rapidity without slurring, in Sor's view, seems to be the same as detaching, which is a form of non-legato. On the other hand, this does not mean that Giuliani thought so as well. Giuliani explicitly added 'staccato' in this place, so all the notes have to be staccato, even where the melody is changing strings. This makes it likely that the left hand was involved in damping as well as the right hand.



Ex 10a From Opus 9 by M Giuliani



Ex 10b

Until now I have found only a few works in which a 'mezzo-staccato' is indicated. W. Matiegka used it in his

Grande Sonate Opus 1. A beautiful example can be found in *An die Entfernte*, one of the *Bardenklänge* by J. K. Mertz. In this piece, we can see that Mertz had a highly developed sense of articulation.

Traditionally, guitar music is not loaded with indications for execution. Still, in point of fact, every theme, even every note, needs to be characterised in a certain way. If we compare the beginning of the *Sonata Opus 15* by Sor to Mozart's 14th *Sonata for Piano* or to Beethoven's first, playing staccato could be the right approach. After the rugged, masculine opening, all three works have a smooth chromatic line downwards (Sor, Bars 6-7) that is best played very much legato so that it makes a strong contrast to the triad in the beginning.



Ex 11a L van Beethoven



Ex 11b W A Mozart



Ex 11c F Sor

Upbeats are further examples of notes that are generally not provided with dots. Yet, in many cases, it is better to keep these short, especially in more rapid or lighter pieces. These notes must definitely be prevented from sounding into the next bar.

Basses, on some occasions, are better played short as well. Both Sor and Giuliani took pains to place rests in the bass line in some of their works, and these cannot be misunderstood. Though it cannot simply be assumed in all their compositions, it is clear that they were familiar with this practice and this raises the question as to whether keeping the basses short can contribute to a correct characterisation of their music. Although generalisations are not desirable here, they were clearly familiar with this practice, and this might be justification for basses in their music to be kept short as a matter of form.



Ex 12a From Opus 40 by F Sor



Ex 12b From Opus 109 by M Giuliani

Interestingly, accents can be seen as a part of the articulation as well. Even when this is not indicated in the score, certain chords, leading notes and syncopations have to be accented. Only seldom is there more explicit information to be found, as in the second variation of Opus 9 by Sor. Though this is no real syncopation, the rest makes it clear that the second G is not merely a repetition of the first.



Ex 13

False accents, as indicated in Ex 14a, can actually distort the music. Care must be taken to prevent the F in the first bar and the E in the second bar from being too long. This would disturb the melodic line. As we can see in Ex 14b Sor meant these notes to be purely melodic.



Ex 14a From the *Menuet* from Opus 25 by F Sor



Ex 14b Ibid.

Repeated notes were a favourite means of expression in the music of the 18th century (Mozart!) and later, and these demand proper execution. In most cases, they will have to be executed in some form of staccato. The repetition increases the tension, and this tends to indicate the way the staccato is to be played. In some cases, as in Sor's arrangement of an *Air* from *The Magic Flute*, staccato is indicated. Flatly playing a uniform staccato will be insufficient, whereas a staccato of increased sharpness emphasises the increased intensity.



Ex 15 From Opus 19 by F Sor

Tone repetitions can have different meanings, depending on their functions. A constantly repeated bass note, for example, will play an entirely different part.

The last subject I want to discuss is the technical imitations that often seem to prohibit us from a well-articulated performance. To me the heart of the matter seems to be that the guitarist, being aware of the need to articulate the middle voices and the bass line as well as the melody line, is content with just managing to play all the notes in time.

Considering, therefore, the articulation-models of which I have spoken, the theme of Opus 9 by Sor deserves a better articulation than it usually gets. In order to achieve this, compare the articulation I have added in Ex 16 with that in Ex 15.



Ex 16 From Opus 9 by F Sor

This kind of staccato playing is something that, according to the current norms, seems out of reach of guitarists' technique. In itself it should be possible to obtain some articulation by a refined manipulation with the left hand, but you have to be very careful not to disturb the progress of the middle voice. Sor describes it thus:

For staccato sounds, also, I do not employ the right hand more, but merely cease pressing the finger-board with the left hand, without quitting the string as soon as it has been played. I do not impose even this task on the whole hand, the thumb alone answering the purpose, by a slight effort, almost imperceptible.

This way of damping does not apply for every note that has to be shortened; bass notes, for instance, could be damped better by the right hand (thumb), especially when open strings are involved, as in Ex 12a and 12b, or Ex 15.

A second example of a more complex situation can be found in the *Sonata* Opus 15 by Giuliani. The articulation as I have indicated it is just a proposition; in experimentation there might be found other solutions as well. A similar situation is in the *grazioso* part of the third movement of the same sonata.



Ex 17a The first theme of the first movement of Opus 15 by M Giuliani



Ex 17b From the third movement of Opus 15 by M Giuliani

The articulation can be obtained partly in the way Sor described it. In other places the right hand fingers can be brought back 'too early' on the string that is still vibrating. The two Cs in the second bar of Ex 17a and the two Es in the second bar of Ex 17b enable you to play staccato while the progress of the Alberti basses will not really be disturbed as all the Gs can sound on. Some will say that this is against the nature of the instrument; the question remains if it is against the nature of the music. Did Giuliani really do it like this? Some will reply in the negative; I would not dare to.

In my opinion, there are sufficient indications to be found in the guitar music from the classical and early romantic periods to draw the conclusion that at least some composers had a well-developed sense of articulation. I suppose articulation is an essential part of their works, but unfortunately it did not appear in the scores.

It can be a challenge to find the way back to the essence of this style by comparing it to the music for

other instruments. I would suggest taking risks by trying to obey the elementary musical rules of the period, and by no longer hiding behind the fact that there are so few indications in the music.

Notes

1. Muzio Clementi: *Einleitung in die Kunst, das Piano-Forte zu spielen*. Leipzig o.J. (1802), S.14.
2. Zitiert nach Jean-Claude Zehnder: *Zur Artikulation im Orgelspiel des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, in *Musik und Gottesdienst* 31/1977, S.89.
3. Carl Czerny: *Vollständige theoretisch-praktische Pianoforte-Schule* Opus 500. Wien/Wolfenbüttel o.J. (1842), Bd. 3, S. 16.
4. Fernando Sor: *Method for the Spanish Guitar*. Translated from the Original by A. Merrick, London 1832. S.21 f.
5. Sor, a.a.O. S. 18.

Recommended Literature

- Betty Bang Mather: *Interpretation of French Music from 1675 to 1775, for woodwind and other performers*: McGinnis & Marx, New York, 1973.
- Robert Donington: *String Playing in Baroque Music*: Faber & Faber, London 1978.
- Ludger Lohmann: *Studien zu Artikulationsproblemen bei den Tasteninstrumenten des 16-18 Jahrhunderts*. Gustav Bosse, Regensburg, 1982.
- Willem Retze Talsma: *Wiedergeburt der Klassiker, Bd. 1. Anleitung zur entmechanisierung der Musik*: Wort und Welt Verlag, Innsbruck, 1980.