CHAPTER 9: STACCATO DOTS AND THE OTHER USUAL SUSPECTS

A. Period Practice
   • To most modern players there are three basic crisp touches: *detaché or portato, staccato, and staccatissimo.*
   • Eighteenth-century musicians set forth basic parameters based on note length, tempo, volume, melodic skip, and *affekt.*
   • By approximately 1750, the dot, stroke, and wedge were all in use and interpreted synonymously.

B. *Staccato* indications depend on context and consequently, carry varying definitions.
   • Play more lightly.
   • Play with an accent.
   • Negate the natural property of its function. Eighteenth-century musicians already knew the anacrusis was light. The dot functions to bring attention to the note, not a superfluous reminder.
   • When *staccato* appears as a new articulation, it perhaps means to make it more important.

C. *Portato* indicates “these notes are important.” It provides the most expressive notation without connecting the tones with *legato.*

D. The performer is then left to his own educated freedom.
   • Determine the *affekt.*
   • Examine each staccato indication and what the composer is after.
   • How is the intention best expressed?
E. Most often, *staccato* and *portato* is played with the fingers only—germane to the quick action of the fortepiano.

**INFLUENCES APPLIED**

A. Determine the *affekt*.
   - What is the best way to project that *affekt*? Rather than a simple choice of *portato*, *staccato*, and *staccatissimo*, varied artistic decisions are now available.

B. Since the tone of the piano cannot be altered once the key is struck the pianist must take extra care in execution decisions surrounding attack, release, weight, length, and articulating groups of notes.

C. Executing eighteenth-century *staccato* on a modern instrument requires careful adjustment to avoid a sound that is choked or too overpowering.
   - Much attention to an appropriate attack and release through careful listening will prove fruitful in responding to the music on each particular instrument encountered.
   - At times, a light amount of arm weight is appropriate for a more full sound on a modern instrument.
   - Keep in mind the style to avoid a banging, heavy, hammered sound beyond the intentions of the time and capabilities of the period instruments.

D. The piano is capable of creating a true *legato* line due to the blossoming of the tone. When *portato* is encountered on the modern piano an intentional detaché is necessary to express the tones according the eighteenth-century norms.