

So we must recognise that when playing allegros, Emanuel Bach and his contemporaries would have expected a more detached touch even than this “normal” one. Conversely, it would only have been while playing particularly slow, sustained music (or for other specific reasons which will be discussed later), that the player would have used something approaching a modern legato. And both 18th century authorities reflect the flexibility which they both clearly felt attached to note-length, as normally notated.

The player’s freedom

If, as C. P. E. Bach wrote, the tempo and mood of a piece suggested the degree to which the player increased or reduced note-lengths, while the notation of itself gave an incomplete indication, how much freedom should a modern player then assume to occasionally adopt what, compared with a literal reading, might seem extreme licence? The fact remains that even a lively *allegro* written largely in minims (half-notes) and crotchets finds many modern players inhibited about radically reducing the note-lengths from those apparently given. Take another well-known Scarlatti sonata:



Ex. 13: Scarlatti: Sonata K30 (“The Cat’s Fugue”), bars 1–10

Factors which have to be considered are the individual response of the instrument being used, the resonance of the room, the precise speed chosen, and so on. In some circumstances it would be perfectly acceptable to play the dotted crotchets as no more than a third of their written length. This would not be a mannered or contrived interpretation, as it undoubtedly would be in a 19th century piece — but simply one of the possibilities inherent in the notation.