

How to Play Staccato, Part 3 (conclusion)

By Douglas Niedt

Copyright Douglas Niedt. All Rights Reserved. This article may be reprinted, but please be considerate and give credit to Douglas Niedt.

Staccato and Legato at the Same Time?

Melody staccato, bass legato

Sometimes the melody in a passage can be staccato but the bass legato. Look at this passage from Mauro Giuliani's *Rossiniana No. 4, Opus 122*:

Rossiniana No. 4, Opus 122 Mauro Giuliani
Original Notation

Short Long Short Long Short

As notated, beat one and beat three are short as is beat one in the next measure. It sounds great that way. However, because this motif is repeated several times I like to vary the articulation. Therefore, on some of the repeated instances of this passage, I like to play:

Rossiniana No. 4, Opus 122 Mauro Giuliani
Alternate articulation—Melody short, bass legato

The melody on beat one and three stays short as before. But this time the bass notes are all played as long, connected quarter notes—legato. So we have the contrast of the upper part (melody) being staccato, but the lower part (bass) being legato. I think it's a great effect for contrast. Check it out:



Staccato Part 3 Giuliani Rossiniana

Melody legato, bass staccato

The next passage is from the introduction to Fernando Sor's *Grand Solo, Opus 14*:

Excerpt from Introduction of *Grand Solo, Opus 14* (Fernando Sor)

The musical score is in 6/8 time. The treble clef part shows a sequence of chords: II^③, V^③, VI^③, VIII^③, X^③, and VIII^③. The bass clef part shows a sequence of eighth notes: 0, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 10, 8, 6, 6, 5, 4, 5. The score ends with a double bar line.

No indication of articulation is given. Playing all the notes sustained and legato sounds fine. But I think the passage takes on an extra dimension or depth and mystery if the bass notes are played a little detached:

Excerpt from Introduction of *Grand Solo, Opus 14* (Fernando Sor)

The musical score is in 6/8 time. The treble clef part shows a sequence of chords: II^③, V^③, VI^③, VIII^③, X^③, and VIII^③. The bass clef part shows a sequence of eighth notes: 0, 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 10, 8, 6, 6, 5, 4, 5. The score ends with a double bar line. The instruction "Staccato bass" is written in red below the bass line.

Watch this video:



Sor Grand Solo

Or, a more complicated example occurs in *Malagueña* by Isaac Albéniz:

Malagueña Opus 165, No. 3 (Isaac Albéniz)

II^③

i *m* *i* *a* *i* *m* *a* *i* *a*
 ③ ② ③ ①
 Cut with *p* and release pressure off 1st finger
 Cut with *i* and back of *p*
 Cut with *m* and *p*
 Cut with *i*
 Cut with *i* and *a*

T 2 2 0 3 0 3 3 3
 A 2 4 2 0 3 3 0
 B 0 4 2 0 1

T 2 2 0 3 0 3 3 3
 A 2 4 2 0 3 3 0
 B 0 4 2 0 1

Cut with *i* Cut with *a* Cut with *p* Cut with *a* Cut with *a*
p *m* *i* *m* *a* *i* *m* *a* *i* *m* *a* *i* *m* *a*
 ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③ ③

T 2 2 5 3 0 3 3 3 2 2 0 3 0 3 3
 A 2 2 3 3 2 2 5 3 5 3 2 3
 B 2 2 3 2 5 3 5 3 2 3

The musical score consists of two systems, each with five measures. The first system's melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The accompaniment for the first system is: T (2, 2, 5), A (2, 2), B (2, 2, 5). The second system's melody starts with a quarter note D5, followed by a quarter note E5, a quarter note F5, and a quarter note G5. The accompaniment for the second system is: T (3, 0, 3), A (3, 0, 3), B (3, 0, 3). The score includes various musical notations such as eighth notes, quarter notes, and triplets, as well as fingerings and string indications.

Here the melody is legato and the accompaniment staccato. The use of staccato makes the piece come alive. Watch this excellent performance by David Russell:



David Russell Malaguena

Staccato in Contrapuntal Music

Sometimes things can get complicated in applying staccato to contrapuntal music such as that by J.S. Bach. Here is the beginning of the *Presto* from Bach's *Präludium* to his *Lute Suite No. 1* BWV 996.

Presto from Präludium, Lute Suite No. 1, BWV996

①

i m i m i m i m i m i m i m

②

Bottom voice played by thumb only

③

TAB

2 0 7 7 5 0 3 3 2 3 0 5 5 0 3 2

1 2

①

i m i m i m i m i m i m i m

②

Bottom voice played by thumb only

③

TAB

2 3 2 0 2 3 3 3 2 0 5 5 4 5 2 5 0

3 3 2 0 5 5 4 5 2

It could be played with no articulation. But a scheme of articulation can make it much more interesting and propel the music forward. For this passage, there are many possibilities for articulation. But the important thing is to *use the same pattern of articulation for the same motif in each voice* for cohesiveness. In this example I have chosen: Long for the upbeat then a recurrent pattern of: Short-Short-Long-Short followed by four legato 16th notes.

In other words for the upper voice:

Upper Voice Only: *Presto* from *Präludium, Lute Suite No. 1, BMV996*

Articulation pattern: Short-Short-Long-Short

Tablature: 2 0 2 7 7 5 3 3 2 3 0 5 5 3 2 2 0 2 3 3 3 2 0 5 5

I keep the same articulation pattern for the lower voice:

Lower Voice Only: *Presto* from *Präludium, Lute Suite No. 1, BMV996*

Bottom voice played by thumb only

Articulation pattern: Short-Short-Long-Short

Tablature: 1 2 0 5 5 3 1 1 0 1 2 3 3 5 4 4 2 4 0 5 5 4 5 2 0

Put the articulation in both parts together and we have:

With Articulation in Both Parts: *Presto* from *Präludien*, *Lute Suite No. 1*, *BMV996*

[illegible][illegible]

Watch me demonstrate:



Staccato Part 3 Bach Prelude

Staccato in Arrangements of Popular Music

Staccato isn't just for complex passages in classical music. It can also help differentiate parts in arrangements of popular music. In this example of *Mr. Bojangles*, adding articulation to the accompaniment emphasizes the $\frac{3}{4}$ rhythm of the accompaniment, adding to its independence against the legato and syncopated melody:

Jerry Jeff Walker

Lift all second-string D's as you play open E's. This produces a clean melody.

I-----III

[illegible]

This is a nice one. Watch:



Staccato Part 3 Bojangles

FINAL THOUGHTS

After deep examination, one realizes there is a lot more to staccato than playing notes in a short, detached manner. First of all of, several methods can be used to execute staccato. Also, a good player can execute different degrees of staccato from very short to slightly detached. And, staccato is not just for single-line passages. Staccato can be used in one part while playing another part legato. It is appropriate and effective to use in all styles of music, from classical to pop. Mastery of staccato will definitely kick your playing up a notch.