

The Rudolf Kreutzer Staccato Etude No. 4 as a "Tone Study"

Modified by Leo Portnoff

How to study:

1. The staccato is to be taken with great energy, even, spending a very little part of bow; then
2. Stop, relax the muscles of the bow-hand and play the sustained note
 - (a) with equal force
 - (b) saving as much as possible the bow
 - (c) the counterpoint being carried out short, not disturbing the equality in force of the sustained notes.

It seems to me that everything has not yet been said or written about the Kreutzer Etudes. Many different editions of these have been published but in most of them the authors give few advices, mostly concerning fingerings and bowings.

In every etude, Kreutzer has given the student rich, inexhaustible material in which great opportunities are offered him for developing imaginative sense and creative ability. Every one of these etudes is applicable to countless uses and needs.

To quote a parable from the Bible: "Just as the Children of Israel found in the manna that fell from Heaven every desired food-taste," so do the Kreutzer Etudes cater to every one of our requirements and needs.

What Bach is to the development of music Kreutzer is to the development of instrumental pedagogy.

However paradoxical it may appear, it still is fact that Kreutzer has done a certain amount of harm, because in the past his etudes have been attempted by ambitious students who were not fully prepared to play them. It is a common fact that too ambitious natures aspire to greater things than they are capable of.

It takes quite a long time for an earnest student to make a thorough study of the 42 Etudes of Kreutzer. However, in most cases (it may be through impatience on the part of the student or through bad advices) a student, after having rushed through the book, starts playing difficult concertos for which he is not all prepared.

The following anecdote illustrates my viewpoint:

While at the Hochschule in Berlin, an incident occurred which is still fresh in my memory, It was instrumental in bringing a student to the attention of Dr. Joseph Joachim. The young student, at his hearing, had chosen to play the Ernst Concerto in F Sharp Major. He had barely begun when the great master made him stop and asked him to play an Etude of Kreutzer. This performance being rather poor, Joachim asked the young gentleman at what age he started the study of the violin. "At eight years of age," answered the startled student "So I suppose" further remarked; the master, "that you began the study of Kreutzer at the age of nine and probably completed the 42 Etudes at ten?" Before the student recovered from his astonishment at such an accurate guess, the master resumed: "You lack control over your technic, left hand as well as bowing arm, and the reason for this is that you began the study of as difficult work as Kreutzer too early. Kreutzer is the Bible of violinists and must be approached reverently. You may never consider yourself as having finished

with these etudes and I advise you to start their study over again and under good direction." I expected the student to appreciate the master's advice and be thankful for it, but instead he confided to me that he thought Joachim was so orthodox!

Of course Joachim was right. It is dangerous for the immature pupil to be rushed into the study of Kreutzer's Etudes, for it will only encourage him to go on undertaking even more difficult works, and in the end he will get used to study everything he attempts, in a superficial manner. While he seems to have a certain facility in playing difficult pieces at home, as soon as he appears before an audience he loses his confidence and his illusions, even in playing a comparatively simple composition.

To help the young students to get the greatest amount of profit from these Etudes, I have modified the most important of them, beginning with No. 4 (staccato etude). It might seem, at first sight, that this etude has as object the study of staccato only, but why the sustained tone after the staccato run? This long tone takes up as much time as the rest of etude.

In my youth, I enjoyed playing this number, but always felt inclined, - in my impatience, to shorten the value of the half tone following the staccato; and the same fault is noticed in the majority of young students.

The reason for this sustained note after each each staccato is a very serious one. Kreutzer's purpose in giving this particular form to this etude was to give the player a chance to relax the muscles after each staccato and thus prevent the arm and wrist from becoming cramped. Kreutzer probably imagined that the purpose of the long tone after the staccato run was so self-evident that he did not find it necessary to indicate anything in his explanatory remarks accompanying the etude. When we consider that most staccato etudes are written in sustained runs of 16th notes we may appreciate Kreutzer's astounding pedagogical skill in his work, quite a pedagogical subtlety.

Does he not really give us invaluable material for another purpose not less important than the heretofore accepted notions of it? This etude, it seems to me, is a remarkable "tone study," because it compels the hand, which has been slightly unbalanced by the vibrations of the stick through the staccato run, to play a sustained tone with the same bow.

In order that this phase of the etude shall be emphasized, I have modified it in the following manner. The 4/4 signature becomes 6/4, consequently the half note becomes a whole note; and in order to enforce strict metronomical control I have incorporated in every quarter a double stop note. Since the effect of staccato is to drive the bow downwards from the top, this long tone also enforces economy of the bow by virtue of the fact that the player is compelled to play the tone with the same bow.