

## SMARO GREGORIADOU: Reinventing Guitar

# Phrasing\_Articulation & the Guitar<sup>4</sup>

Phrasing and Articulation are significant, interdependent, perplexing components of musical interpretation that share many similarities with **SPEECH** and **MOVEMENT**.

**PHRASING** in musical performance is the uniting of words into phrases, of movements into gestures. It parallels the right **SYNTAX** of the oral sentence, which guarantees apprehension and persuasiveness of an argument. It is the art of choreographing a movement so as to appear meaningful, balanced. It deals with the right inflection of harmonies and their vertical intensities.

**ARTICULATION** is responsible for the correct **PUNCTUATION**, word pronunciation, flawless accent of vowels and consonants. It chisels the melodic intervals and contours, and offers improvisatory spontaneity to the rhythmical patterns. With the right sense of phrasing and articulation, musical performance is never flaccid or neurotic, repose is never inactive, form is always lucid and the plot constantly exciting.

Exactly as in speech and movement, phrasing and articulation are dependent on right quality and quantity of **BREATHING**. Breathing is the interpreter's tool for shaping and delivering living musical phrases.

**OBJECTIVITY:** According to Kirkpatrick, good phrasing is determined by **INHERENT MUSICAL VALUES**, to which the performer's **INDIVIDUAL TASTE** is but secondary. This is valid for both composers that left detailed legato or staccato markings (Mozart, Chopin, Hindemith,) as for those who didn't (Bach, Scarlatti!) But what are these values and how can we extract them out of a musical score?

**BAD HABITS & THE GUITAR:** Every instrument suffers from bad habits in phrasing and articulation. String players or singers often render big slurs existing in the score into huge, constant, sluggish legatos that destroy every sense of musical declamation. In just the same way bad actors would definitely destroy their text if they uttered only vowels without consonants, or spoke using no dots, commas or other punctuation marks. But maybe no instrument suffers more than the classical guitar! We hardly hear true legato playing from guitarists, and one reason is definitely the mindless, unconscious, indiscriminate use of **SLURS**, hammering ruthlessly the plasticity of the musical texture and movement. Even though technically indispensable for a proper technique, hammer-ons or pull-offs shouldn't be placed everywhere. Technical ease and fretboard convenience shouldn't be allowed to have priority over consistency of articulation and phrasing!

How can we change such old-fashioned attitudes in phrasing and articulation when **COMPOSING, PERFORMING** and **TRANSCRIBING** guitar music? In the classical guitar seminars "**INCLUSIVE INTERPRETATION – FUNCTIONAL TECHNIQUE**" we confront such delicate musical matters. Get involved!