“Vibrato Wars” Part 2. Threads V20 to V35

Introduction

George Kennaway, the administrator of FB’s Performance Research Group, stressed that his post on 22 February 2017 was NOT an invitation to restart vibrato discussions. But they did. The threads attracted comments from many members who joined [over 5,700 at the time of writing] after “Vibrato Wars” Part 1 finished in March 2016. I’ve therefore assembled the threads, from this and other FB sources, as “Vibrato Wars” Part 2. Main topics covered:

- V20 [Page 2], George Kennaway, 22 February 2017. Woodwind and brass vibrato. The increasing relevance of social media discussions in the early music field.
- V21 [Page 6], Richard Bethell, 6 March 2017. His unpublished letter to the Daily Telegraph explaining why people are reluctant to attend opera performances.
- V22 [Page 9], Richard Bethell, 12 August 2017. What classical singers can learn from pop, jazz and folk vocalists. This led to discussions on non vibrato singing by current artists, early recordings by Patti & Albani etc., and the French Urlo Franceso sound.
- V23 [Page 32], Kypros Markou, 21 August 2017. Discussion on string vibrato, mainly by violinists, and on related topics such as bows and bowing, gut strings, chordal playing. Also, are we exaggerating the importance of vibrato, which was given less emphasis in the 17th/18th Centuries than affect, rhetoric, articulation and rhythm?
- V25 [Page 53], Richard Bethell, 31 August 2017. What did Burney mean by “the Beat upon the unison, octave, or any consonant sound to a note on the violin”.
- V26 [Page 58], Vladimir Waltham, 29 September 2017. Most posts from members explaining why they dislike continuous vocal vibrato. Concluding discussion of just and mean tone temperaments, tuning, major and minor semitones, as they affect singing.
- V28. [Page 71], Max Hummus, launched 31 December 2017. Short thread on sweeping generalisations by the likes of Richard Bethell and John Potter, followed by discussion on laryngeal development.
- V29. [Page 75], Joe Bolger, launched 29 January 2018. What might HI performers learn from today’s pop musicians? Various aspects of this “can of worms” discussed, e.g. improvised counterpoint, reviving falsetto register and Portamento di Voce.
- V30. [Page 80], Ben Thapa, launched 26 February 2018. Responses to Ben’s request for views on vocal vibrato, in context with his views on the singing of Nigel Robson who he felt has “a vibration on it that keeps the voice shiny”.
- V33. [Page 103], Andrew Munoz, launched 23 March 2018. Responses to request for sources on how recitatives were sung in the 18th C.
- V34. [Page 109], David Badagnani, launched 15 April 2018. Amicable discussion on David’s uncompromisingly rigorous YouTube playlist featuring singers with absolutely zero vibrato.
- V35. [Page 131], Richard Bethell, launched 10 May 2018. Expert discussion on interpreting tremoli of Zacconi, Rognoni, Bovicelli, Zenobi, etc. Then, other miscellaneous discussions.

Richard Bethell Version 7, 6 June 2018
V20. George Kennaway, launched 22 February 2017

George Kennaway· 22 February at 10:56

On March 14 at 3.30pm, I’ll be giving a seminar paper at the Birmingham Conservatoire entitled 'Diseased, or Just Vulgar – What is it about Vibrato?’. I will partly draw on the astonishing 'vibrato wars' threads from this page from a couple of years ago. Reading back though them (in the pdf so kindly prepared by Richard Bethell!!) I'm struck by many things but chiefly the general level of engagement in *informed* discussion (informed by research, practice, or both) of a potentially explosive topic. Many thanks!

Comments

Christopher Suckling I'm also using Richard's pdf as the starting point of a discussion class with students in the HP department in Guildhall. It really is an extraordinary resource. Do I detect the hand of Leopold Auer in your title? 22 February at 11:04

Lynda Robertson One teacher said to me: it's fine to use vibrato (in flute playing), but you wouldn't want ketchup on all your food, all the time! 22 February at 11:06

George Kennaway Actually, I just made it up - but there are so many sources that talk about vibrato as either a disease or what an earlier generation would have called 'common' - and not in a good way! 22 February at 11:21

George Kennaway And please - this is NOT an invitation to restart this topic!!!!!! 22 February at 11:22

Esha Neogy You're no fun! 😁;) 22 February at 14:37

George Kennaway You can have too much of a good thing! 😄;-) 23 February at 10:32

Mike Bayliss You like to live dangerously! 22 February at 12:00

George Kennaway That's been said... 22 February at 12:01

Ian Pace Would it be possible to post that PDF up in the files area for this group? 22 February at 12:24

Christopher Suckling http://www.earlymusic.info/Vibrato_Wars_Threads_V1_to_V19... Like 6 22 February at 12:25

Ian Pace Thanks! 22 February at 12:27

Richard Bethell George Kennaway and Christopher Suckling, Thanks for your "Vibrato Wars" PDF reference. I hope it helps to launch lively student discussion. Just a reminder, anyone can download the transcript from the home page of the National Early Music Association's website. Also, re Ian Pace's question, anyone is free to post it in the Files area as well http://earlymusic.info/nema.php
John B Dick Do you mean string vibrato across historical style and equipment, or a wider (!!) vibrato? · 22 February at 13:26

George Kennaway I will not answer that question. I plead the 5th amendment. · 22 February at 13:27

Esha Neogy For anyone blessedly unaware of this bit of Americana, that's the constitutional amendment that says one doesn't have to incriminate oneself... · 22 February at 14:36

Roland Hutchinson Are there any such, Esha? I have heard, and do in part believe, that the British watch so many American cop shows that it is not uncommon for British detainees to assert that they know their Miranda rights or to invoke the Fifth Amendment. · 22 February at 22:54 · Edited

Roland Hutchinson (Maybe the Dutch are different. Maybe.) · 22 February at 22:55

Esha Neogy Oh, you're probably right. It's the editor or conference director in me, always wanting to make sure everyone gets all the jokes (and thereby squashing them, alas). · 22 February at 23:16

John B Dick My clarinet teacher did not feel any urge to encourage the wide vibrato of Jack Brymer (Clarinet) and Gwidion Brooke (Bassoon), fashionable at the time, nor would I have wanted to use it. His own style (and his EJ Albert Barret action instruments, now in EUCHMI) were from the start of his career in 1903. Can you or anybody explain how the fad was so pervasive and yet only lasted one generation, what caused it and what ended it, and are these causes a common feature of new fashions in style? I confess to having used vibrato on Baroque flute or Recorder, but only as an ornament on a single isolated note in very few pieces. 22 February at 13:51

Esha Neogy There might be something about this in the pdf (I'm not sure). · 22 February at 14:40

Mike Bayliss As far as woodwind is concerned, and as a broad generalisation, it seems to vary from instrument to instrument: (modern) flautists tend to use it a fair amount, oboists to some degree, bassoonists less and clarinettists not at all. Most perplexing! · 22 February at 13:59 · Edited

Lynda Robertson I have used a bit of vibrato on the clarinet, but it is not my first instrument (I'm a flautist). I think it's possible it is used to some degree on the clarinet. · 22 February at 14:21 · Edited

Esha Neogy Now this I don't remember anyone mentioning, though I'd have to read the pdf to be sure! · 22 February at 14:41

Lynda Robertson I'm talking about modern instruments, of course and air vibrato (not finger vibrato, which was used in earlier times on flutes). · 22 February at 15:24

Mike Bayliss Esha Neogy, I have mentioned it myself before (but possibly not on this thread). Lynda - yes, so was I. I don't know any (classical) clarinettists of my acquaintance who use vibrato - possibly you are carrying across your flute ways on to the clarinet !! · 22 February at 16:30
Lynda Robertson Most probably, but I believe it added something to the slow movement of the Poulenc sonata (in places), when I took my grade 7! · 22 February at 17:59 · Edited

Julian Rushton Clarinetists not at all? nobody told Glinka whose Trio pathétique I played with friends this morning: he asks for vibrato in places ... I did my best to comply. That of course implies no continuous vibrato. · 22 February at 18:56

Mike Bayliss I was speaking generally, not about special effects. "That of course implies no continuous vibrato." Quite - it should be used as a colour when required, not as a permanent tremulant. · 22 February at 19:09 · Edited

John B Dick I think I remember that Quantz covers vibrato, possibly fingered but my copy is in store so I can't check for some months. I think I remember a lot of things nowadays and I have concerns that my memory is not as reliable as it was. · 22 February at 19:40

Roland Hutchinson Two words from west of the Pond about clarinet vibrato: Richard Stolzman. And three more: Known for it. · 22 February at 22:42

Henry Howey As unbelievable as it might seem, one of the bulwarks of the great Chicago Symphony brass, Edward Kleinhammer, ALWAYS used vibrato - on bass trombone. It was slower and not terribly wide, but it was there;-) · 22 February at 14:22

Mike Bayliss In the UK, there seems to be a difference in the use of vibrato between orchestral brass players and brass band players- at least, in those bands I know. Which reinforces a point I have seen made elsewhere (whether or not in these threads, I do not recall) that vibrato use is dependent on context and culture as much as anything else. · 22 February at 16:36 · Edited

Frances Eustace The brass band thing is extraordinary. Having just joined one after a lifetime in early music I was amazed by the full body wobbling of some players even when tuning or trying to! · 23 February at 08:31

Mike Bayliss At least your players tried to tune, Frances - unlike the band I played in for a brief period recently, whose members didn’t bother anyway! (But they did use enormous amounts of vibrato.) · 23 February at 13:33 · Edited

Frances Eustace Mike Bayliss hha ha. It did take me 3 months to discover the pitch was A442 not 440! · 23 February at 13:33

Christopher Price Pontifex It’s like watching an avalanche starting. · 22 February at 22:18

Mike Bayliss No one is shouting at anyone. Yet. · 22 February at 22:23

Miles Golding You might mention in passing in the course of your presentation that such social media discussion threads on various specific topics are perhaps beginning to hold more value than, say, research projects undertaken by "reputable" academic institutions that are underwritten by £800,000 worth of taxpayers’ money. · 22 February at 23:33

Richard Bethell Good point, Miles, though I don't begrudge the spending. I've just drafted 'The Accelerating Tactus' for NEMA’s Early Music Performer. This addresses, inter alia, the influence of time signature on tempi of baroque allegros. My editor, Andrew Woolley, drew my attention to some relevant references, either recent or in one case dated September 2000. Clearly, academic processes can be slow, cumbersome and often institutionally insular. Online discussions, preferably in this Group, are needed as well. · 23 February at 12:56
Richard Bethell But discussion forums still need critical mass. Unfortunately, some musicologists are stuck in the academic stone age and disdain social media. While two contributors, seasoned academic Klaus Miehling and promising young student Sheridan Haskell, are both FB friends, two (Bernard D Sherman and Beverley Jerold Scheibert) are not on FB. Could contacts/colleagues of either suggest joining this group, as I plan to mention them on a post to the interesting parallel thread 'How Fast was it Really'? · 23 February at 12:58 · Edited

Sheridan Haskell I'd be interested in joining. I'm not a musicologist but I've studied the issue of tempo in baroque music for a while. What Quantz taught is one of my main fascinations and I've written on it here: http://media.wix.com/.../a34c69...Like · Reply · 1 · 23 February at 16:57

Danur Ingrid Kvilhaug Sheridan, don't kid yourself, you are a musicologist. · 23 February at 17:57

Miles Golding Richard, I begrudge spending huge amounts of taxpayers' money on academic projects that are founded on falsehood, and display poor standards of academic integrity and inadequate peer review. · 24 February at 09:58

Frances Eustace Miles Golding ouch · 24 February at 10:06

Richard Bethell Miles, true of course, but aren't you putting up a straw man here? Can you give us any examples? · 24 February at 11:40

Job Ter Haar Richard Bethell That would be great. We are losing momentum in that thread; the half tempo people seem to be getting cold feet. We can use some fresh blood there! · 24 February at 12:38

Mike Bayliss Just out of curiosity, and as a taxpayer, I should be interested to know more about a research project on vibrato undertaken by a 'reputable' academic institution that was "underwritten by £800,000 worth of taxpayers' money". · 24 February at 14:53 · Edited

Miles Golding I don’t know of any vibrato projects such as that, but there was one discussed in October in this group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/performancepractice/permalink/1315876205112773 / · 25 February at 01:52
You may have seen articles by Anita Singh and Rupert Christiansen in Saturday’s Daily Telegraph headed: “The British ‘need to learn how to love opera’”. You can probably find them online. I felt they were superficial and complacent. I then broke the golden rule (never tell the whole truth!) by drafting a letter to the editor which, needless to say, wasn’t published. Here it is:

Comments

Richard Bethell “Good to see opera getting pride of place on your page 3 yesterday. But Anita Singh and your opera critic, Rupert Christiansen, barely scratched the surface in uncovering the reasons for poor attendance. Elitist branding? Foreign import? Ridiculous productions? Philistinism? Not really. John Bull loved Italian opera through the 18th and 19th centuries. He stays away now because he loathes the horrible singing, especially the sempre fortissimo volume levels, with painful bellowing or shrieking on high notes, poor diction, huge vibrato a minor third wide, and plummy delivery due to pronounced laryngeal development. Opera singing is in a stranglehold, with all these features uniformly inflicted on the whole repertoire from Monteverdi, Handel and Mozart, through to Verdi, Wagner and Britten. We need vocal reform. For the way forward, I refer the reader to the home page of our website for relevant downloads. From: Richard Bethell, Secretary, National Early Music Association.”

Three responses were published this morning. Only one, from Peter and Sheelagh Mosley of Inverness, was on target, as follows: “Sir—We both love music. Unfortunately, this love does not extend to opera. / The excessive vibrato used by many singers gives the impression that they can’t be sure they will hit the right notes. Instead they hedge their bets by going a bit above it and a bit below it as quickly as they can. It’s even worse when they try to sing Bach or Handel with this technique.”

Our moderator George Kennaway may decide to discourage more vibrato debate, given that the research angles were fully explored in the 19 threads (86,400 words) posted during early 2015. But how about sempre fortissimo on high notes, poor diction and laryngeal development, all of which were deplored in the 18th and 19th centuries? And, how to get reform in the 21st century? 

David Aurelius I blame the stage directors who do not respect the original settings of the opera which affects the music and destroy the meaning of the original play... Mimi is not a heroin addict who overdoses; the witch's oven in Hansel and Greta should not resemble Auschwitz and the ride of the Valkyries not a greyhound race in Ascot (all this horribleness in the Stockholm opera.... Melisande waiting in a busstop???? all of this distracts from the singing and the integrity of the original which people would rather see. Excuse the rant.

Geoff Thomason But, unless an opera is set in the period when it was written, all original settings are anachronistic to begin with. Julius Caesar sings Italianate baroque arias, Mary Stuart sings 19th century bel canto, medieval Meistersinger sing German Romantic music, The Trojans sing in French.... The list is endless - but nobody complains that the composers have ignored the original setting. Let's face it - the idea that everyone from Greek gods to space monsters goes around singing with an orchestra in tow is pretty irrational to start with. -
David Aurelius not the point: I'm saying that the composers and librettists set opera in their time frame and to screw it up with modern anachronistic stageings for me works against the integrity of the piece. · 6th March 2017 at 20:31

David Hansell I've recently been to both ENO and ROH (Verdi and R Strauss). Both houses were packed. I enjoyed the evenings in every way. But I do choose my productions carefully - even more carefully than the casts. · 6th March 2017 at 10:08

Christopher Price Pontifex All too often the debate about historically informed singing is limited to vibrato, the most obvious shortcoming of the many in the modern, historically inapt style that is applied indiscriminately (and lauded by critics and the indiscriminate alike) to every kind of music from Monteverdi to (especially) Mozart and later. But the debate is about much more, as many of us who have participated in it have tried to explain. Let's talk about vocal or tonal weight, if that's the right word to describe the modern sempre fortissimo, over-muscled voice production too often heard in period instrument baroque opera productions these days. · 6th March 2017 at 10:41

David Aurelius amen - in the Drottningholm theatre outside Stockholm (you saw a replica of that when Bergman filmed Magic Flute) the orchestra using period instruments while the singers sang 1930's German opera style. · 6th March 2017 at 11:05

Christopher Price Pontifex I might add, having just read the Telegraph article, that the reason so many people dislike traditional opera (as distinct from real baroque or classical period opera) is that the singing style is so unpleasant and unnatural. Any art you have to become habituated to before you can stop actively disliking it has to have something wrong with it. · 6th March 2017 at 10:48

David Badagnani May I ask what laryngeal development refers to? 6th March 2017 at 11:34

Richard Bethell It's singing with a lowered larynx, which opera singers are trained to do. Tenors, baritones and basses are particularly known for it. 19th century reviews called it throaty or plummy singing. I have to say that Emma Kirkby [see next post], while she does use a narrow vibrato about a semitone wide, has no laryngeal development. · 6th March 2017 at 17:29 · Edited

David Badagnani Thank you so much for this explanation--I just tried this and was able to duplicate that sound. · 6th March 2017 at 18:22 · Edited

Janet Walker I couldn't agree more with the comments of Mr Bethell and Mr and Mrs Mosley - I dislike opera for the same reasons. Perhaps it has to do with clarity and simplicity of delivery - Emma Kirkby singing a Handel aria, for example, as opposed to a coloratura soprano shrieking through an overblown role; or a Corelli Sonata da Chiesa as opposed to a 19th century symphony with a vast orchestra. In each second case the sound is quickly tiring to the ear, the effect fatiguing, rather than engaging. For the British, would it have something to do with our protestant history of church music and a tradition of sobriety in art, architecture and music? · 6th March 2017 at 12:26

Mike Bayliss I recall the remark of a very well-known 20th century brass player (so well-known that I temporarily forget his name!) who hated the introduction of the large, loud, wide-bored instruments because he said "It seems as if the orchestra is always shouting." It's all of a piece. (PS: I shall be seeing - and I hope hearing - Emma Kirkby later today!) · 6th March 2017 at 12:36 · Edited
**John B Dick**  As I have described previously, the production of Tosca I heard in Inverness many years ago. The minimal company toured smaller provincial theatres around Milan, Sets. cast and a (cheap) Hungarian orchestra came in two buses. Today's principals were tomorrow's chorus. The fact that with only holiday and orchestra knowledge of Italian, with school French and Latin unused for half a century, I could distinguish the words and understand them was a shock. Equally shocking was the fact that the company received no subsidy at all!  · *6th March 2017 at 12:41*

**David Hansell**  I was asked to review the ABRSM's handbooks on historical performing styles. The relevant passage on singing said, 'It would be unthinkable now to sing Rossini as it was sung then'. In my review I asked why. I'm still waiting for the answer. But I must say that I don't these days often hear opera that sounds ghastly and I do think that HIP has had an impact. Last year's Glyndebourne 'Barber' was superb and so is their touring Don G. And the ETO Cosi I saw about 3 years ago with a young-ish cast was quite brilliant.  · *6th March 2017 at 14:09*
Richard Bethell · 12 August

Several contributors to the 2009 conference on singing at the University of York, including myself, noted that today’s classical singers could learn much from some current and past pop singers. My new project to identify such singers has used Spotify as a key research tool, yielding the 39 female vocalists listed below. All have natural mostly “straight” voices, untainted by conditioning from opera singing factories; but all were musically trained, often playing guitar or piano. In timbre, they cover the wide variety from “Cutie Pie” thin voices such as Aurora in “Little Boy in The Grass” [select the recording on 4 Aug 2015] to “Passionara” rich voices like Alison Krauss in “A Living Prayer”.

They can be matched by historical descriptions. Giuseppina Ronzi de Begnis’s voice was described on 8 occasions as thin. The Quarterly Music Magazine [QMM] reported in 1822: “There is a quality, in the upper parts most especially, which we can only characterize by the word infantine, for it partakes of the querulous plaintiveness of our tenderest age, and indeed would scarcely be thought to proceed from an adult, or even from the same person as the lower notes, by any one who should hear and not see the singer”. At the other end of the scale, Catherine Stephens’s voice was noted as rich on at least 12 occasions. QMM also said in 1823: “When I hear such a singer as Miss Stephens or Mrs. Salmon, the power of ductility seems carried to its utmost. There are no roughnesses, no breaks--the metal is drawn out exactly, and if we could run it along between the finger and the thumb, or pass the nail over the surface, it would be as even, as smooth, and as polished to the touch as it is brilliant to the ear”.

Spotify subscribers can hear these tracks on my “Vibrato Free Female Pop” playlist. But an alternative YouTube option is available in every case, plus video, with the single exception of Kathryn Williams’s Mirrorball. In some cases, Spotify is better. For example, Amy Stroup on YouTube is unbearably flat in the opening phrases of her “Just You” but the problem has been corrected in the Spotify version.

Why am I posting? Because I would really like to hear views on the topic from this group, including suggested additions or deletions from the list.
Comments

Neil Coleman I wonder could "rich" be the same as "thick"? In Jane Austen's "Emma" Jane Fairfax sings two duets with Frank Churchill, and is then asked to stop: Towards the end of Jane's second song, her voice grew thick.
"That will do," said he, when it was finished, thinking aloud--"you have sung quite enough for one evening--now be quiet."
I would like to suggest adding Agnetha Fältskog and Anni Frid Lingstad to the list: excellent pre-autotune intonation, and diction. 12 August at 14:12

Richard Bethell Thanks for the reference. I think there was a distinction though. Thick or throaty voices were invariably disapproved of. QMM stated in 1824: "One of the most constant defects in the formation of the voices of amateurs is the adoption of a thick guttural tone, instead of the "purezza argentina", the brilliant silvery quality of which the Italians speak in such rapturous terms." Charles Dibdin wrote in 1805: - "Fat singing is also
a favorite mode, as if a man had eaten too much after dinner; but I know of nothing that so completely destroys the effect of singing, and at the same time is so comical in itself, as swallowing the words". Throaty singing was excoriated by everyone, from Tosi onwards. But "laryngeal development" is actually part of today's opera singers' technique! 12 August at 17:48

Neil Coleman You're welcome, and thank you too. I was going to ask if "fat singing" were the same as "low larynx" and even "covered" sound. 12 August at 19:06

Richard Bethell Yes, Manuel Garcia II recommended the "voix sombre ou couverte" sound (making clear that this is produced by a lowered larynx) as an alternative to the clear timbre. I believe that he might have been influenced by John Braham, of whom QMM wrote in 1825 that "nothing is more difficult than to apprehend distinctly the real properties of his true tone—so much does he vary from the standard in execution. It is sometimes even a little throaty, often extremely heady and nasal". 12 August at 21:08

Neil Coleman Thank you, Richard. It does sound like singing that is less than direct, and more "manufactured", as it were. 12 August at 21:21

Max Hummus Gillian Welch has a lovely conversational singing manner. 12 August at 14:30

Max Hummus It sounds like an interesting project, will look up your playlist 12 August at 14:31

Richard Bethell A great hillbilly sound. Will add. 12 August at 17:53

Max Hummus Great. Found your playlists but the female list isn't listed (haha) - is it public? 12 August at 18:32

Richard Bethell You may have sorted my problem. I have 6 playlists:: Vibrato Lite Early 20C Voice, Vibrato Free Classical Singing, Vibrato Free Female Pop, Vibrato Free Folk, Vibrato Free Male Pop, and Vibrato Free Ensemble Singing. I found that two of them, including Vibrato Free Female Pop, were for some reason not set to public. Have now done so. Thanks! Please reply if you are successful now. 12 August at 18:59

Max Hummus Yes, took a while to show up but it's there now thanks. 13 August at 08:42

Alexander Skeaping I don't do Spotify, but will certainly have a listen. I have for many years been frustrated by the universal domination of vibrato, often with such a wide pitch-oscillation as quite to obscure the intended pitch of the note, with which almost all classically-trained singers manage to ruin my enjoyment of the song they are singing. ::-(

Richard Bethell I share your frustration, as you'll recall from our discussion in one of the "vibrato wars" threads. Does Miss Cross [the large lady with an equally large vibrato] still give you nightmares? There are a few examples of non-vibrato classical singing, achieved either by accident or a rare outbreak of good taste. For example, Miriam Feuersinger sang Graupner's Angst und Jammer beautifully in straight voice, probably inspired by the pure tone of the oboist (Xenia Löffler). The CD was on Spotify, but later removed, although you could find it on YouTube. But Capricornus Consort Basel have since restored it to Spotify, but removed it from YouTube. They don't seem to know whether they are coming or going on this issue. You might want to invest in the CD. In due course, I'll see what classical tracks I can find on YouTube and set up a playlist, as David Badagnani suggests below. 12 August at 19:25
David Badagnani Have you made a YouTube playlist and if so can you share the link? · 12 August at 16:31

Richard Bethell To be honest, I didn't know you could do that! I see there is a 14 step process to create one. Will do. · 12 August at 17:28

David Badagnani Go to your YouTube channel, click "Playlists" in the menu at the top, then click "New Playlist." Give the playlist a title (such as "Non-vibrato singing: classical, male" or "Non-vibrato singing: popular, female"), then whenever you come across a video that you'd like to add to one of the playlists, you can click the plus sign on the video and select which playlist you'd like to add it to. Later, you can go to your "Playlists" section, copy the URL for the playlist, and share or repost for colleagues. · 12 August at 17:33 · Edited

David Badagnani I would suggest adding Mary Timony of the band Helium (b. 1970): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RshLDcBPxZc

Helium - Superball · Promo video - 1995 (Oh I wish I had a better version!) Mary is fantastic. · 12 August at 16:35

Richard Bethell The voice sounds good, what little I can hear of it, submerged as it is by the appalling banging and crashing of the rhythm section. I'll check out her other songs. · 12 August at 17:26

Tim Braithwaite Absolutely love this! Also, people like Michael Jackson for a more flexible use of registers than modern classical tenors. · 12 August at 16:36

Richard Bethell I agree. In the early 19th C a falsetto extension was expected from all tenors and even baritones; it was exceptional NOT to have one. Pop male singers often have falsetto also. As you say, it's frowned on by operatic tenors. · 12 August at 18:29

Tim Braithwaite Absolutely, even much earlier you get virtuoso singers (even basses) singing both registers (bastarda). · 12 August at 21:08

Esha Neogy Now thinking of Cat Stevens' song with the young man and the old man (possibly called Father and Son?). It doesn't include falsetto, but he certainly sings in two different registers, both in pitch and emotion. · 13 August at 14:14

David Badagnani Also Liz Phair (b. 1967): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tM60GAPIXTY

Liz Phair - Supernova · Music video by Liz Phair performing Supernova (Video). · 12 August at 16:38

Richard Bethell Again, more banging and crashing from the rhythm section. But will check her other songs. · 12 August at 17:24

David Badagnani Mary Timony actually included "I Prithee Send Me Back My Heart" by Henry Lawes on one of her albums, so there is a strong early music influence on her work. · 12 August at 17:36 · Edited
David Badagnani This one has a more subdued instrumentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Euq9AiH4OeA

Mary Timony - The Mirror youtube.com 12 August at 17:30

Richard Bethell David Badagnani, can you identify the album containing Mary Timony's "I Printheye Send Me Back My Heart"? I can't find it on Spotify or YouTube. 12 August at 21:15

David Badagnani It is a hidden track at the end of her "The Golden Dove" CD and is not on YouTube, unfortunately. 12 August at 21:45

David Badagnani One further suggestion: American country and bluegrass, with roots in Appalachian folk singing (religious singing and secular ballads) was traditionally non-vibrato. I think Hazel Dickens (b. 1925) from West Virginia is the best example. Her tone is flat as a board but at the same time robust and vibrant (something some vibratists insist isn't possible): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODg9gW-ZTJI

Hazel Dickens Performs "Black Lung" West Virginia singer/songwriter... youtube.com 12 August at 16:41

Richard Bethell I have a separate folk list, rather short at present. Will add this, plus a separate list of male pop singers. Michael Morrow would have liked it. He sometimes instructed singers to sing like a Genoese docker! 12 August at 17:32 Edited

David Badagnani My favorite of all time is Jantina Noorman who was instructed by Michael Morrow of Musica Reservata to sing like a Spanish fishwife. 12 August at 17:35 Edited

Richard Bethell Mind you, this style only works for certain repertoire. There's a Spanish source (early 16th C?) I can't think of which lends itself to fishwife singing. In the baroque, the best singers' voices were invariably described as pure, clear and sweet, and sometimes compared to Benjamin Franklin's Glass Harmonica. 12 August at 18:07

William Summers Not a fan of Jantina Norman - too limiting for most repertoire - but I do like this project. It is very difficult to discuss different options with singers as they will see these techniques as inexpert rather than alternative. 14 August at 23:20

David Hansell Eva Cassidy - a goddess!! I asked a current post-grad at a leading conservatoire if there was ever a suggestion from tutors that different music might be sung in different ways. 'Only in the Early Music faculty' was the answer. 12 August at 17:07

Richard Hoffman Suggestions to add: Blossom Dearie, Mildred Bailey. 12 August at 17:55

Richard Bethell Thanks for this. Have added Blossom Dearie's gentle, sweet Manhattan to the list. 14 August at 12:33

Bodie Pfost A couple newer artists who come to mind are Camille (Fr.) and Regina Spektor. Though I'm not sure if they fit your criteria. 12 August at 18:39
Richard Bethell Thanks. Both fit my criteria. Regina Spektor is already on the list. I've added Camille's Ta douleur. 12 August at 20:21

David Badagnani Has this video been shared before? The recorder player has the same name as Richard. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odjp47Xc2V0

Sheep Sheep may safely graze (Schafe Können sicher weiden) by J S Bach. Aria in B flat...youtube.com 12 August at 21:43

Steven James Paul Russell Your point is? 12 August at 22:15

David Badagnani I didn't have one. I asked if it had been shared in this group before. It could be another one for Richard to list. I don't remember it coming up when someone asked for examples of non-vibrato early music performances a few months ago, but in my opinion it's not bad, and worth consideration. 13 August at 15:22 · Edited

Richard Bethell Thanks for this David. I'd forgotten about it but will put it in. The soprano is Jennie Cassidy. Michael Piraner and myself were on recorders. The cellist was Louise Jameson. Masumi Yamamoto played continuo. 13 August at 11:58

Martin Davids Speaking of falsetto- this countertenor (80s rocker) hits high A's repeatedly. https://youtu.be/F-nyeiKk35M

Steelheart - I'll Never Let You Go Music video by Steelheart performing I'll Never Let You Go. (C) 1990 UMG...youtube.com 12 August at 23:27


David Badagnani Wheeler has a lovely voice but she is using vibrato in this song (though it may be the "Clear Smooth Sweet Chaste" type Richard refers to in his writings on the subject). 13 August at 02:06 · Edited

Dominic Wan Yes, I hear a little of it. Sort of like tasteful early violinist's vibrato, non-intrusive and only as ornament. 13 August at 02:07

David Badagnani Yes, very much so. 13 August at 02:08

Richard Bethell But too loud to be sweet. And certainly not chaste. She's also struggling against deafening bang-crash-wallop rhythm section. 14 August at 12:18

Danur Ingrid Kvilhaug This is so fascinating 13 August at 04:27

Kate Hawnt Did the entire conference in 2009 also only focus on the female voice? 13 August at 18:14

Richard Bethell No is the answer to your question, Kate. It's my intention to post in this thread similar tables for classical singers, male pop singers, and folk singers, but I've had...
to attend to other things today. Also, contributors have helpfully been educating me in YouTube and Spotify techniques and I have to take in the lessons. · 13 August at 19:18

Kate Hawnt Ok, interesting. Looking forward to more! · 13 August at 21:03

Jim O'Toole Vetta Wise Rachel Keal of interest? · 13 August at 22:25

Vetta Wise Thanks for this Jim O'Toole, will take a while to go through it all.. fascinating indeed · 13 August at 22:31

Gabriel Poynton Ella Fitzgerald? 13 August at 22:35

David Badagnani Narrow, medium-speed vibrato on most long notes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2bigf337aU

Ella Fitzgerald - Summertime (1968) http://bjazz.unblog.fr/music/musicians-hall...youtube.com · 13 August at 22:49 · Edited

Gabriel Poynton True, and beautiful too. · 13 August at 23:09

Richard Bethell I would judge about a tone wide. · 14 August at 11:41

Katie De La Matter Not sure if it gets into vibrato or not, but in the 00s Robert Toft did a lot of comparative rhetorical study of Holly Cole's singing: e.g. https://academic.oup.com/.../Rendering-the-Sense-More... Rendering the Sense More Conspicuous: Grammatical and Rhetorical Principles of... Singers two hundred years ago did not deliver the notated texts of recitatives, arias, and songs as literally as their modern counterparts do. Indeed, singers in the earlier era saw their role more as one of re-creation than of simple interpretation. Consequently, they altered the texts before them...academic.oup.com · 13 August at 22:55 · Edited

Richard Bethell Thanks for this Katie. Will look up on my next visit to the BL She does have the conventional jazz mannerism, of almost ALWAYS applying vibrato at the end of a phrase, which I find personally a little irritating. Still this is good singing, with some beautifully clear and pure long notes, so I've put "Calling You" into the list. · 14 August at 12:03

Katie De La Matter For me, she always took a lot of care in making each word or phrase unique, in a text-based way - usually with vocal colour, or approach to diction. I loved her stuff in high school, and think it's connected to why I'm into early music now.

Check out Cecile McLorin-Salvant. She's incredible for this. And also (surprise) trained as an early music singer for a while. I'd trade almost anything to record something with her. · 14 August at 17:56

Richard Bethell Thanks for this Katie. I'll put her "Monday" in the list. · 14 August at 18:33

Katie De La Matter I'm in love with "Nobody", myself. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kxDdkphgwQ

Cecile McLorin Salvant: "Nobody," Live On...
Hear the full interview and performance here: http://soundcheck.wnyc.org/2013/jun/27/cecile-mclorin-salvant-in-studio/ Subscribe for more WNYC videos here: h...youtube.com· 14 August at 18:34

Katie De La Matter Oh and PS: this album is full of early jazz tunes that she dug out of total obscurity. It's all part of the same thing 😊:):)· 14 August at 18:36

Marcello Mazzetti Livio Ticli· 13 August at 23:18

Richard Bethell Isn't he a performance director (of renaissance music)? I can't find his singing on FB.· 14 August at 11:46

Marcello Mazzetti Yes, he is! You can find him on FB as well.· 19 August at 17:29

Anita Sikora One difference between pop singers and opera singers is that the former may use microphones and the latter not. The bigger the opera house the louder opera singers have to sing and there is automatically more vibrato. Should early music opera singers use the help of microphones to sing without vibrato, Richard Bethell?· 14 August at 10:11

Deborah Roberts God forbid!!· 19 August at 13:33

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Then again, Verdi's favourite soprano sounded like this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4fVXpwXM6E

Adelina Patti ~ La Serenata ~

A beautiful aria sung by Adelina...youtube.com· · 19 August at 20:16

Anita Sikora Deborah Roberts Some early music opera DVDs though are produced with the help of microphones and I prefer this to a strong vibrato. In general singers have less vibrato in studio recordings than in life performances in front of a large audience...· 20 August at 14:30

Deborah Roberts I don't think it is directly to do with vibrato at all. Much more to do with the overall techniques being used. Vibrato is one of many consequences. Microphones in recording studios are being used to record not to amplify!!· 20 August at 14:46

Luke Green Early recordings are also difficult to use in pronouncements about vocal production simply because of the fear of distortion and balance with studio orchestras who were not used to accompanying for a recording, or ensembles specially created for the recording process. Playback was not immediate and singers had no idea how to moderate their singing style (and were occasionally anxious about the process entirely) for a very new technology very much in its infancy.· 21 August at 11:22

Luke Green Patti here is singing in the chamber style with piano accompaniment cf. Tosi writing in the 18th century. She sings with a vibrato that also allows her to do glissandi with articulation-not on the throat, in addition to portamenti.· 21 August at 11:27

Luke Green Very interesting. Thank you.· 21 August at 11:27

Richard Bethell You've put your finger on one problem with pop singing, Anita Sikora, the fact that pop recordings these days are all too often not crafted by the singer, but made in the studio, with techniques such as autotune routinely applied. I regard Kelly Sweet as the
best singer in my list, but "Dream on" suffers from studio interference including prominent overdubbing. She uses some vibrato periodically, and also (very rare this) artistic messa di voce.· 14 August at 10:46

Richard Bethell On your second question, I would prefer the use of smaller spaces to microphone use. Of course, some large opera houses existed in the baroque (San Carlo, Naples), but this house was unsuitable for singers even then. Louis Spohr noted sarcastically in February 1817 "Military movements of infantry and cavalry, battles, and storms at sea can be represented here without falling into the ludicrous. But for opera, itself, the house is too large. Although the singers, Signora [Isabella Angela] Colbran and the Signori Nozzari, Benedetti, etc., have very strong voices, only their highest and most stentorian tones could be heard. Any kind of tender utterance was lost."· 14 August at 11:16 · Edited

Anita Sikora I share this view for concerts, but for opera performances on modern stages, such as the Scala, which stages Handel's 'Tamerlano' this autumn, I'd prefer some microphones and clarity to Fagioli's vibrato.· 14 August at 16:23

Richard Bethell It is clear from several reviews that Isabella Colbran had no vibrato, although her voice was worn out by the age of 40. E.g. QMM reviewed her in 1828 as follows: "The deportment $ of the voice--the purity and uniformity of the tone—the noble simplicity of the declamation—the accurate articulation both of syllables and sounds—the gradual melting and assimilation of tone from the most powerful messa di voce to the softest pianissimo—always in keeping and never violent—the retention of legitimate and the rejection of meretricious ornament—and lastly, the power of bending all these elements to the changeful purposes of expression, declare at once the mind, the training, and the experience of the gifted artist. When we first heard Pisaroni we felt as when we first heard Colbran. Both were in the decline of their powers—but both in an instant demonstrated that time, the friend of science, the enemy of nature, was alone to blame."· 14 August at 11:19

Kate Hawnt I don't find that this makes it clear that she didn't use vibrato. Even the phrase, "rejection of meretricious ornament", could be interpreted in a few ways depending on the taste and fashions of the time.· 19 August at 13:06

Richard Bethell Fair enough. I'm working on a book which will make it clear.· 19 August at 16:47

Deborah Roberts I think any voice worn out by 40 may have been abused in some way... with proper and healthy use a voice should last decades longer. Voices can be damaged as much by tightening up and constricting as by over singing.· 19 August at 18:41

Richard Bethell I'm sure you're right, Deborah, though of course we'll never know. All I'm suggesting is that the size and acoustics of San Carlo, as reported by Louis Spohr, a qualified observer of the operatic scene [see my quote above of 14 August] could have made a contribution.· 19 August at 19:20

Richard Bethell I promised my list of "vibrato-less male pop" singers. Those with a falsetto extension have been marked in the table with a superscript red "f". Also, following David Badagnani's instructions, I've made a YouTube playlist. As for the female list, I'd appreciate any comments or suggested additions. The URL is https://www.youtube.com/playlist...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>DoB</th>
<th>on</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Album</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mel Tormé</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Lullaby Of Birdland¹</td>
<td>Songs of New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don Everly</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Wake Up Little Susie</td>
<td>The Very Best ......</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lennon</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Cry Baby Cry</td>
<td>The Beatles (Remastered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon &amp; Garfunkel</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>April Come She Will¹</td>
<td>Sounds of Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sting</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Shape Of My Heart</td>
<td>Ten Summoner's Tales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Nail</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Crocodile Shoes¹</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>More than Words¹</td>
<td>The Best of Extreme, duet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ben Folds</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>The Luckiest</td>
<td>Rockin' The Suburbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kurt Cobain</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>And I Love Her</td>
<td>Montage of Heck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Hey, Soul Sister</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gary Barlow</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Said It All¹</td>
<td>The Circus (Take That)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad Paisley</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Whiskey Lullaby</td>
<td>Mud On The Tires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Bublé</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>It's a Beautiful Day</td>
<td>To Be Loved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gavin Mikhail</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>I Will Wait</td>
<td>And You Let Her Go</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chris Martin</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Fix You¹</td>
<td>X &amp; Y, Coldplay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maroon 5</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>She Will Be Loved</td>
<td>Songs About Jane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie Cullum</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Get a Hold of Yourself¹</td>
<td>Momentum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jannis Makrigiannis</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Hollow Talk</td>
<td>This is For the White in Your Eyes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wise Children</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Keep Quiet¹</td>
<td>Absence &amp; Reunion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austin Plaine</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Never Come Back Again</td>
<td>Austin Plaine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tyler Ward</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>Dynamite, acoustic f</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phillip Phillips</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>So Easy¹</td>
<td>The World From the Side of the Moon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niall Horan</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td>This Town</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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¹ evidence of falsetto
² Estimated in a few cases

Source: S=Spotify, Y=YouTube

· 14 August at 17:44 · Edited

Neil Coleman Andi Deris and Timo Kotipelto add vibrato as an ornament. Both get the red "f".· 14 August at 18:40

David Badagnani https://www.youtube.com/.../UCuubzBjE03QzY1M.../playlists...Richard Bethell youtube.com · 16 August at 05:11

Richard Bethell Thanks for helpfully posting this, David Badagnani. Clicking on R brings up a "macro playlist" with links to all six of my YouTube lists, which I didn’t realise could be done. Three of them still need populating. I will now post a table of 16 songs in my “vibrato-less folk” list, all of which are on Spotify. The YouTube list can be found at https://www.youtube.com/playlist...
Richard Bethell I suspect that many members of this group will be more interested in non-vibrato classical singing. I attach below a list of these, some of whom I will comment on in subsequent posts. Any suggestions? As I’ve said before in this group, straight singing of early classical music is still so rare as to be virtually non-existent, mainly because the vocal hegemony (the tyranny of the status quo) insists on constant vibrato. When it does occur, I suspect directors or instrumental partners may have had a benign influence. Only very few of these pieces can be heard on YouTube [the link is https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI6rqsrSkc0XIsu1CWYa0AcTHV2IP7ryq], so you usually have to go to Spotify. As David Badagnani noted on my home page, most YouTube classical stuff is region-specific to the US.

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<th>Vocalist</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>*</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Group or accompanist</th>
<th>Album</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marc Maillon</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Guillaume de Machaut</td>
<td>Dame vostre doux viare</td>
<td>Pierre Hamon</td>
<td>Sević Brezce</td>
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<td>Sigrid Lee</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td>Guillaume Dufay</td>
<td>J'ayme bien celui qui s'en va</td>
<td>Ars Italica</td>
<td>Musica del XV S in Italia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raitis Grigalis</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Hayne van Ghizeghem</td>
<td>De tous bien plaine</td>
<td>Ensemble Leones</td>
<td>Colours in the Dark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Skiba</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td></td>
<td>Antonio Scandello</td>
<td>Schein uns du liebe Sonne</td>
<td>Instrumenta Musica</td>
<td>Italiener in Dresden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owain Phye</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thoinot Arbeau</td>
<td>Belle Qui Tiens Ma Vie</td>
<td>Phye (Vihuela)</td>
<td>Voice &amp;Vihuela</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeni Melia</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Dowland</td>
<td>Time stands still</td>
<td>Christopher Goodwin (lute)</td>
<td>The Lost Art ofWooing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dominique Visse</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Dowland</td>
<td>Sorrow Come</td>
<td>Fretwork</td>
<td>Tunes of Sad Despaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sting</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Dowland</td>
<td>Weep You No More, Sad Fountains</td>
<td>Edin Karamazov</td>
<td>Songs fr Labyrinth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Hawnt</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Danyel</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lute and Bass Viol</td>
<td>Mistress Anne Greene</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faye Newton</td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Thomas Campion</td>
<td>Fain would I wed a fair young man</td>
<td></td>
<td>Twenty waies ... bels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blažíková</td>
<td>SY</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sigismondo d’India</td>
<td>Dilectus meus</td>
<td>Bruce Dickey &amp; group</td>
<td>Breathtaking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deborah York</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Franz Tunder</td>
<td>Wend' ab deinen Zorn</td>
<td>Collegium Vocale Gent</td>
<td>Deutsche Kantaten</td>
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<td>Stephan MacLeod</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Franz Tunder</td>
<td>Da mihi Domine</td>
<td>Ricercar Consort</td>
<td>De profundis</td>
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<td>Susanne Lebloch</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Franz Tunder</td>
<td>Wacht auf, ruft uns die Stimme</td>
<td>Collegium Musicum Plagense</td>
<td>German B.Vocal Music</td>
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<td>Maria Keohane</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dietrich Buxtehude</td>
<td>Herzlich lieb hab ich dich o Herr</td>
<td>Goteburg Baroque Arts Ens</td>
<td>Abendmusik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pal Benko</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td>Agostino Steffani</td>
<td>Lagrime dolorose</td>
<td>Affetti Musicali</td>
<td>Scherzi Musicali</td>
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</tbody>
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* S=Spotify, Y=Youtube
Name of Spotify Playlist:- Vibrato Free Folk
YouTube Playlist URL:-
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI6rqsrSkc0XIsu1CWYa0AcTHV2IP7ryq

· 19 August at 11:57 · Edited
Suzie LeBlanc  S  Pierre Bouteiller  Missa pro defunctis: Agnus Dei  Les Voix Humaines  Missa Pro Defunctis
Roger Drabble  S  Henry Purcell  When I Am Laid in Earth  Malcolm Archer  Music, Ever Divine
Elisabeth Popien  S  Nikolaus Bruhns  Ich hab Gottlob, das m. vollbracht  Cantus Köln  Deutsche Kantaten
David Erler  S  Jan Dismas Zelenka  Immissit Dominus pestilentiam  Collegium Maricanum  Sepolcri
M. Feuersinger  S  Christoph Graupner  Aria: Angst und Jammer  Capricornus Consort Basel  Himmlische Stundnen
M. Feuersinger  S  Christoph Graupner  Aria: Seufzt und weint  Capricornus Consort Basel  Himmlische Stundnen
M. Feuersinger  S  Christoph Graupner  Chorale: Ach Gott und Herr  Capricornus Consort Basel  Himmlische Stundnen
Jennie Cassidy  Y  J S Bach  Sheep May Safely Graze  Ad hoc instrumental group
Carolyn Sampson  S  J S Bach  Agnus Dei  Collegium Japan, Suzuki  Mass in B Minor
Paul Elliott  S  G F Handel  Thy Rebuked ...Behold The Lamb  Academy of Ancient Music  Messiah
Susanne Rydén  S  G F Handel  Eternal Source of Light Divine  London Baroque  Ode ... B'day Q Anne
Aled Jones  SY  G F Handel  Did You Not Hear My Lady  You Raise Me Up
Magali Léger  S  G F Handel  Qui Tolis Peccata mundi  Rosa Solis  Gloria
Lezhneva, Jaroussky  SY  Giovanni Pergolesi  Stabat Mater Dolorosa  I Barocchisti (Diego Fasolis)  Stabat Mater
Natalya Kirillova  S  Wolfgang A Mozart  L’ho perduta, me meschina!  MusicAeterna, Currentzis  Le nozze di Figaro,

* S=Spotify, Y=Youtube

Name of Spotify Playlist:- Vibrato Free Classical Singing
YouTube Playlist:- https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI6rqsrSkc0UxIDBfhhAmfLpCSe0Lkm

· 19 August at 18:50 · Edited

Anita Sikora  Hardly opera arias in this list...pity. We have already talked about this in another post. It seems that singers choose to use less vibrato in sacred music.· 19 August at 11:52

David Badagnani  The YouTube videos that are region-specific (viewable only in the U.S.) are mainly CD audio tracks that have been uploaded to YouTube. They can be watched (listened to) for free in the U.S., but apparently nowhere else.· 19 August at 16:25

David Badagnani  Richard, only three playlists come up on your YouTube channel:
1) vibrato-less male pop
2) vibrato-less classical voice
3) vibrato-less folk
And I don't see all the videos you describe, such as Jeni Melia's version of Dowland.· 19 August at 16:40 · Edited

Richard Bethell  If there isn't a Y in the "on" column, it's only on Spotify.· 19 August at 18:27

Gawain Glenton  One correction: the vocalist with us on Ensemble Leones 'Colours in the Dark' was the fab Raitis Grigalis not Crawford.· 19 August at 18:32

Richard Bethell  Gawain Glenton, thanks, have amended the table.· 19 August at 18:52

Richard Bethell  I've three different takes on Dowland, by Jeni Melia, Sting, and Dominique Visse. Jeni Melia clearly had a beautiful, pure, sweet, clear voice, of the type often described in late 18th C and early 19th C sources. Early music types get sniffany about Sting's Dowland, noting that he sometimes abbreviates long notes. But to my mind, this is artistic as it matches the swift decay of lute sound. He's also been taken to task for his worn voice. But some wear is inevitable after 30 years of rock band gigging, and some quality remains. For Visse, see comments on my home page; I used this recording in my contribution to the Radio 3 discussion programme on vibrato, broadcast at 8.10 pm on 6th August.· 19 August at 11:00
Tim Braithwaite I also rather like the Sting versions, I'm sure I came across 16th/17th century English source once saying that if the performer doesn't think the way that the words are set he should just change it. The obsession with the printed (or written) text is contrary to the goals of early music in my mind! 19 August at 12:29

David Badagnani Can you get an MP3 of that Radio 3 program? [RIB Note. I did ask the BBC but it was made clear to me that a recording would only be available at astronomic cost] 19 August at 16:26

David Badagnani Tim, have you read Ian Pittaway's recent article about "Kalenda Maya"? It covers just this subject. 19 August at 16:27

Ian Pittaway Thanks, David. If you're interested, Tim, it's here: www.earlymusicmuse.com/kalendamaya 19 August at 23:18

Tim Braithwaite Thank you, I actually have and enjoyed it very much! 20 August at 06:17

Tim Braithwaite In fact, the whole site is great! 20 August at 06:17

Richard Bethell David Badagnani I'm trying to upload a recording once I find out how to do it. The participants were:
• Louise Fryer, BBC, chair
• Peyee Chen, demonstrating 3 types of vibrato use (1 Straight Tone, 2 Narrow Continuous, 3 Wide Operatic)
• Helena Daffern, University of York, vocal science
• John Potter, Chairman of the York conference
• Janis Kelly, Royal College of Music, Personal Chair of Vocal Performance
• Myself, billed as NEMA secretary
Each guest chose a recording to illustrate their preferred use (or non-use) of vibrato. Mine was Dominique Visse singing "Sorrow Come" from Dowland’s Tunes of Sad Despaire, in which he displays excellent messa di voce consistent with Giulio Caccini’s advice in Le Nuove Musiche. 20 August at 13:47

Richard Bethell It doesn't appear to be possible. Someone said online "This bears repeating: The point is that FB deliberately blocks uploading audio easily. All of these work-arounds are a pain in the ass, compared to just browsing for your .mp3 like you can for a .jpg, and there's no reason other than that, presumably, FB wants more videos because they attract more "eyeballs". It might be possible to put on our website. In the meantime, you can get it from the BBC online if you do it within 30 days of the broadcast date (6th August). 20 August at 14:02

David Badagnani Here is what I do to turn an audio track into a video:
Open the Windows Movie Maker program.
Add the MP3 you want, then add any relevant photos (to make a kind of slide show of the audio track).
Insert the MP3 and photos into the project below, then expand the photos to the length you want each to be.
When the project is ready, save it as a movie to your desktop.
The movie is now ready to upload to your YouTube channel.
I've done this many times. Here is one I made:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDEkTChlCF0

Historic recording of "Liuyang River" (浏阳河)... version of "Liuyang River" (《浏阳河》，Liuyang He) for mixed chorus and instrumental ensemble. The ensemble consists primarily of Western orchestral instrument...youtube.com· 20 August at 16:12 · Edited

Richard Bethell Kate Hawnt, you contributed earlier to this thread. Your singing has been recommended to me by Deborah Roberts. I agree with her that you are an excellent performer of lute songs—with a natural, pure, clear sound, and stylish with good diction, so I have included you on my playlist. I have a single minor concern with two or three songs, where you have a mannerism [commonly used by jazz singers] of predictably concluding every phrase with a vibrato, which I personally find irritating.· 19 August at 18:43 · Edited

Kate Hawnt Hi. Thank you for including me on your list. I haven't listened to or studied much jazz, so I wouldn't call it a "jazz mannerism", just perhaps one of my own. I do choose to sing without much vibrato but was not aware that in that disc I "predictably conclude every phrase with a vibrato". I frequently choose not to in concert. Since having children and getting older I've found vibrato a useful and necessary tool to be honest, in order to be able to keep singing and enjoy it. For me what is key is getting the text across to the listener so that has always been my first consideration.· 19 August at 13:16

Deborah Roberts I'm 100% with Kate here. There is also a lot of nonsense talked about vibrato. A voice with no vibrato is dull and lifeless. Surely the point is that it is a tool to be used appropriately and not applied to every note.· 19 August at 13:40

David Badagnani I love Kate's voice, accent, and enunciation. What a pleasure to listen to. "Griefe..." is so beautiful! I don't think I've ever listened to Danyel's lute songs before.· 19 August at 16:35

Deborah Roberts She is a model for singing lute songs. Wonderful text expression but still much variation in vocal color.· 19 August at 17:57

David Badagnani I think vibrato was similarly used as a "spice" (one among many) in the early opera of the Florentine Camerata (Caccini, et al.). This activity was taking place exactly at the same time Dowland and the other lute song composers were active in Britain.· 19 August at 18:00

Deborah Roberts Of course. It must always have been a natural part of singing.· 19 August at 18:04
Kate Hawnt  Thanks guys!  19 August at 18:11

Richard Bethell  Kate Hawnt  I've edited my post in view of your comments.  19 August at 18:44

David Badagnani  It's part of Broadway (musical theater) singing as well.  19 August at 19:00

Ian Pittaway  The point with vibrato, I'd have said, is this: that it is an ornament, not a thick sauce to be spread over everything, a condiment, not the whole flavour. What I often find is the case in the 'vibrato wars' is that it is either/or: you use vibrato or you don't. But there is a rich historical resource of commentary on adding flavour/ornamentation to the voice. Perhaps I'm reading all the wrong things, but I can barely remember this even being mentioned in the same breath as vibrato in a discussion, as if vibrato or the lack of it is the only issue in singing early music.  19 August at 23:24

Richard Bethell  I've included Hana Blažíková singing D'India. I sometimes find her voice shrieky and, yes, vibratoey. But elsewhere she intertwines beautifully with Bruce Dickey's cornetto. As I noted in one of the earlier Vibrato Wars threads, the cornetto's sound (I think of it as a baby's cry) was praised as it was so close to the human voice. But the reverse should apply as well, with the soprano voice emulating the cornetto, which Hana seems to have done at times.  19 August at 11:03

Bruce Dickey  I don't wish to re-enter the vibrato wars, but I do feel it necessary to jump in to defend Hana's use of vibrato, which I think is wonderful. Yes, she sings with less vibrato when she imitates the cornetto. I wouldn't want to hear her sing Scarlatti or Bassani with the same sound she uses for D'India. I think that is the wonderful thing about her singing, that she can sing Hildegard, D'India, Carissimi, Scarlatti and Bach, each with a different color and different use of vibrato. That seems to me exemplary. That she should sing all of this music with almost no vibrato seems ludicrous to me. Why, after all, was the voce humana stop made the way it was. I think singers always used more vibrato than instrumentalists, and the latter were always searching for new techniques to imitate the singers' tremolo. As for her voice being "shrieky", I find that frankly insulting. You can say you find her vocal color too bright, but it doesn't need to be dismissive or insulting. And the cornetto as a baby's cry???? I think we can find better metaphors.  19 August at 23:13 · Edited

David Badagnani  Shouldn't we base our concept on actual historical sources describing singing rather than guesses?  19 August at 23:23

David Badagnani  Your cornetto playing in the above video is astoundingly good.  19 August at 23:24

Richard Bethell  Miriam Feuersinger’s beautiful singing of Graupner cantatas was discussed on several occasions during the Vibrato Wars threads. Klaus Miehling, Christopher Price Pontifex, David Reid Alker and others agreed with me. Nicholas Clapton, while conceding her beautiful sound, accused her of being a 4 foot organ stop, unengaged with the text. In other recordings, Miriam uses quite a lot of vibrato; but in this recording I think she was inspired by Xenia Löffler’s smooth, stylish oboe playing. I suspect that Xenia herself has learnt from Leopold Mozart’s 1778 review of oboist Carl Besozzi’s sound: “What is particularly remarkable is his ability to sustain his notes and his power to increase and
Richard Bethell  I have 4 Handel pieces. Paul Elliott deploys a pure, clear, non-vibrato sound in his Messiah singing, without the typical tenor’s plumminess. Susanne Rydén, in her Ode for the Birthday of Queen Anne, lays aside her conventional operatic voice to match Nicklas Eklund’s historically informed trumpet sound (although, judging from a Gramophone review, I don’t think his instrument is holeless). You can get some idea from this track what Farinelli’s famous contest with a trumpeter would have sounded like. Julia Lezhneva and Philippe Jaroussky [Sorry, this comment is on Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, so doesn’t belong in this Handel category] have replaced their usual “grand uproar” production by beautiful, pure, clear sound, appropriate for this suspension rich music. Was Diego Fasolis responsible for this novel approach? I’ve included Aled Jones as his vibrato is minimal and his diction clear, probably resulting from his neutral larynx position. Magali Léger uses lots of vibrato, quite legitimately, in her staple repertoire of late 19th century French opera. But her singing here is very different and almost perfect, apart from the occasional “shriekette”; perhaps she was advised by the excellent RosaSolís.

Richard Bethell  Charismatic and messianic conductor Teodor Currentzis made something of a publicity splash when he announced (I think in 2011) that he was going to lead a long march to Perm in Siberia with his orchestra MusicAeterna to (exhaustively) rehearse and record Mozart in a fresh way. Vibrato would be cut out, or at least cut down. Listening to his Le Nozze di Figaro, I felt he had mixed success, with tenors, baritone and basses sounding as loud, plummy and vibratoey as in a typical operatic performance. The sopranos were better, with Natalya Kirillova especially good.

Christopher Price Pontifex  His Figaro was more successful in HIP reduced vibrato terms than his subsequent Mozart opera recordings have been. It was also more successful in drama terms. There is some kind of mania that grips even HIP singers when they come to sing Mozart, which causes them to drop the whole reduced vibrato they employ for pre-1750s music and whack on the heaviest vibrato they can manage.

Christopher Price Pontifex  Typical (especially in France) period instrument production of Mozart opera: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0z2KzuL23I


Richard Bethell  Thanks for posting Emmanuelle Haïm, Christopher. I'm going to get myself in trouble again by some adverse comments. But we have to take account of the historic record. Burney, Edgcumbe and QMM would have all taken strong exception to her fortissimo shrieking on high notes, although it has to be admitted that French singing was widely criticised in the 18th century for this type of singing. I call it the French [dis]connection (from the benign Italian hegemony). Mozart himself, of course, will be
turning in his grave. He wrote: "What annoys me most of all in this business is that our French gentlemen have only improved their goût to this extent that they can now listen to good stuff as well. But to expect them to realise that their own music is bad or at least to notice the difference—Heaven preserve us! And their singing! Good Lord! Let me never hear a Frenchwoman singing Italian arias. I can forgive her if she screeches out her French trash, but not if she ruins good music! It's simply unbearable". Others, from Quantz through Burney to John Waldie made similar comments. Reform in France only came when Rossini settled in Paris.

Christopher Price Pontifex Emmanuelle Haïm's soprano in that clip, Marie-Adeline Henry, sounds as if she is basically an operatic soprano untrained in historical performance practice. She suffers from many more defects for Mozart in HIP style than just her heavy vibrato and her fortissimo shrieking on high notes. Her performance is akin to watching a weightlifter performing gymnastics - a total mismatch of skills and genre. I suppose Mozart was referring to the French music he heard while he was in Paris (that is, from that time and not earlier stuff). It's a pity he was not more explicit about what he considered was wrong with the French style beyond his complaint that the French did not know how to sing Italian music. I don't know, since I am not a scholar, but it seems to me that his comments could be interpreted to suggest that the French sang more stridently than the Italians, which is interesting since, to my observation, the modern French style of HIP soprano singing (with and without vibrato) tends to be quite strident and power-focused (sometimes attractively and sometimes not). That is, there is a definite French style of HIP singing today, which is quite different from the styles we usually hear from the UK, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium, Spain and most of the rest of the Continent. It would be interesting to hear of descriptions of or comments about the French operatic style from others who were contemporaries of Mozart.

Richard Bethell Christopher Price Pontifex, you suggest in your interesting post that the strident and power-focused style of current French HIP singing is strongly differentiated from other European countries. The same was true during the long 18th C, when French singing was universally castigated, as evidenced by about 40 contemporary review comments which I've recorded. Does anyone know if this has ever been researched, apart from some work by Donald Garth Gislason on Castil-Blaze? Reviewers objected both to screaming and vibrato. In answer to your request, I include some of the more illuminating comments in three posts below, on the long side I'm afraid. We should probably conclude that modern French HIP singing is legitimately HIP in the sense that it seems to replicate their counterparts' efforts in Paris almost three centuries ago.

Richard Bethell First, French Singing during the late baroque. Johann Quantz mentions in his autobiography his visit in 1726: “Though the French style was not unknown to me and I did like their manner of playing very much, I liked neither the warmed-over and worn ideas of their opera composers, nor the small difference between recitative and aria, nor the exaggerated and affected howling of her male singers, and especially her female singers.” Quantz added in his Versuch (1752): “The Italians and several other nations unite this falsetto with the chest voice, and make use of it to great advantage in singing: among the French, however, it is not customary, and for that reason their singing in the high register is often transformed into a disagreeable shrieking, the effect of which is
exactly the same as that created when you do not cover the mouth hole sufficiently on
the flute, and when you try to force out the high notes by blowing more strongly.”

George Hogarth noted in his Memoirs of the Opera (1753): “It remains to add a few
words respecting the French school of singing. Till within a recent period, the badness of
French singing has been constantly remarked by all (except the French themselves) who
have had occasion to speak of the music of that country. ..... Rousseau, in his celebrated
Lettre sur la Musique Francaise [1753] and, indeed, in all his musical writings, speaks of
the French singing with unmeasured ridicule and contempt, characterising the voices as
harsh and screaming, the style as vicious, and the expression as affected and unnatural.”

Richard Bethell Second, French Singing by or contemporary with Mozart. Charles Burney
reported in his Present State of Music in France and Italy (1770): “I was more disgusted
than ever, at hearing French music, after the exquisite performances to which I had been
accustomed in Italy. Eugenie, a pretty comedy, preceded Silvain, an opera by M. Gretry:
there were many pretty passages in the music, but so ill sung, with so false an expression,
such screaming, forcing, and trilling, as quite made me sick”. We should probably
interpret trilling in this context to mean vibrato. Mozart reported on his symphony for
the Concert Spirituel in 1778:-“And then the men and women singers! Indeed they hardly
deserve the name, for they don’t sing—they yell—howl—and that too with all their
might, through their noses and throats.” We know what Burney would have thought of a
modern operatic falsettist from his comment in The Present State of Music in Germany,
the Netherlands, and United Provinces, Volume 2, on singing in the Amsterdam
synagogue of the German Jews:- “One of these voices was a falset, more like the upper
part of a bad vox humana stop in an organ, than a natural voice. I remember seeing an
advertisement in an English newspaper, of a barber, who undertook to dress hair in such
a manner as exactly to resemble a peruke; and this singer might equally boast of having
the art, not of singing like a human creature, but of making his voice like a very bad
imitation of one. Of much the same kind is the merit of such singers, who, in execution,
degrade the voice into a flute or fiddle, forgetting that they should not receive law from
instruments, but give instruments law ...... But though the tone of the falset was very
disagreeable, and he forced his voice very frequently in an outrageous manner, yet this
man had certainly heard good music and good singing. He had a facility of running
divisions, and now and then mixed them with passages of taste, which were far superior
to the rest.” The peruke analogy makes clear that the vibrato was of the pitch not
emphasis type. Edgcumbe commented on Madlle Saint-Huberti in his Reminiscences
(1784):-“She was a fine actress, and in her singing a little less violent and extravagant
than the generality of French singers, but still had too much of the national style.”
Michael Kelly commented in his Reminiscences (1787) while in Paris: “but the principal
singers (God save them) made a shriek louder than I thought any human beings capable
of producing”. John Gunn reported in his Art of Flute Playing (1795): “There was formerly
in use a numerous list of graces, some with and others without characters to represent
them, and now for the most part discontinued. Among them was the dumb shake, on
stringed instruments, corresponding to what the French call flattement on the flute, and
in our language, I think called "sweetenings", made by approaching the finger to the first
or second open hole, below the proper note that is sounded, and moving it up and down
over the hole, approaching it very near each time, but never entirely upon it; thus
occasioning an alternate flattening and sharpening on the note, and like the dumb shake,
producing a trembling, palsied expression, inconsistent with just intonation, and not unlike that extravagant trembling of the voice which the French call chevrotter; to make a goat-like noise; for which the singers of the Opera at Paris have been so often ridiculed”.

Richard Bethell Third, French Singing Post Mozart. In 1802, John Waldie noted in his Journal: “the airs and recitative are very unpleasing, being a continual succession of unmeaning squalls and discords, and a seeming test between the singers who should exert their lungs most—nothing could be so contrary to any discrimination or delicacy of execution than the continual climax of noise attempted every moment, till the ear is harassed with discords. Gluck himself would be furious if he could hear this painful contest destroy his music”. Richard Mackenzie Bacon reported on a visit to the Paris Opera in 1820: “It is supposed that the stranger who for the first time enjoys this magnificent spectacle must be overwhelmed with astonishment and delight at all he sees and hears. Alas, no! The first thing that strikes him is, the screaming (criallerie) of the singers and the noise of the orchestra. In truth, they alone who are accustomed to the opera have ceased to be disgusted by these two defects, which impress the connoisseurs of all countries, and even those amateurs who cannot lay claim to high science, but who are gifted with natural delicacy of organ, and polished by the habit of hearing good music. Let not these last be compared to persons of weak sight, whom a great blaze of light overpowers. Not so! The screams of the opera and the burst of the orchestra do not resemble the brilliancy of an illumination, but the destructive fierceness of a furnace.” In his book on Castil-Blaze, Donald Garth Gislason wrote: “At this theatre, the emphasis on preserving the intelligibility of the text at the expense of the melodic line had produced a heavily accented declamatory style of delivery, known to the Italians since the eighteenth century as the urlo francese or "French Howl". Castil-Blaze constantly pointed out in his early articles [c. 1821] the absurdity of this singing style, and urged his readers to look instead to the Italian model of musical expression, which he insisted could generate equivalent extremes of emotional intensity, but without resorting to calamitously unmusical shrieks and howls.”

Richard Bethell Here’s the list "vibrato-lite early 20 C voice". What will strike all listeners is that vibrato was both faster and much narrower than used today in operatic singing. Even then, many singers were critiqued for their vibrato, in Emma Albani’s case about 80 times, although her vibrato would be regarded as narrow today and not always present. The available YouTube recordings can be found at https://www.youtube.com/playlist...
David Badagnani I wonder if this means that the rapid vibrato French (popular) chanson singers are known for are practicing a holdover from this early-20th-c. fashion.

"The last castrato," Moreschi (and I guess the only one ever recorded), has a huge, wide vibrato but I don't know where this style came from, or when.

David Badagnani Albani: gorgeous, and completely unlike any opera singer of the modern day. The control she had! The vibrato is very subdued and does not detract from the music. And the subtle sliding tones remind me of a skilled player of the theremin (an instrument developed in the 1920s when such refined singing was still practiced). If she was criticized 80 times for using too much vibrato when in this recording she's using almost none, that does seem to be very good proof that just a century ago straight-tone singing really was the standard. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBl3MXxRLlc

Emma Albani sing Serse (Xerxes), HWV 40, Act I...1903 o 1904.wmv youtube.com

Richard Bethell Didn't you mean "unlike", David? · 19 August at 18:10

David Badagnani Yes, typo · 19 August at 18:10 [typo corrected]

David Badagnani Opera students should be forced to listen to Albani's recordings as part of their curriculum. · 19 August at 18:11
David Badagnani Having read with interest the many descriptions of "good" classical singing from historical sources, dug up and included by Richard as examples in his writings over the years, this Albani recording is a very good illustration of the ideal vocal production those writers had in mind, and, to me at least, proof that what they were describing was a reality. 19 August at 18:15

Richard Bethell Besides minimal vibrato, Albani also sang in a neutral or high larynx position. Students in today's "opera singing factories" are inculcated with the "singers' formant", involving some laryngeal development, besides adopting a wide vibrato of a tone or even a minor third. 19 August at 18:57 · Edited

David Badagnani Thank you for this explanation. When she goes up in register, however, I would not describe her voice as weak, lacking in projection, or lacking in "engagement with the text." 19 August at 18:24

Kate Bennett Wadsworth For the early 20c list, you could look at adding Charles Santley and George Henschel (both on YouTube) 19 August at 20:21

Richard Bethell Thanks. Both added. Santley was a remarkable 79 when he recorded Simon the Cellarer! 21 August at 21:19

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Oh good Sarah Potter is following! Anything to add to this thread, Sarah? 19 August at 20:58

Richard Bethell Here is "vibrato-less ensemble voice", which is my last, some members of this group will be glad to hear. The first half is devoted to medieval and renaissance singing. But the rest is a mixed bag, containing shape-note singers, barbershop, odd pop pieces, folk songs, A Nina and Frederik song in their curious West Indian style, and a couple of non-western pieces posted by Paul Poletti in one of the "Vibrato Wars" threads. All are on Spotify. Most are on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/playlist... vibrato-less ensemble voice - YouTube youtube.com 20 August at 22:23

Richard Bethell Here is the table listing all the pieces, with the Four Freshmen
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* S=Spotify, Y=Youtube

YouTube Playlist: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI6rqsrSkc0VS4F5SZ2czKihf6UvbH6NE](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLI6rqsrSkc0VS4F5SZ2czKihf6UvbH6NE)

Bodie Pfoest: The Four Freshmen sing mostly without vibrato. [https://youtu.be/lddMu0z6jZQ](https://youtu.be/lddMu0z6jZQ)

Richard Bethell: The Four Freshmen’s song Angel Eyes now in. [https://youtu.be/lddMu0z6jZQ](https://youtu.be/lddMu0z6jZQ)
Miles Golding Sandy Denny is thrilling here. Absolutely straight on some notes, delicate vib on others. Lots of vib on some of the guitar notes by contrast. One of FC’s best. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWxdicGkja8· 21 August at 10:43

Richard Bethell Yes. Strong feeling communicated, with gentle sound, folky harmonies and slight but expressive vibrato [as a condiment, mentioned by Ian Pittaway]. Have put on YouTube, although seemingly not available on Spotify.· 21 August at 11:50 · Edited
I am preparing a lecture/recital focusing on performing baroque music on modern instruments. I will be performing on violin with my colleague on harpsichord and possibly another colleague who is an active baroque performer on flute. I am particularly interested in comments about the use of vibrato; what is appropriate, when is it appropriate etc. The instrument I am playing on was made in 1795, the bow in 1912. Both the violin and the bow, even though "modern," can produce "soft" warm resonating sounds and I try to simulate baroque instrument sounds as much as possible. I intend to use strings with gut core and will also consider gut strings if I can find a reliable set. Any comments, ideas, suggestions will be much appreciated.

**Jordan Brown** I did not know the purpose of playing baroque music is to produce "soft" or "Warm resonating" sounds. I think you should do more research in this area and on vibrato before you are capable of delivering a lecture on the topic. 21 August at 15:19

**Esha Neogy** I do think the baroque violin is often very bright, but perhaps he is using these words in an attempt to make a comparison to a modern violin sound, since the talk is about using modern instruments. 21 August at 15:29 · Edited

**Kypros Markou** I did not say that "the purpose of playing baroque music is to produce "soft" sound etc. Never mind, my question was not what you responded to. Thank you, anyway.

Yes, I was using the word "soft" more as a color. When one listens to good players on baroque violins, articulations have wonderful clarity, and one can produce brilliance. To my ears baroque instruments have a unique resonance but it is not the brilliant resonance (even harsh at times) that comes from digging in and sustaining intense pressure which may be appropriate for Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev etc. My approach is to use a light but quick bow, away from the bridge, mostly with cleanly articulated beginnings, using vibrato that is narrow, never "wobbly" more "in the note" and use it sparingly, often changing within a long note (messa di voce) My goal is that the listener should not be aware I am using vibrato. I am just hoping that my question will elicit many answers especially from people who devote themselves much more than I to research. Let me add that in the last 30-40 years we have come a long way in interpreting the sources and there are many exiting musicians who are historically informed but also exceptionally creative! 21 August at 16:12 · Edited

**Jordan Brown** My apologies, it just sounded from your post like you have virtually no experience in this area. 21 August at 15:30

**Sally Bradshaw** ??? 21 August at 16:45

**Jordan Brown** " ??? " 21 August at 16:47

**Sally Bradshaw** Jordan Brown The question was attached to the post referring to soft or warm as if these adjectives were anathema to you. 21 August at 16:49

**Jordan Brown** Read how the OP used those adjectives in relation to creating baroque sounds on a modern violin. Unless he explains it further, yes, this approach to baroque music is anathema to me. 21 August at 16:52 · Edited

**Esha Neogy** He's now edited his answer in this subthread. 21 August at 17:37
Jordan Brown my experience is quite the opposite. Raw gut and baroque bows produces a strident and even sometimes harsh sound compared to modern steel strings. · 21 August at 18:37

Esha Neogy It's also being discussed in subthreads below. · 21 August at 18:40

Jordan Brown I really recommend hands on experience with period instruments because the differences you are citing are actually useless generalities. In certain ways, steel resonates more freely than gut and gut can be quite a physical chore to produce loud tones in comparison. The most meaningful differences between the instruments are not tone or vibrato but inflection, stress, and sustain. · 21 August at 18:41

Esha Neogy The bowing is not only about the sound, but the difference between the downbow and the upbow due to the tapering, so if you can borrow a baroque bow, that will do the most for your sound. (EDIT: I do see your talk is about using modern equipment, but this one change is known as the step to take that helps the most if you can do only one thing.) As for vibrato, first of all (and as I see you know), you don't want auto-vibrato at all times. I was taught that one wants a pure sound with expressivity handled by the bow more than the left hand, and that vibrato was used only as an occasional ornament, though I can't give you specifics on where to use it (Oliver Webber could). There was an intense discussion about vibrato in general a while back in this group, which was made into a file. That may be posted in the Files section in this group, or maybe you can find it on the NEMA (National Early Music Association, a British society) website, or maybe someone will send it to you if you want. I'm sure someone will be along soon who knows more about its location than I do. There was quite a hullabaloo about it at the time, so please don't be alarmed if people make remarks that seem amused or cryptic. Good luck! · 21 August at 15:27 · Edited

Kypros Markou Thank you. And yes, I come across musicians who automatically say "no vibrato" as if vibrato is a mechanical thing one turns on and off. The quotations from sources are often interpreted in a very simplistic manner. I am a string player and have often been surprised when I hear a performance by a major orchestra conducted by a prominent conductor, who asks them to play for ex. the Messiah, without any vibrato, with little adjustment to the bowing techniques, and resulting in a sound and style that neither reflects the baroque style or any style that helps the music move the listener. I am fascinated by musicians such as Jodi Savalle, Jeannette Sorrell (Apollo's Fire) Catherine McCintosh etc. who deliver exciting, engaging, deeply moving performances. Also, I have listened to Angela Hewitt playing Bach with the Australian Chamber Orchestra; Angela plays piano; the string players of the Australian Chamber Orchestra were able to produce a very convincing "baroque" sound and I find Hewitt's performances very satisfying. Of course their phrasing, articulations, inflection, overall spirit capture (in my opinion) the essence of the music.
Thank you again for your comments. · 21 August at 15:41

Richard Bethell Yes, you can easily download yourself all "Vibrato Wars" threads from the home page of the National Early Music Association's website.
http://earlymusic.info/nema.php
National Early Music Association (UK) - useful information regarding early and historically... earlymusic.info · 21 August at 16:05

**Kypros Markou** Richard Bethell Thank you! · 21 August at 16:11

**Esha Neogy** Well, I think on a practical level it is actually either on or off, but of course there are variations and gradations as well. · 21 August at 16:41 · Edited

**Kypros Markou** Esha, I am sorry to disagree but as a violinist I do use vibrato selectively. Also I vary the vibrato considerably. Let me give you a couple of brief examples. Handel Sonata No. 4 in D major, D-F#-A - E, A-D-F# -B The first three notes of each group are 8th notes the fourth note (E and later B) are half notes tied to an 8th note. For the first D, I use open D string, F# without any vibrato, A, again open string; I use light bow, progressively more on each 8th note so that there is a phrase crescendo leading to the E. I start the E non vibrato but move quickly to a very light vibrato which increases toward the middle of the note (I guess messa di voce) Next phrase, I start on the A without vibrato but on the D and F# I add just a hint of vibrato leading to the B which sounds more intense than the E, the previous half note.) In other words the second group of notes (A -D-F#-B) is given just a little more intensity or volume. I offer this as a very small example of what one might do to highlight the phrase structure but also use vibrato ever so slightly to enhance the expression of each phrase. And yes I spend a lot of time on each phrase until I feel that it sounds musically convincing. Another example might be the opening theme in the second movement of the Concerto for two violins by Bach. The first note F (doted quarter note tied over to an 8th note presents several possibilities; start non vibrato and move gently into vibrato and then again non vibrato or less vibrato before moving on to the 8th notes. Those 8th notes can be done non vibrato or with a slight impulse vibrato at the beginning of each note to give them a little extra spark or warmth. Regarding the opening note the possibility exists to start warmly, relax the vibrato briefly and build again into the tied 8th note so that the following 8th notes (Fa---mi -re Do) sound as the outcome or natural flow out of the F. I am sorry to take so much space, but I wanted to give an example of how much detailed thought goes into each phrase. I freely acknowledge that I am not a musicologist; I am a performer who wants to be informed and learn from those musical colleagues who invest a lot of their time searching for knowledge. I am very grateful to all who have taken the time to share their knowledge and ideas. · 21 August at 18:10

**Esha Neogy** You have misunderstood me. Whatever kinds of vibrato you use, you are either using some kind of vibrato or none at all. I was commenting on the precision of your language, not your concept. I didn't mean it would be on all the time vs. off all the time, simply that at any given moment, it is in fact either on or off. I said gradations were part of that. My point is not particularly important. · 21 August at 19:40 · Edited

**Esha Neogy** I like the way you described your examples, in any case. · 21 August at 20:50

**Beth Garfinkel** Not to mention the "Wobble Wars" on rec.music.early in Google Groups. · 21 August at 22:50

**Oliver Webber** Longer response in due course- but could I urge you to avoid the direction of quick, light bows far from the bridge- always dangerous to generalise of course, but this is the antithesis of how good baroque players use their bows. Slow bows, near the bridge when loud, varying the pressure according to need, are the best starting point. Vibrato is a
huge topic of course, but essentially it should be used as an ornament. Constant vibrato, even very narrow, is a much later concept, more appropriate for late 19C music, especially of the Franco-Belgian school (as you can hear in early recordings of Ysaye, Sarasate etc).

21 August at 16:24

**Kypros Markou** Oliver, thank you. Your point is well taken. Can I indulge your patience please. What I am after is how to we emulate the sonorities of a performance on baroque string instrument when we play on a modern instrument. If one compares the performance of a Handel Sonata or the Bach Chaconne by Szeryng and let's say Victoria Mullova, Szeryng plays with slow bow and near the bridge but the performance is quite out of character with the performances of baroque instrument players today. On the other hand Mullova and Vengerov attain a sound that is much closer to the baroque sound. (Vengerov uses a baroque bow but I was not sure if Mullova was using a modern bow) Part of my quest has to do with finding the techniques that will lead to the appropriate sound. The technique used when playing a modern instrument with a modern bow may have to be different from the technique used while playing with a baroque bow on a baroque violin. What really matters in my mind is not so much the technique used but the resultant sound. In general, I agree with what you say about vibrato and the idea of continuous, fast and narrow vibrato. Interestingly, there are some recordings of Sarasate playing, and he is surprisingly "classical" and elegant. Others play his music with a "gypsy fire" There is a master class with Joseph Silverstein on Youtube where he talks about vibrato; at some point he talks about vibrato within the note that warms up the sound but the listener is hardly aware of any vibrato. If I were to rephrase my question it would be something along the following lines: When I listen to a wonderful baroque string player, I try to be aware of the essence and the key characteristics of the sound, the phrasing, the coloring variations etc. Then I try to discover What I have to do to recreate a similar aesthetic experience. As a player, I have a large number of options in combining different types of vibrato with different uses of the bow not only for tone production but also articulations, phrase shaping, sense of direction, rhythmic lilt etc. I am thinking of the Bach Concerto for two violins, the concerto for violin and oboe, Handel Concerti, Vivaldi etc. These are pieces that are performed often using modern instruments. My main goal as a performer is to capture the spirit, the aesthetic, the style.

21 August at 18:17 · Edited

**Kypros Markou** Oliver, one more thing. I agree entirely that one should not use vibrato constantly. Even in later music, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and 20th century one should not use the vibrato constantly. But of course each period and each composer's music requires individual attention.

21 August at 17:20

**Jordan Brown** In most cases, speaking of vibrato at all with performers on modern instruments is a recipe for disaster and I avoid the topic almost entirely unless someone has a major wobble. Vibrato Wars are no fun in orchestra rehearsal! 😊.

21 August at 18:49 · Edited

**Oliver Webber** And yet, it is one of the most important elements of style and expression, so not addressing it shuts off a whole range of possibilities.

21 August at 20:02

**Jordan Brown** Kate Bennett Wadsworth said what I meant better than I did, below.

21 August at 20:05
Oliver Webber See my response to her comment- the false dichotomy is the problem. • 21 August at 20:13

Kypros Markou Jordan Brown It depends. If you are working with good and open minded players it can be done politely, efficiently and with a good spirit. But I acknowledge that sometimes one may be better off avoiding the subject. But I have been lucky 😊 • 21 August at 20:23 • Edited

Roland Hutchinson My problem with modern instrument players and vibrato is that the strings is that almost all of them use (metal core, available since the 1920s, or synthetic core since the 1970s) generally sound like crud when played without vibrato -- or open, or pizzicato.

This is why I keep Eudoxas on my modern viola and violin. • 21 August at 22:45

Mike Parker Vibrato is an ornament... and on occasional notes, or just gently waking up a long-held note can be beautiful... but like all ornaments, if you do them too often, they cease to ornament, and actively disfigure... and pre 20th C, and quite late at that, I can’t think of anywhere that it would be the standard sound, and a non-vibrato note is a statement.... • 21 August at 16:41

Oliver Webber Also worth remembering that in the past, as today, there was a wide range of opinions about vibrato (although amongst string players, the only thing never mentioned is a continuous vibrato). Geminiani and Mozart are 2 notorious opposites, the former suggesting its application (with detailed emotional content according to length, intensity etc) as often as possible, and the latter ridiculing those who use it too much and explaining that it belongs properly only on long notes or final notes, and imitates the after sound of a bell. Some late 18th and early 19th C sources (Bremner, Jousse) call it "hurtful and disgustful" when used outside a solo context, which is another interesting perspective. Geminiani's precision about the emotional content is particularly insightful IMO - worth looking up on IMSLP if you're not already familiar with it. • 21 August at 17:19

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Is this for an audience of modern players? If so, I'd recommend staying away from the vibrato issue in an introductory lecture on Baroque style, 1) because it's a cultural wedge issue and risks alienating a section of your audience before you've had a chance to teach them anything, and 2) because if people go home and decide to try eliminating vibrato, they may find themselves confronted with a giant tangle of technical problems which tend to be easily masked by continuous vibrato (poor intonation, dull sound, flat phrasing), and any one of three issues could generate a separate (and perhaps more interesting) lecture on 18c style. • 21 August at 19:16

Oliver Webber "Eliminating" brings up the false dichotomy of "vibrato vs no vibrato", though. Surely it's more constructive to talk about using it differently, which is both perfectly in keeping with 17th or 18th century perspectives whole also accessible to modern listeners. • 21 August at 19:25

Ben Hebbert Kypros - one of the several characteristics of the baroque bow (itself a generalisation) is that it tends towards a smaller playing area towards the head. As a result the ideas of long bows from the heel, or techniques in the middle of the stick apply differently if at all. There is a great deal in terms of articulation that you can demonstrate with a baroque bow, and if you retain a modern bow hold you may encounter the kind of
stability problems that come from a convex stick - so immediately you can see how something like a Vivaldi concerto works, and thereafter consider how these restrictions may relate to a Bach partita. What you won't get is the very different techniques that come from "pushing" the strings into motion, and you won't get the flexibility of the sound which comes from the flexibility of the string with gut, all of which combine to require fundamentally different approaches to violin playing from "modern" technique. It is absolutely legitimate to demonstrate how just the bow offers difference as long as you are aware that this isn't the full story!

Kypros Markou Kate, Oliver, Ben, THANK YOU for engaging in this discussion. I do appreciate all of your points. To Kate's point, the recital is mostly for music students at my University but also people from the community. My colleague is encouraging me to do a similar presentation for CODA (College Orchestra Directors Association) I 'll wait. My purpose is not to provide a definitive answer but to encourage people to be open to different approaches. After some of the comments (especially Oliver and Ben) I looked again at Jodi Savalle, Apollo's Fires, and the Croatian Baroque Ensemble. I appreciate Oliver's comment that it is more constructive to talk about using it (vibrato) differently. Regarding the bow hold, there are more than one ways of holding it, and there are several ways of using it. Without going into the "Russian School" the Franco-Belgian school, etc let me make an observation. If a player holds the bow with fingers fairly close together (which is what I tend to do) one has a more flexible flow, more push and pull like brush strokes rather than digging in using pressure. Looking at the above mentioned baroque players the bow is perhaps an inch or so from the bridge. Because the distance between the bridge and the end of the fingerboard is larger it looks close to the bridge. My understanding is that the closer to the bridge we play the more upper partials will be in the sound, making the tone more "brilliant" and even harsh. A lot of teachers try to get their students to play like that because "it will project to the back of the hall" I had some of these teachers. This kind of playing on a modern violin would be too thick, too aggressive and not singing enough for most baroque music. Looking at Jodi Savalle’s playing as well as the other mentioned groups above I find that their bows flow quite freely. Even in the successive 16ths in Brandenburg 5 the violinist uses speed rather than pressure. To my ears the baroque string instruments have a wonderful natural resonance. I appreciate Ben's point about the bow being used more naturally toward the head. And indeed when playing baroque I would avoid going all the way to the frog; in a sense I would use only 4/5ths of the bow, most of the time anyway. Ultimately I listen to the sounds and adjust accordingly. Bear in mind that each violin and each bow responds differently and produces different sounds. I do plan to experiment with various strings; still hoping for reasonably stable gut strings. Also I am hoping to use a baroque bow. The violin that I play on now, even though not a baroque instrument, has many qualities that will allow me to do a credible presentation. Last year I was playing concertmaster for a pretty fine chamber orchestra in Handel's Ode to Santa Cecelia. Question was asked right away; without vibrato, right? So I said no; use vibrato tastefully and sparingly so that no one will know we are doing vibrato. I just demonstrated a few spots, including rhythms and everything was fine. Recently I was playing concertmaster for Bach Cantata No. 11. Large cathedral, not too large a choir, but they were very good. The conductor made the decision to use 3 firsts, 3 seconds, 1 viola, 1 cello, 1 D. Bass. It worked beautifully. Everyone played comfortably and freely and the balance was excellent. On the same program we did Mozart Requiem for which they used a much larger choir. We used 5-4-3-3-1 Every piece is different. Concert venues are different. I am hoping to encourage
exploration but be grounded in historical information. Listening to wonderful baroque ensembles has been very informative and enlightening. And again, I am very grateful to you for contributing your knowledge! 21 August at 20:15

Job Ter Haar If nobody knows that you use vibrato, you may as well not use it 😎:-) I think the whole idea of 18th century vibrato is that people DO notice: it is used as an effect to enhance the expression or the beauty of the sound. 25 August at 11:17

Kypros Markou Job, thank you, but it is not as simple as that. My point is that the occasional vibrato should not bring attention to the "technical" aspect but to enhance the tone. I suggest that you listen to various baroque ensembles and musicians who perform on baroque instruments. Each of them uses vibrato differently. Some do not use vibrato, some do so extremely rarely, some use it on longer notes in the middle, some in impulse at the beginning of notes and so on. Even if you compare prominent players on modern instrument you will find very different approaches. It also depends on the piece. One should not do the same vibrato in Mendelssohn Violin Concerto as one might do in Tchaikovsky. Listen to Vengerov or Mullova or Tetzlaf. Listen to the Dover Quartet, the Emerson Quartet and compare them to the old Quartetto Italiano or the Amadeus. To my ears baroque string instruments resonate more easily and freely than modern instruments. Of course modern instruments are very different. On one occasion I played Bach Double on a beautiful Nicolo Gagliano; I hardly had to use vibrato. The open strings resonated so beautifully and the stopped notes too! Later I played a few times on another Nicolo Gagliano which I had on loan; it was a very fine instrument but I had to work hard to get it to ring! Anyway, I enjoyed this discussion and it has made me clarify the question I posed. Hopefully I will arrive at some answers. All best. 25 August at 12:39

Job Ter Haar Dear Kypros, I play the baroque cello and I am a member of a baroque ensemble 😊:-) What I meant to say is that 18th century vibrato (or what we know about it from 'the sources') is not an integral part of tone production. It is a way to embellish the tone locally, for the sake of expression. Many baroque players had a modern training before they 'converted', and their use of vibrato often has traces of that training. Anner Bijlsma, my beloved teacher, used to say: "I love it when my students play without vibrato, but if it happens on a 4th finger I always get a bit suspicious" 😏:-) If that happens it is a sure sign that a student is using vibrato without being conscious of it. I tell my students not to use vibrato unless they have a very good reason for it. And then it’s interesting to experiment with all kinds of vibrato: fast, slow, narrow, wide (even adding another finger for a hysterical vibrato trill, for dramatic moments). 25 August at 13:18

Kypros Markou Dear Job, I really appreciate the information you gave me. I am not a baroque instrument player even though I am tempted late in my career. I have seen the movement evolve with great interest; from players who thought that by simply using a baroque instrument they were being authentic. Then there are ensembles who feel that by adding a harpsichord they have already done what is needed. Yesterday I listened to Brandenburg concerto No. 1 recording with the eminent Raymond Leppard directing the English Chamber Orchestra. Probably made in the 60s. The solo violinist uses a constant vibrato; very elegant, graceful player; would have been perfect for Mendelssohn. The oboist has a beautiful sound, a very light vibrato, hardly noticeable, but it’s there. The flute uses no vibrato. The orchestra is using modern instruments. At the time, it was considered "authentic" We 've come a long way. I have read at least one major research
paper that makes the case that the "no vibrato" concept is a fraud. But I am really looking much beyond that. There is a special aesthetic that’s beyond the technical means we use. Vibrato can be used to enhance the tone, if used properly. Inflection, defining phrases, changing the color of the sound are some of the possibilities. I watched Rachel Podger teach a lesson on youtube and was fascinated to see her bring out the harmonic progressions with ever so slight use of vibrato. If I was not looking particularly for the use of vibrato I would not be aware of it. Jodi Savalle fascinates me; his sense of phrasing, the rhythmical energy, the flow and sense of structure is absolutely wonderful. Your teacher Anner Bijlsma is absolutely wonderful. Let me simplify things to explain what I am trying to accomplish. There are thousands of High School students, College orchestras, amateur musicians, and professional musicians who play music by Bach, Handel, Corelli, Lully etc. They do not have access to baroque instruments. What can we do to help them learn about the aesthetic, the techniques, the sounds of historical performances, authentic style and other aspects of Baroque, so that they can play this music with a better understanding and closer to the spirit of the music. These are also people who will be much better prepared to appreciate players and ensembles that specialize in baroque music and who perform on baroque instruments. I am very happy to see so many wonderful baroque ensembles today that play with tremendous musicality, energy, and spirit. I am also happy to see so many musicians who were trained on modern instruments who now realize the importance and the beauty of performing baroque music on original instruments (or reproductions of original instruments) I know that there are many musicians who do both and who use different instruments according to the music they perform. If one looks back the developments in this area over the last 50 plus years are quite remarkable. Perhaps we can continue our discussion. I certainly don't think that I have the answers. But in my little way I hope to encourage the curiosity of the students I work with and to engage the colleagues I work with in the pursuit of more stylistically sensitive performances. Maybe the next step for me is to acquire a baroque violin and a baroque bow. I am already planning to use plain gut strings. For now I try to emulate the tonal colors of baroque performers I admire, and pay special attention to inflection, phrasing, rhythmic character and other means that will hopefully help my performances to reflect the spirit, even though I cannot present a true reproduction. Please do share more of your ideas and knowledge. It has been quite satisfying to read from so many musicians who know so much and are obviously so dedicated. All best.

25 August at 20:01 · Edited

Kate Bennett Wadsworth You’re very welcome, and thanks for posting the question! If you’re curious about sound production, it might be good to order some high quality gut strings - even just for yourself! The thickness of your strings will affect how close you need to play to the bridge, and the string gauges relative to one another will affect your bowing and fingering choices. Also, in case he is too polite to mention it, Oliver Webber is an expert on this and is even involved in making some mind-blowing bare gut strings.

21 August at 21:31

Kypros Markou Kate, thank you. I did sense right away that Oliver is an expert. But also you and Ben have shown very good knowledge and understanding of the issues. Can I ask if you have specific suggestions/recommendations for gut strings that I might use? Let me throw something else from the "modern" bow techniques. There is a very wide variety of approaches to how to use the bow and also on left hand and vibrato. In the
1960s there was a violinist who came out with "A New Approach to Violin Playing". That was Kato Havas. Both arms were much more relaxed. She taught about pushing and pulling the string gently and listening for the upper partials. She would point out that it was not a matter of strength but a matter of balance etc. She was not dealing with baroque playing but her actual tonal results were much closer. She claimed she was inspired by the playing of gypsies in her native Hungary. She would point out that often a young Japanese or Korean lady, petite in size, would make a sound that would float through the hall while a big guy with big muscles would have a small sound. On the other side we had the people who wanted a "big" tone to fill the hall; they insisted on strong consonant beginnings that would make the sound project. And yes, they wanted vibrato all the time; the louder, the better. Thankfully it’s not like that all the time any more. It seems that the last 60 plus years musicians have become much more aware of the importance to pay attention to historical research but we have been influenced by actually hearing some wonderful musicians performing on Baroque instruments. And things are getting better, it seems to me. It’s just that there were some dogmatic positions that were not necessarily the complete answer. For example the question of "double-dotting" or "over-dotting" and when it should be done seems to have changed dramatically. Paul McCreesh in the Messiah Overture does not do double dotting! It was not a French Overture anyway. I am hoping that soon I will buy a baroque violin and a baroque bow, so that I can practice regularly and play with them when performing baroque music. But the reality is that a number of performances of Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Corelli etc. take place with modern instruments. It would be helpful to explore ways to make the best of it in trying to present a more appropriate performance.

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts.

Kate Bennett Wadsworth

Very cool about the gypsy-inspired approach to technique! Re strings, anything you can order online through stringking.net will be good. (I use a top string from Toro, middle strings from George Stoppani (the ones Oliver helps make), and a bottom string from Nicholas Baldock, but I should mention that I’m a cellist!) 

Kypros Markou

Kate, thank you. I already contacted Oliver Webber. He has been so nice. I hope there is no problem shipping them to the US. I am in the Detroit area, Michigan. I am a professor and director of orchestra at Wayne State. But the violin is still my soul! It was good and helpful to read your comments. The recital/lecture is scheduled for October 30 and it is under the auspices of the Humanities Center at Wayne State. Best wishes and good luck with everything you do.

Kypros Markou

Kate, I found you on youtube. You are such a wonderful musician, performer. I also noticed that you studied with Lawrence Lesser at NEC. I graduated from NEC in 1976 with a Masters in conducting. A former student of mine (long time ago) plays with Apollo's Fire, Jennifer Roig-Francoli. But I did not teach baroque. I was her teacher when she was 12-16. She went to Indiana and while studying with Gingold she also started studies with Stanley Ritchie.

I look forward to listening to more of your performances and hope to hear you in a live concert some time. I wish you much success with everything you do.

Kate Bennett Wadsworth

Thanks for your kind words, Kypros! Yes, I remember Jennifer from my time living in Toronto, when I drove down to Cleveland to play with AF from
time to time. There was one project when I met a lovely baroque violinist who had just moved to back to Detroit after living in Italy for a while - Mary Riccardi. Do you know her? She might be a great resource. Back on the strings front: if you're in the Midwest, you should also know about Gamut Strings. They are also excellent, and Dan Larson is right in Minnesota

https://www.gamutmusic.com/

Gamut Music, Inc. specializes in early music strings and instruments made by Dan Larson,...gamutmusic.com 22 August at 16:21

Kypros Markou I learned about Mary Riccardi recently from Noah Horn, our choral director at Wayne State. I am planning to contact her very soon. Noah spoke very highly of her also. It's so good to have met you on Facebook and I really hope to hear you perform live! All best.: 22 August at 16:39

Jim O'Toole Mary Riccardi 😊;-) 29 August at 22:43

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Whoo... do you guys know each other?? · 30 August at 09:56

Jim O'Toole We played together a few times in Germany before Mary Riccardi moved back stateside. Small world eh?· 30 August at 11:12

Roland Hutchinson One thing you might like to experiment with is holding your Tourte-model bow in an 18th-century manner, which might be characterized as more or less a German grip a short distance up the stick from the frog (for most players).

Then remember that the Tourte model IS an 18th-century bow, and might commonly have been used in just that way originally.: 21 August at 22:51

Kypros Markou Roland, thank you. I am familiar with this possibility. Cecil Aronowicz, prominent violist in the UK apparently held the bow like that. I also found an interview of Catherine McCintosh on youtube where she discusses this. In my mind the bow hold is of course very important but also the approach to tone production employed by the player. I know of players and teachers who believe that they really need to dig in, even to the point that they make a sound that is "scratchy" under the ear because they believe it will project better in the hall. I am much more in line with players who believe a "pure" tone that allow partials to resonate. The analogy Kato Havas used to give was that if you throw a stone in a pond with force it will make a big splash but the splash will stay there. If you throw the stone gently you will see circles forming and they will travel far. In my practicing I include open strings looking for a bow movement that brings out upper harmonics. So while playing on the D string I listen for the A and on a good day the F#. One cannot get these harmonics if one presses too much. Then I try double stops listening for the resultant tones. To my ears baroque instruments have this extra layer of resonating. On the modern instrument it is not the same but I find that one can capture the character by experimenting. On the other hand listening to some great violinists of years past, but unfortunately even today, they play Handel or Bach as if it were Tchaikovsky or Shostakovich! On the other side I hear performances of Tchaikovsky that are really beautiful by not overdoing things. What I really hope to accomplish is to open some doors for our students both for their own studies but also when they move on to performing and teaching.
Thank you for taking the time to write. I will experiment with the bow as I practice this evening!: 21 August at 23:11
**Roland Hutchinson** I like the way you think. Of course the equipment is only a tool for achieving the sound that the player intends to make, and intention goes a long way. One can, for example, hear proof of this in the recordings of some of the 1970s-era artists who started out on modern instruments and then acquired baroque ones: sometimes there is no difference to be heard at all.

I certainly knew the name of Cecil Aronowicz, but I did not know that he held the bow that way.

One thing that you might or might not know is that relatively recent research (the past 15 years or so?) by Oliver and several other people has changed our ideas about baroque setup, so that it is now pretty clear that baroque fiddles were strung with heavier (higher tension) strings than modern gut stringing. The current controversy is whether they were really strung with all strings at equal tension or merely much closer to that than the modern setup is. (Note that higher tension does not necessarily mean higher pressure on the belly of the instrument, since the angle that the strings make with the bridge also affects that.) Not all baroque players have adopted the higher-tension stringing yet, however.

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**Kypros Markou** Ronald, thank you for the comments. I just learned about Oliver Webber. He shared ideas after I posed my questions and obviously he knows a lot; plus he sounds very open minded and has a broad perspective. I also learned that he makes excellent gut strings and looked at his site and learned more about tension possibilities. Actually several people, like yourself, offered ideas and I greatly appreciated that. My goal at least for now is pretty practical. There are young students studying string instruments; there are musicians from amateur to very professional. They all play Bach, Handel, Corelli etc. Can I help my students and people I work with, who do not have baroque instruments, do not specialize in baroque music, and who probably were never exposed to the style, aesthetic, and other characteristics of Baroque, to play with more understanding and sensitivity to the style and make adjustments to their sound, articulations, expression etc so that they are closer to the style, character and spirit of the music.

I agree with you completely that the instrument is the equipment; if the player does not have a sound and other musical elements in his head, things will not happen. By the way I studied at the Royal College of Music in London in the late 60s. Then I came to the US, studied with Ruggiero Ricci at Indiana U and then did a Masters in conducting at New England Conservatory. At that time Daniel Pinkham was the expert in Baroque at NEC and I took a year with him studying the music of Bach. Later on I was conducting the orchestra at the University of Pittsburgh where our Chair, Dr. Don Franklin, was an expert on Baroque and early classical. I learned a lot from him too; and he was very broad minded; it was never "this is the only way." Anyway, I appreciate your comments; I learned a lot since yesterday when I posed the question. I have a couple of months to prepare. Hopefully I will only talk for 15 minutes and perform for 45!

Best wishes.

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**David Dyer** I don't think you can quickly learn to imitate baroque playing, and if the goal is to learn to play baroque music on modern instruments I would not change equipment, I would use modern violins and bows. This is probably controversial, but when I was at the University of Michigan and we were using modern instruments, Edward Parmentier set
down some basic rules for us, not because they were strictly "authentic" baroque practices, but to break us of some habits and get us used to some new ones. We played without vibrato, whenever it was possible to use an open string we used an open string, we always adjusted our bowing as quickly as possible to get strong notes on downbows, we tuned in perfect thirds as well as possible, we tried to follow the contours of lines with dynamics, don't play any two notes in a row the same way, and a few other things. I think we also did not hold any long notes straight and plain. It is NOT baroque playing but it got us into the shallow end of the swimming pool quickly. Then we learned more from sources and started breaking these rules. But I think until you know what baroque vibrato is, it is very difficult to say just use a little less, because that's not what it is. It is not toned down modern playing.

Elizabeth Field is a kind of expert at teaching this. I haven't seen her work so I don't know her approach, but my experience was over an entire semester or two so it probably isn't ideal. Elizabeth probably has better advice on how to do it in a workshop environment, I would suggest contacting her. I am a big fan of the idea and believe very satisfactory results can be achieved. The only adaptations I might suggest is holding the bow up a little higher and explain major and minor half steps, but I wouldn't try to make people believe there's essential magic in gut strings they can't do without. However, if you are lecturing to people without instruments, you might suggest they go home and try the things I suggested for a while and then read up on the subject and of course take lessons. There's no substitute for that of course. Good luck, great that you're doing it.· 22 August at 12:26

Andrew Lawrence-King I like this list of basic rules, especially "don't play any two notes in a row the same way" and "not hold any long notes straight and plain".

I would add "last note short" and "long notes long, short notes short".· 29 August at 11:00

David Dyer Thank you. I would also add to stay in first position unless it was necessary to shift. But once again, all these rules come with the caveat that they are for discipline to give one a starting place and are not meant as actual Baroque style. And as to following the contour of the line for dynamics, higher notes louder and lower notes softer, one might say the opposite for the bass line. Also, stepwise notes legato, and the larger the leap the shorter the notes.30 August at 00:08

Oliver Webber By the way, the open string preference (which I was also taught as a way to imitate baroque style) is contradicted by some sources, e.g. Roger North, who says open strings should be avoided (for the same reason as modern players do). I'll try to find the quotation.· 22 August at 12:33

Oliver Webber Here is a reference to it from Robin Stowell's seminal work- though beware his comments on strings, which perpetuate a number of since-debunked myths. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=bqmRldqZ4yYC&pg=PA117...

Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Early...· 22 August at 12:35
David Dyer I don't believe it to be a preference, just a discipline, although L Mozart describes a good vibrato as being like the sound of an open string in its natural fluctuation. It seems like an endorsement. Yeah, I've got that one, haven't read it in a while though and he's asking about baroque performance. 22 August at 12:39

Oliver Webber The reference is to Roger North, writing in the 1720s, so pretty relevant for the OP. 22 August at 12:40

David Dyer Oliver Webber gotcha. When one looks at Handel, Corelli, and other Baroque sonatas they seem so built around open strings, especially with so much d major. that it would be very difficult to play them without open strings. 22 August at 12:45

Oliver Webber I agree. It's a curious comment from RN- but it does also seem rather clear! 22 August at 12:56

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Hm, I'd love to see the context for that North quote if you have the time to chase it up, David Dyer. Also, what's the evidence from published music with fingerings and/or scordatura notation? From what I remember, there are plenty of open strings in 18c cello music (Bach suite #5 in both Anna M and Kellner versions, Jakob Klein's sonatas) and of course in 19c editions they are everywhere! 22 August at 15:31

David Dyer I did not refer to published music with fingerings, but so much music, like Handel's D major sonata, would be difficult to play without open strings, especially because of all the string crossings in the allegro. Even think of the opening adagio. If the D-F#-A were played were played with 4th finger it would be rather dull sounding. The following E is a long note and it makes sense to use 4th finger and use vibrato. Same is true for the following A-C#-E on open strings and then the following E, of course, has to be fourth finger, another good vibrato opportunity. I see the same sort of thing in The Division Violin. So much of that music would be difficult if you wanted to avoid open strings, it seems to be written with open strings in mind. Bach's E major Partita requires a lot of open Es and As making for a bright sound, especially the prelude. The more sombre d minor Partita also requires Ds, As, and Es, but the Ds and As are so often the bottoms of chords and must be covered, and in his c minor Sonata with harpsichord, he uses a key that avoids open As and Es. I think he chose a key to avoid open strings because of the affect of the sonata, compared, for instance, to the G major sonata. So my argument is that the music itself is evidence of open string use. One might argue that music for some wind instruments tends to favor sharp keys as well, but they are built to favor these keys (perhaps to go along with violins). That is not true for the baroque recorder, for instance, whose music tends to favor flat keys. 22 August at 21:47 · Edited

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Ah, I thought you had the Roger North handy. It would be great to know if he was speaking about a specific musical context (e.g. a paragraph smooshed between two etudes) or giving us general wisdom about beautiful fingerings. Don't worry if you don't have it, though! I mentioned published fingerings and scordatura notation because they would give us hard evidence for violinists' decisions for/against open strings, so that we wouldn't need to speculate. 22 August at 22:19

Andrew Lawrence-King Re open strings: today's baroque guitarists mostly use chord-shapes with as many open strings as possible, and chord-shapes in "first position", as suggested by the abecedario (list of chord-shapes associated with alfabeto notation) at the beginning of many guitar treatises.
But the Samuel Pepys music-books show highly sophisticated guitar-continuo realisations by his music-master Morelli, which use high positions (even when lower positions are available) and unusual tonalities that reduce/eliminate use of open strings.

Perhaps the 'honest manly sound' of open strings was favoured in general, and certainly for average players (and Sam himself was if anything below average), but leading virtuosi might explore the unusual sounds of higher positions, more "stopped" tone colour, for particular effect. Guitarists? Violinists etc.? · 29 August at 10:55

**Andrew Lawrence-King** I suggest that there is a larger question lurking beneath this discussion. Whatever period practice concerning vibrato might have been, was Vibrato as important a topic back then as it is for us today. Chat-group discussions today often focus on Pitch, Temperament & Vibrato. But period evidence does not support prioritising these topics.

The underlying question is "What were the priorities in a particular period/place?". If we fail to examine this question, then we are digging in the wrong place, and no matter how deep the hole is dug, it will always be in the wrong place!

In 1601, Caccini defined Music as 'nothing else than Text & Rhythm, with Sound last of all. And not the other way around!". Here is a period prioritisation (not the only possible one, of course) that would inspire quite a different set of questions today.

https://andrewlawrenceking.com/.../music-expresses-emotions/

Music expresses emotions? Probably most musicians and music-lovers would agree that 'music expresses emotions', although each of ....andrewlawrenceking.com· 29 August at 09:50

**Kypros Markou** Andrew, I am really glad that you brought up other very significant aspects that are so important for a good performance of music.· 29 August at 12:59

**Ben Hebbert** With great respect, Giulio Caccini'a writing with respect to Nuove Musiche in 1601 may be relevant to whether a violinist warbles through Monteverdi’s Vespers or not, but it is clear from every point of view that violin playing went through quantum leaps in the seventeenth century. Whether or not that includes Vibrato. I quite see that within stylo recitivo and other elements a total purity of sound seems essential to the performance but that is so particular to the early seventeenth century that I wouldn't presume to apply any ground rule to later uses of the violin.· 29 August at 10:03 · Edited

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Ben Hebbert: you miss my point. The question is not whether more Vibrato was used in the 18th-century than circa 1600. And of course, performance practice changes with time and location.

But my point was: is Vibrato such an important question? Clearly, circa 1600, for Caccini, it was not.
One way of finding out what was important in a written source is to do a simple word-count. How many times does, say, Leopold Mozart use the word 'vibrato' compared to the number of times he uses other words. One could make this technique more sophisticated by weighting the use of key words in say, chapter headings, etc.

So it might be illuminating to take your favourite violin source, and do a word-count for the most frequently occurring words, and see what emerges.  

Ben Hebbert Andrew Lawrence-King I think I did misconstrue your post first time around ... sorry! 😊)

I think in many ways I'm expressing much the same ends as you were so we are much on the same page.  

Oliver Webber Nonetheless, it *is* interesting to consider whether musicians of earlier ages were as exercised about our pet topics as we are. I think L Mozart's passing jibe about violinists who play as if they have the palsy is about as extended as it gets. He devotes far more time to affect, rhetoric and articulation, for example, so maybe we would do well bear in mind what 17th and 18th century priorities might have been.  

Andrew Lawrence-King THAT's the point!  

David Dyer What strikes me about L Mozart's remark is that if he has to warn about these violinists that do it all the time, is that it means that there were violinists doing all the time. There must have been some that had a taste for it, so to say a constant vibrato did not exist would not have been true, whether it was ideal or preferred is another matter.  

Ben Hebbert I do agree with many points but the implied proposition (either conscious or not) is of an attitude that might have been consistent from the 1600s to the 1780s - that at least is how one could interpret evidence laid out a certain way. When Caccini was writing violin playing was so rare that we don't actually know of a maker of note outside Venice, Cremona or Brescia. By 1660 it had so transformed that almost every major Italian city had a maker working there, as well as most of Europe, and the transformation by 1720 is vast again. From that perspective the evolution of violin playing is wildly unpredictable. - my comments aren't there to be disparaging towards Andrew Lawrence-King simply to warn over an immediate linear connection between Caccini and Leopoldo Mozart as *some undergraduates* might assume by the nature of this debate generally 😏):  

Andrew Lawrence-King I certainly do NOT assume "one size fits all" for Early Music: this is a key change from the 1960s, when Donnington tended towards a binary of "early" and "mainstream" and a more nuanced understanding that recognises many differing historical performance practices in different periods, different places. Nevertheless, the importance of Text (i.e. Rhetoric) and Rhythm remains high, I would suggest, in many pre-1800 repertoires.

And despite the exciting developments in violin-playing during the 17th century, the general rule is still useful that instrumental playing was strongly influenced by aesthetics for the voice. So where we lack violin-information, we can reasonably apply vocal sources
(and those sources will show evidence of changes with time/location, of course).

I do not wish to imply, consciously or not, that performance practice did not change from 1600 to 1780. But I do state my opinion that Rhetoric and Rhythm remained high priorities throughout this period (dealt with in various different ways). And I see little evidence that vibrato was a big question during this period. · 29 August at 10:37

**Ben Hebbert** I agree wholly :) :) :) · 29 August at 10:44

**Kate Bennett Wadsworth** "Nevertheless, the importance of Text (i.e. Rhetoric) and Rhythm remains high, I would suggest, in many pre-1800 repertoires." I agree. Can we move it up to 1900, though? · 29 August at 11:44

**Oliver Webber** I can’t see where such consistency is implied, I must say. After all he closes by linking to *a* period prioritisation, specifically stating "not the only possible one, of course". Also his point really is not about "purity of sound" in recitative and other 17th century genres, but about the relative importance of all elements of a performance. · 29 August at 10:26

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Yes! · 29 August at 10:37

**Ben Hebbert** Hmm ... I think I may have half read the post... kind of responding by amplifying the caution that Andrew is putting forward about regions and places - we are fundamentally on the same page :) · 29 August at 10:29

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Absolutely - many things change through the period 1600-1780, especially less important matters (such as vibrato, pitch and temperament). :) Fundamentals - Rhetoric, Rhythm (i.e. Tactus) and the significance of Delivery/Action changed less, I would argue.

My suggestion is that by focussing on such surface details as vibrato, whilst paying less attention to fundamentals (how many performances are there nowadays, directed by Tactus, rather than by modern conducting whether from podium or keyboard?) we (the HIP community) are fiddling whilst Rome burns.

Of course, there is also room for debate on what the fundamentals really were, and how priorities changed with time/location. As any Ph D supervisor will advise, the first step is to examine carefully what question you should be asking, and only when the question is well formed, to go looking for answers.

Sometimes I feel that the vibrato debate is approached from the opposite direction: debaters (on both sides!) already feel passionately that they know the answer, so they come to the question looking for evidence that supports a position they have already adopted, without even considering whether the question itself is a good one.

But see above in this thread for some very helpful adjustments to the vibrato question, away from "Shall we?" or "how much?" and towards "how?" · 29 August at 10:48 · Edited

**Andrew Lawrence-King** And here’s the elephant in the room, the question I think we SHOULD be asking

Isn't that a heffalump though? Historically speaking?

Andrew Lawrence-King, vibrato is demonstrably NOT a “surface detail”, but fundamental. Frederick Gable, in his translator’s introduction to Greta Haenen’s conclusions from her monumental study “Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock (1988)”, commented: “the use of vocal and instrumental vibrato, both solo and ensemble, is the most controversial and also at the same time the most important aspect of sound production in the whole field of early music. The extent to which vibrato is used and its size and speed can so obscure other elements of a performance that our whole perception of a work can change simply on the basis of vibrato.” I agree. This was underlined by the huge vibrato debate we had in this group concluding last year.

You may agree, and late 19th century commentators on opera might agree, but I’m not sure musicians in the 17th and 18th century share our concerns. There doesn’t seem to be evidence from this period of the kind of energised exchange so common now on this topic.

That’s true, for the very simple reason that vocal vibrato was so rare then as to be virtually non existent. So why would people get fussed about it? Oliver you’ve just given me an easy long hop to hit for six!

Well, cricket fan though I am, I wasn’t thinking in those terms. Nor was I thinking only of singers, but primarily of string players, who certainly used vibrato, albeit in very different ways from today’s musicians.

Certainly, string vibrato is a more complex issue, although there was little excitement about it in the 18th C. Although it wasn't primary in my research, I did document many occurrences during the 19th C. If you will message me your email address, I'll send it to you.

That’s really the point here: it might be a hot topic today, but as you say, there was little excitement about it in the 18th century - so clearly not fundamental, as you claimed earlier.

Vibrato was also a hot topic in the 16th and 17th centuries. It just wasn’t called vibrato, but tremolo. It had many forms and many techniques, and almost certainly the instrumental variety of tremolos was an attempt to imitate the many kinds of tone fluctuations in use by singers.

But was it the cause of the kind and degree of angst and occasionally even vitriol that we see today? A topic of discussion, yes, but where did it come in a musician’s priorities?
Bruce Dickey  It was an ornament, and one of the most important. It is discussed in detail, and many rhythms are given for its realization.· 29 August at 21:53

Bruce Dickey  It's nature was very unlike what we call vibrato, and I think the introduction of the word, so foreign to the 17th and 18th centuries into any discussion of the topic, inevitably brings with it distortions and misconceptions.· 29 August at 21:54

Richard Bethell  The historic record [see my paper to the 2009 Singing Conference at York] shows that vibrato has been a MASSIVE issue in the past, specifically during the period 1860 to 1880, when the remaining straight tone singers were displaced by the incoming vibratoists. The latter were heartily detested with a bitter loathing, with reviewers frequently coupling tremolo or vibrato with derogatory adjectives such as aggressive, detestable, hideous, horrible, vicious, abominable, evil, odious, etc. One of our best prime ministers, William Gladstone (who tried to win Home Rule for Ireland), stopped going to the opera because of the vibrato singing.· 29 August at 13:32 · Edited

Kate Bennett Wadsworth  You won't get any argument there! Late 19c is an excellent place to look for vibrato wars. Very cool about Gladstone!· 29 August at 13:40

Richard Bethell  I agree with Andrew that more attention is needed to other fundamentals such as tempo, where there have been big changes over the last century. My article “The Accelerating Tactus”, due out in this Autumn’s Early Musical Performer, gives some examples.· 29 August at 13:30

Martin Spaink  From my own experiences in two distant (time, cultural) musical traditions, one early medieval chant, the other Classical Indian Music, (Dhrupad) I can say confidently that I have no use at all for vibrato. In modal melodic music in which drones can be/are used, the exact pitch-relations and careful note bending is used, vibrato just would not fit in, it would go against the nature of the music. The closest thing I know, is 'andolan' which in certain raga's is a slow and discreet oscillation between two close pitches, think of it as calligraphy. To finish it off: what a calligrapher can do cannot be reproduced by a typewriter. Singers especially have to un-learn the implanted 'idea' of pianos in their head, and learn to sing like calligraphers.· 29 August at 19:46

Oliver Webber  Pianos? No vibrato there...· 29 August at 19:51

Martin Spaink  Oliver ok ok forget the piano. it was an allegoric piano, anyway.· 29 August at 22:31

Kate Bennett Wadsworth  I have memories of being told as a student to match the piano's vibrato...· 29 August at 22:43

Richard Bethell  Piano playing was not entirely free of tremolo/vibrato. Alexander Dreyshock's playing was wittily reviewed by the Examiner in 1843:- "The Lion has roared!! Paris is astounded — [Alexander] Dreyshock has exhibited—Blanchard has puffed— the cognoscenti (!) have swallowed!! Of all the exhibitions you can conceive, nothing so thoroughly laughable as the display of this new wonder, (aged twenty-four), ever entered the interstices of your pericranium. I attended, of course, the raree-show, at Erard’s, on Sunday last. But in the midst of the general dissatisfaction, Herr Dreyshock threw himself sans facon into a shaking and thundering of the keys, somewhat after the manner of a palsied man in a convulsion, which, on inquiry, I learned, to my great satisfaction was THE TREMOLO— (you recollect THE ANDANTE, no doubt). This
delectable ragout of shaking, quaking, shivering, and quivering, lasted about ten dreary minutes, at the end of which I felt as though some one had been soundly thrashing me with a piece of whalebone. 

Richard Bethell Also, from time to time, pianists attempted to coax a clavichord-style bebung from their instrument. For example, "A peculiarity in his playing [Mr. Frederic Lamond] of legato passages is, that he tries, apparently, to impart the tremolo effect so commonly and successfully obtained by violinists, and which on a violin is so easily done. This must be a waste of force and nervous energy on Mr. Lamond’s part, for when a note on the piano is once struck and held down, no amount of movement of the finger can alter the effect, the hammer having left the string does not touch it again until restruck. There may, however, be a virtue in it which we fail to detect." [Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, 15 Oct 1886]. The State Times Advocate of 8 April 1941 reported: "Nowadays we have little sympathy for the pianist who appears to suffer over his music like a wounded bird. Such a de Pachmann trick as interrupting a concert to fetch in a cushion is no longer amusing. Most annoying of all was Mr. [Samuel] Sorin’s vibrato. It really is of no avail for a pianist to wiggle his finger on the keys. Here Sorin confuses the piano with the violin." 

Job Ter Haar The Dutch early 20th century composer Willem Pijper reportedly used a similar 'vibrato' on the piano. 2 September at 00:16

Bruce Dickey Straight-tone singers versus vibratoists is clearly a false dualism. It is only changing fashions and different kinds of vibratos. 1 September at 12:52

Richard Bethell But, unfortunately, fashions in the classical music tradition are controlled by hegemonies. My study of the historic record suggests that, from around 1650 to 1840, a benign hegemony controlled largely by the castrati ensured that, with few exceptions (including probably France), straight-tining vocalists ruled. By contrast, through the 20th century to date, monitored in part by the vocal science departments of conservatories and universities, vibratoists have ruled. This rule-based situation has largely prevented straight toners from getting a note in, except in the anarchic world of popular music. All contributors to the Radio 3 discussion (6 August last) on vibrato, which I took part in, agreed that hegemonies were a bad thing and that diversity was needed. For those that haven’t heard it yet, I supply a link to the programme below, although the 30 days are up on 5th or 6th September: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0902kf8

Prom 29: Mussorgsky - Khovanshchina, 2017, BBC Proms - BBC Radio 3 Mussorgsky’s opera Khovanshchina, with the BBC...bbc.co.uk 1 September at 15:28

Fynn Titford-Mock Throwing a Wobbly starts about the 2:39:38 mark at the link above. 1 September 1751
V24. David Tayler, launched 24 August 2017

David Tayler shared a link. 24 August

Early Handel

Soprano Emma Albani ~ Angels, ever bright and fair (1903)  Soprano Emma Albani (1847-1930) / Angels, ever bight and fair / Theodora (Handel) / Recorded: 1903 -- EMMA ALBANI: November 1, 1847, Chambly, near Montreal -...

youtube.com

Comments


File:Albani cartoon.png - Wikimedia Commons

This work is in the public domain in its country of origin...commons.wikimedia.org 24 August at 04:29

David Tayler It's amazing that this is over one hundred years old...I wonder how common those long scooping tones were at the turn of the century? 24 August at 07:27

Luke Green Very common. Ornament: It may well have also been an ornament in Handel's times but I can't remember my sources at this point. 24 August at 08:53

Richard Bethell Mancini certainly allowed it. See in Article XII on Agility of the Voice, Page 50 (Foreman translation). “.... And further in the tempo of the siciliana he will find it useful to mix the slide [scivolo] and the down-slide [strascino], as long as they are placed in suitable positions and given with the just proportion.” Mhairi Lawson gave a paper at GSMD on the use of 'portamento', commenting on it during the "Vibrato Wars" discussion on 11 March (I forget which year!) as follows: "Pier Francesco Tosi (165 – 1732), Johann Friedrich Agricola (1720-1774) and Domenico Corri (1746-1825) all write about the use of vocal portamento in their publications of 1723, 1757 and 1809. The terms they use vary and include appoggiatura, appuyer, port de voix, portamento, portare la voce, dragging of the voice, slurred division. This paper will provide a short introduction to the aforementioned musicians, their context in musical history and their writings." 25 August at 10:39
Luke Green  Portamento was spell-checked to ornament! How clever! · 24 August at 14:20

Christopher Ball Albani, Patey, Lloyd and Santley were the standard quartet of oratorio singers during the last quarter of the 19th. century. All, apart from Patey, left recordings. Despite coming from different vocal backgrounds and all were past their best when they were tempted into the recording studio, careful listening - particularly with regard to the play back speed - can reveal certain common stylistic features in their singing. Lloyd for example provides decorations in Sound an alarm which would not be out of place today. The ornaments are not idiosyncratic to Lloyd as a near contemporary recording by John Coates reveals almost identical embellishments. Patey died in the mid-1890s, but, in some respects, her legacy is more important than recordings. She produced an album of 12 songs for contralto or mezzo voices, 'edited with directions as to expression, phrasing and respiration.' Playing recordings of some of the items by her near contemporaries - Butt, Crossley and Thornton for example - shows that the markings were observed to the letter, thus providing objective evidence, rather than speculation, that this is how the songs were performed 100/125 years ago. · 24 August at 14:34

Robert Rawson Are you sure this cylinder was played at the right speed? · 24 August at 14:38

Christopher Ball My point precisely. I do not listen to on-line versions for this reason and I abhor compressed sound. Some voices did not take kindly to the early recording process. A lack of overtones can give an impression of intonation problems. · 24 August at 14:50

Sally Bradshaw The pitch gives a clue, which suggests to me that this really was the speed she sang it. Voice isn't distorting and I can clearly hear how she adjusted to the rising phrase in order to produce a top note diminuendo. · 24 August at 17:05

Robert Rawson Sorry folks, I was merely joking. · 25 August at 09:12

Sally Bradshaw This is fascinating listening! Thank you David! · 24 August at 17:05

David Tayler Just think about when we will be them. I have forty year old recordings....just another 60 to go. · 24 August at 17:46 · Edited

Sally Bradshaw Yep......ha ha ha. And I have recordings of me singing Handel recitative before I knew.......and on the BBC so soon..... · 24 August at 18:21

Stephan Olbertz The piano doesn't seem to be tuned to ET, at least to me.... Interesting! · 25 August at 08:13 · Edited

Oliver Webber According to Ross Duffin's book, pianos rarely were in the early 20C, despite the stated aim being ET. · 25 August at 08:19
Can anyone interpret what Charles Burney meant by “the Beat upon the unison, octave, or any consonant sound to a note on the violin” in the footnote on pages 388/9 of The Present State of Music in France and Italy? The close-shake (apparently outmoded by this time) is of course what is known today as the vibrato. Burney was expressing surprise that violinists on the continent were not using this effect, in the same way that organs were not supplied with the swell stop. He had just listened to Signor Colista playing the Great Organ in St. John Lateran in Rome during November 1770.

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**Comments**

**Neil Coleman** In Purcell’s "Rules for Graces" a beat is a lower appoggiatura rising to a lower mordent. · 31 August at 10:21

**Domen Marincic** Here is a page from David Golby, Instrumental Teaching in Nineteenth-Century Britain, quoting Simon McVeigh, The Violinist in London’s Concert Life, 1750-1784: Felice Giardini and his Contemporaries. I had the same thoughts before reading this.
I looked in Ebelings contemporary German translation. He translates "Beat" with "Anschlag". This is an ornament where the main note is preceded by a third consisting of the lower and upper second. If the main note e.g. is c, the "Anschlag" is b and d, played very fast. Ebeling himself is not sure what Burney means with "close shake" but translates it with "Bebung" what indeed has the meaning "vibrato".

Emily Baines A beat is generally the English term for one or more oscillations to the lower auxiliary.

Domen Marincic I find McVeigh's interpretation convincing. I understood this in the same way and can think of no other reasonable explanation at the moment.

Jordan Brown Is he referring to a kind of bow vibrato?

Domen Marincic No, it's about vibrating or trilling (for lack of a better word, so "beat" actually seems right) on a sympathetic interval on another string which is not touched by the bow and only resonates with the main note producing some kind of soft vibrating resonance.

Dmitry Ponomareff Seems Charles Burney wrote more on vibrato in his Berlin impressions of the same book I will check.

Richard Bethell I can save you the trouble Dmitry, as I have all Burney's comments on vibrato documented.

He noted for 3 December 1770, while in Lyons, P.402:- "I was more disgusted than ever, at hearing French music, after the exquisite performances to which I had been accustomed in Italy. Eugenie, a pretty comedy, preceded Silvain, an opera by M. Gretry: there were many pretty passages in the music, but so ill sung, with so false an expression, such screaming, forcing, and trilling, as quite made me sick." Trilling, in this context, could mean vibrato, as he would normally describe a proper trill as a shake.
In his subsequent book, Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces, Burney described a falsettist in a Dutch synagogue (October 1772, P. 300):

“One of these voices was a falset, more like the upper part of a bad vox humana stop in an organ, than a natural voice. I remember seeing an advertisement in an English newspaper, of a barber, who undertook to dress hair in such a manner as exactly to resemble a peruque; and this singer might equally boast of having the art, not of singing like a human creature, but of making his voice like a very bad imitation of one. Of much the same kind is the merit of such singers, who, in execution, degrade the voice into a flute or fiddle, forgetting that they should not receive law from instruments, but give instruments law ..... But though the tone of the falset was very disagreeable, and he forced his voice very frequently in an outrageous manner, yet this man had certainly heard good music and good singing. He had a facility of running divisions, and now and then mixed them with passages of taste, which were far superior to the rest.” The falsettist clearly used a pitch vibrato, given the “peruque” analogy.

A little later, Burney wrote: “As to the vox humana [the Haarlem organ], which is so celebrated, it does not at all resemble a human voice, though a very good stop of the kind: but the world is very apt to be imposed upon by names; the instant a common hearer is told that an organist is playing upon a stop which resembles the human voice, he supposes it to be very fine, and never enquires into the propriety of the name, or exactness of the imitation. However, with respect to my own feelings, I must confess, that of all the stops I have yet heard, which have been honoured with the appellation of vox humana, no one, in the treble part, has ever reminded me of any thing human, so much as of the cracked voice of an old woman of ninety, or, in the lower parts, of Punch singing through a comb.”

Finally, possibly as late as 1810, Burney defines in the Rees Cyclopaedia: “TREMBLANT, in Music, the name of a very disagreeable stop in large church-organs on the continent. Its name describes its effect. In general, a steady tone in a voice or wind-instrument capable of sustaining a note, is the most essential requisite; but in the tremblant stop there is a perpetual quivering, such as we sometimes hear in the streets by the vielle and barrel-organ.”

Job Ter Haar Only the last one is clearly about vibrato... 31 August at 11:41

Dmitry Ponomareff Richard Bethell not a trouble at all but just another idea to read more the book I really like} 31 August at 12:50

Andrew Benson-Wilson To avoid confusion, the Swell is not a "stop" but a separate division contained in a box with openable front shutters of various types. All it does is make the sound louder. The default position in England was closed, hence the description as 'swell'. The organ in Italy, but not at that time in England also has beating stops, tuned slightly out so that it created a beat with another stop. There was also the Tremulant, a mechanical device in the winding system that produced a fluctuating sound. The fact that Burney combines two different concepts in the same paragraph and footnote makes me wonder whether he was confusing the English Swell organ, and the various methods of giving a sense of vibrato on the organ. It seems odd to switch so abruptly from discussing organ divisions to violin ornamentation. 31 August at 11:06
Graham O'Reilly It's interesting that in his original journal (ed. H.E. Poole, 1969) Burney simply writes (after "Italy" and in the main body of the text) "it is the same with the beat from the octave or 5th of any note on the violin instead of the old close-shake". So all the extra stuff about its neglect on the continent and Giardini must have been added back in London when he edited the journal for "The Present State". It's also worth putting his remarks in context: he's just described Colista's playing of the S. Giovanni Laterano organ as "full" and almost (but not quite) criticised it for lacking "grace taste and melody" - something which could be supplied perhaps by having a swell, In Burney's mind, therefore, the close-shake is something else that provides these qualities. The passage in the article above about "the rapid depression and release of a consonant note on a neighboring string" producing "an ethereal effect not unlike vibrato" seems to me a perfect description and suggesting it on the 5th is apposite to its use on the violin. It seems to me to be a desire to make the violin's open strings sound the same as the stopped ones with sympathetic vibrations. So nothing to do with appoggiaturas or other ornaments. Modern violinists do this all the time, don't they? Conclusion, either the 18th century ear was very conscious of overtones and their effect (something that also struck me in Richard's previous post about vibrato) or some amount of vibrato with the fingers of the left hand was normal. I do love vibrato being described as having "an ethereal effect"!

31 August at 11:12

David Badagnani Are you all certain that the "beat" referred to is not a stop in which two pipes, tuned a few cents differently from the other, produce a beating effect (much like the "wet" stop on French accordions)?

31 August at 15:31

Domen Marincic I am. This is a perfectly common practice on bowed string instruments.

31 August at 17:20 · Edited

Beth Garfinkel Reasonably. At least, here's what the OED says about it: "9. Music. 'The name given in English to a melodic grace or ornament, but with considerable uncertainty as to which particular ornament it denotes, the word having been variously applied by different writers.' Grove Dict. Music (1880)."

31 August at 15:49

Richard Bethell Burney offers us this definition in Rees: "Undulation, or Beat, in Music, is used for that rattling or jarring of sounds, which is observed, chiefly, when discordant notes are sounded together. See Beats." But when you look up Beats, he offers an alternative definition as an inverted mordent. See image below.

31 August at 16:26

Richard Bethell Burney also says elsewhere in Rees: "Beats, in Music, are certain pulsations of two continued sounds, as in an organ, that are out of tune, occasioned by warring vibrations that prevent coincidence in any two concords."

31 August at 16:58

David Dyer My take on the Burney quote is that he is talking about 3 different things. He laments that the swell is not used in Italian organ, as well he laments that the beat on
consonances is not used on strings in his footnote. Then he laments that vibrato is not used on the continent like it is in England. He says this is a beautiful effect so I doubt that his complaint about excessive trilling is about vibrato. It also might mean that Geminiani’s vibrato recommendation of frequent vibrato does not apply so much to the continent in general and should only be taken as feature imported from Italy and used most widely in London. Geminiani seems to support this. Giardini, mentioned by Burney, was also from Milan and moved to London. Geminiani was a student of Corelli so maybe one could extract back to Corelli as a source for this Italian import of vibrato use in London. It seems to me that French music, with more "fussy" ornaments, simply has less room for ornaments. Burney does not seem to have liked a steady tremulant, but that does not mean he disliked some vibrato, he did say a close shake was an attractive sound. I could not read Domen’s facsimile. It is also possible that some complaints about vibrato were about people who did a lousy and indiscriminate job of it and not about vibrato in general.

Domen Marincic | Sorry. The relevant part of the footnote based on McVeigh’s book goes something like this: "This technique involves ‘the rapid depression and release of a consonant note on a neighbouring string’, producing ‘an ethereal effect not unlike vibrato’. This device is later referred to by Spohr who warns against its over-use, although he accepts its value on some natural harmonics as ‘these cannot be animated by any tremolo’.

1 September at 11:39

Domen Marincic | Sorry. The relevant part of the footnote based on McVeigh’s book goes something like this: "This technique involves ‘the rapid depression and release of a consonant note on a neighbouring string’, producing ‘an ethereal effect not unlike vibrato’. This device is later referred to by Spohr who warns against its over-use, although he accepts its value on some natural harmonics as ‘these cannot be animated by any tremolo’.

2 September at 00:48 · Edited
Well that topic's settled then. **Why do opera singers use so much vibrato?** Is this technique more than just a tradition?classicfm.com.

**Classic FM post follows:**

If you ask someone to imitate an opera singer, you can guarantee that they will do so with a humorously excessive amount of vibrato. But is this technique more than just a tradition? To get started, here’s Puccini, with lots of amazing vibrato: [NB Link not picked up]

But opera hasn’t always sounded like that.

Opera was born in Italy at the end of the 16th century, when the ‘camerata fiorentina’, a group of musicians and intellectuals from Florence, became fascinated by Ancient Greece and wanted to revive the ‘simplicity’ of ancient tragedy. Then in 1598, Jacopo Peri wrote the first ever opera, *Dafne*.

Although *Dafne* has now been mostly lost, we know that unlike 18th- and 19th-century operas, the production focused on the words, not the music. An opera written in the 16th or 17th century (the Baroque period) could be described as more of a play with musical interludes.

Even so, these interludes were always accompanied by an orchestra or a small musical ensemble, which meant the singers still had to project over the instrumentalists. As operas developed, they came to be divided into two types of singing: recitative and arias. Even in periods of recitative singing, the singers are constantly using their voices, and need to be able to use their tool for a considerable amount of time without damaging the voice.

And here’s where vibrato comes into the mix.

Using vibrato enables the singers to sing very loudly and project for a long period of time, without tiring out their voice. Listen to this video of Elina Garanca singing ‘L’amour est un oiseau rebelle’ from *Carmen*.

Do you see how relaxed she looks while singing her high F sharp at the end? That’s because she’s using vibrato.

Vibrato is an effective way of ensuring your muscles are relaxed while singing, which in turn creates a fuller sound. Vibrato essentially means ‘vibrating’ your voice, which helps a singer maintain their stamina while singing (which they need, to make it through four and a half hours of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*).

But as opera singer David Leigh points out on Quora, vibrato is not exclusive to opera. “Every singer, in every genre, has vibrato”, he says. “What we think of as straight-tone is actually a very small vibrato extent, usually less than 10 cents (or 1/10 of a semitone), and sometimes less than 5 cents. Vibrato rates in popular music usually vary between 4-8 cycles/second, which is the same as the acceptable range for opera singing.”

However, if pop singers do use less vibrato, it is often because they are mic’d up and therefore don’t need to project as much as an unmic’d singer in an opera house.

We like this analogy from composer and writer Saul Tobin on Quora:
So next time you go to the opera, spare a thought for the singers, who have to go on stage night after night for hours of intense, emotional singing, and still manage to knock it out of the park with some cracking vibrato.

Comments

Eleanor Knight  Next week: why do conductors wear socks?  29 September at 10:56

Colin St Martin  Why are conductors employed for pre-19th century repertoire/at all?  29 September at 11:01

Richard Bethell  I'll rise to the bait, but won't bite! This subject was done to death in this group last year in the vibrato wars discussions. You can download my transcript from the National Early Music Association's website at http://www.earlymusic.info/nema.php

National Early Music Association UK  29 September at 12:02

Vladimir Waltham  I know, that's precisely why I thought this link should appear here 😊  29 September at 12:45

Ben Hebbert  Thank goodness for Classic FM then 😊  29 September at 12:06

John Mark Rozendaal  Because the jewelry is strangling them.  29 September at 12:50

Deborah Peters  ^_^  29 September at 13:15

Timothy Tikker  Even so, listen to historic recordings of the great singers of yesteryear: you'll find that their vibrato is much smaller than is the norm today. More and more modern singers have vibrato that completely obliterates the actual pitch of their notes. When they sing e.g. Handel's Messiah airs, there's no actual difference between their long sustained tones, their trills, and their running passage work: each is merely a wobble.  29 September at 12:52

Michael Fleming  Have you heard Conchita Supervia?  29 September at 14:43

Timothy Tikker  Michael Fleming  https://youtu.be/cmu0yttn8vtg

Conchita Supervia  "Una voce poco fa" Il Barbiere...1927  youtube.com  29 September at 15:02

Timothy Tikker  Contrast with this -- in the part just after 2:00 you can hear several passages in which groups of fast notes are practically indistinguishable from sustained tones with vibrato: https://youtu.be/xJmlEDAHusc

Una voce poco fa'. Rossini. ECHO Klassic 2016. Olga...

Olga Peretyatko receives ECHO Klassic Award for the best album (Rossini!) youtube.com  29 September at 15:10
Martin Davids  Are you speaking only of female singers? Caruso wasn't exactly "straight-tone". · 29 September at 18:04

Timothy Tikker  Martin Davids  no, these were just convenient examples. The longer video I posted elsewhere on this thread has examples of both genders. · 29 September at 20:02

Timothy Tikker  I remember when I was in Paris in 1984, attending a concert at a church, an American baritone sang some arias from Handel’s Messiah. My companion was a fellow organist but also an excellent soprano, studying both areas during her time in Paris. Between numbers, she offered that she thought this singer had a pleasant, warm voice, but when she asked my opinion I said that there was no difference between his sustained tones and his fast passage work (e.g. Why Do the Nations Rage), because his strong vibrato turned it all into a wobble. During his next number, my friend sat absolutely still with her eyes closed, and I thought "what is she doing?" It turned out that she was just listening very intently to hear if what I said was true, because immediately at the end of that aria, she announced to me "you're right." · 29 September at 20:08

Timothy Tikker  Martin Davids  listen to this Caruso example. Yes, he has vibrato, but not the currently prevalent type that obscures pitch: https://youtu.be/tNnVVxf0uPg

Enrico Caruso - Amor Mio (Vincenzo Ricciardi)  Recording from 1914. I have...youtube.com· 29 September at 20:13

Timothy Tikker  https://youtu.be/YNrokeGpk1c

Modern Singing vs. Oldschool Singing - Direct confrontation  1. Marton vs. Cigna in Turandot...youtube.com· 29 September at 13:00

Sue Addison  I wish that wouldn't ??
At selective moments beautiful but all the time .. no! · 29 September at 13:12

Timothy Tikker  Vibrato used to be considered an ornament, not a constant. This is made explicit in singing methods e.g. Tosi from the early 18th century. · 29 September at 13:28

George Kennaway  Group admin  No shit. There's a huge body of research that nailed this one years ago. · 29 September at 14:53

Timothy Tikker  George Kennaway  yep, uh huh, right, sho' 'nuff. And when will all this knowledge finally have an effect on how music is performed today?! · 29 September at 17:07 · Edited

George Kennaway  Group admin  Really. Is there anything original that can be contributed to this topic? Can there really be anyone *AT ALL* that doesn't know that vib used to be ornamental to specific notes, then gradually became continuous? that sometimes it's wide, and sometimes narrow? that some people like it, some people don't, and some people are a bit undecided/inconsistent? that there are many examples of singing styles in other cultures that don't use vib (so it's not an innate thing)? that, contrary to some assertions, there's a wide range of practice nowadays? Is there anything left to say? · 29 September at 14:52

Sheila Guymer  Well, it is Classic FM. I doubt the intended readership is anyone on the HPR list. · 29 September at 22:29
George Kennaway Group admin Oh indeed. I was just reacting, perhaps too impatiently, to the prospect of yet another vibrato thread. Which, frankly, is the prospect of an unholy cocktail of statements of the obvious (in this field, there are no other kinds of statement), mixed with personal prejudice (in this field, these proliferate). 29 September at 22:39

Richard Bethell George, your world-weary tone is understandable, given that most posts simply echo issues raised in previous Vibrato Wars threads. I'll make 2 points. First, OP Vladimir Waltham and Timothy Tikker, who I'll come onto in a moment, together with 10 other contributors, were not involved in any of the 19 original Vibrato Wars threads, although I'm not counting a few mini outbreaks which have occurred since March 2016. The main "old hands" posting on this occasion were yourself, Oliver Webber, Robert Dawson and Mark Bailey. So, for the newbies, the issue is fresh. Perhaps you need to resign yourself to a fresh vibrato wars outbreak every 6 months or so, as our membership grows towards the 5,000 mark!. 1 October at 17:28 · Edited

Richard Bethell Second, vocal vibrato is without question the elephant in today's opera house. Feelings ran high, with singers generally supporting the wobbling one-size-fits-all operatic voice, opposed by instrumentalists unhappy with it. But, to answer Timothy Tikker's important question "And when will all this knowledge finally have an effect on how music is performed today", we need to take a holistic view, because vibrato is not the only problem. During the long 18th century, a benign hegemony existed, monitored by the castrati, ensuring that vocalists sang in default straight voice, in neutral or high larynx position, producing high notes in an extended falsetto register. They also trained hard to achieve clear diction and deliver rapid passaggi, good trills and messa di voce, with beautiful results. Unfortunately, since the 1920s, classical singing has got stuck in a malign timewarp; singers emerge from institutions afflicted with a permanent wobble, plummy/throaty production due to laryngeal development and high note shrieks in chest voice (all of which were expressly forbidden by Tosi), with ugly results for Monteverdi, Rossini and everything in between. I think we should try to turn this round, but it won't be easy. 1 October at 17:27

Esha Neogy Agreed; 'tis the nature of things to have discussions recur as new people come along. Most formats don't make it easy to ascertain what's already been said. 1 October at 18:50 · Edited

Bob Mitchell I also detect a tendency for journalistic writers about classical music to treat the whole HIP spectrum as some sort of "past event", from which we can now safely emerge "now that episode is over". Go down that road and you're only going to get people like me when I was about 12 years old: classical music pissed me off totally because of the vocal and string vibrato. 1 October at 19:59


George Kennaway Group admin Oh I say! Why, I wonder, am I reminded of this? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qopCQSWmpM
A Philosophy of the Wheel  One of the little gems from the 1964 movie "Carry on Cleo", starring...youtube.com · 29 September at 15:35

Jonathan Bellman George Kennaway—Jim Dale? Is that the very Jim Dale that reads the Harry Potter books for the Yank releases (as opposed to Stephen Fry for the Brits)? · 1 October at 19:21

George Kennaway Group admin Yes! · 1 October at 21:19

Mark Bailey To echo Timothy Tikker’s point above, it's time that historical recordings enter the vibrato conversation more actively, at least as a way better to understand the evolution (and differences) in its use over time, vocally and instrumentally. As one of many, many examples, Nellie Melba's 1904 recording of "Porgi Amor" from Nozze di Figaro is particularly instructive and characteristic of an earlier time: there’s a quicker and much narrower use of vibrato in the middle range that becomes barely noticeable in the upper and very lower ranges. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8WTCZ2Zaa1Q

"Porgi Amor" from Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of..."Porgi Amor" from Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Nellie Melba, soprano An early recording by Dame Nellie Melba with pian...youtube.com · 29 September at 15:02

John Mark Rozendaal I can’t imagine hearing a performance of this sort of intimacy, tenderness, and restraint in an opera house today. · 29 September at 16:25

Richard Bethell Indeed. But although later critics praised her "bell-like" purity, she did get some critical early reviews. Colonies and India [30 May 1888] concluded: "Her school, unfortunately, is not of the best, and the use of the vibrato is excessive." The Perth Daily News wrote: "When I say that the last impersonator of the sad-fated heroine whom I saw was Mme. Albani it may be understood that I should be somewhat of a captious critic of last night’s performance. Mlle. Melba has a pleasing, resonant voice, sometimes a little forced in the upper register and its effect frequently marred by a distressing tremolos [sic]." · 29 September at 18:21

Mark Bailey It's so interesting that Melba's use of vibrato would be considered excessive when now it's considered minimal. Also, compared to her contemporaries who also made recordings, I wouldn't say her vibrato use stands out as more than the rest. In her later recordings, as with Adelina Patti, there certainly is a more noticeable vibrato, likely due to age. The 1888 critique is fascinating. We have many (maybe all) of Melba's recordings in the Yale collection, and, having listened to most of them, I don't really agree with the criticism from the recordings perspective (though, again, I think the content of the critiques is fascinating). In 1888 she was pretty young, and maybe the fast vibrato -- coupled with some youthful nerves -- made it more prominent(?) · 29 September at 18:30

Timothy Tikker I think that the main reason for vocal vibrato going out of control nowadays is that, over the past century or so, orchestral instruments have become louder: wide-bore brass, metal instead of gut strings, etc. Singers more and more force their voices to maximum loudness, and vibrato is used to make the sound more penetrating ("projecting"). · 29 September at 15:16
Luis Roncayolo Actually, vibrato doesn’t make things project. The balance between forward and backward how projection is found. Place it "forward" and the smallest voice can "cut" (too far forward = "nasal"). Place it "back" and you get the color (too far back and it get "woofy" = manufactured "old" sound for 20 somethings).
What causes out of control vibrato is, in order of frequency:
1) bad breath support
2) mental concept of "vibrato" (there should be more time above the pitch center as opposed to below it)
3) bad role models
4) singing repertoire that is beyond your physical gifts

Timothy Tikker Luis Roncayolo true. But the myth is that vibrato aids projection. Also, forcing the voice too loudly -- i.e. projecting via sheer volume -- can cause vibrato to be out of control.

Luis Roncayolo Timothy Tikker Then don't perpetuate the "myth"... 😊:)

Timothy Tikker Luis Roncayolo I wasn't seeking to perpetuate it, rather merely to describe it.

Luis Roncayolo Yes, pitch is rising, halls are getting bigger, and brass keep getting louder. These are all problems all musicians face. Bayreuth was designed to address some of these issues—the orchestra is under the musicians, the hall not so big, etc. He wanted Italian-trained singers for his operas, for their ability to "cut". This brings up another reason for bad intonation: National chauvinism. There are essentially two schools of French singing--those that were trained by Italians brought in by Lully and those that adhere to "use only enough breath as if speaking" (i.e., "We are French")... I guess that it is a subset of issue #1.

Martí Sanmartí Bad taste?

Savio de La Corte Soloist interpretation lives, and has always lived, from exclusiveness in sound and realization. The moment there's an attempt to standardize it, interest in the individual is lost. About singers, each body is so immensely different that I'm not sure we can precisely define "old", "new" or "middlesouthwestern" styles properly. Nevertheless if a singer must narrow the vibrato in order to achieve a trill, than that singer has doubtless a too wide vibrato... And it happens quite often, unfortunately.

Allan Evans Vibrato makes music more beautiful and soulful. Here's a perfect example: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2f8mCDla8A

Marisa Galvany asks, "Who is Stefan Zucker?" Here's STEFAN ZUCKER with ROSINA...youtube.com

Robert Dawson Bah! I wasted some 30 or 40 seconds reading this intensely stupid and poorly researched article. Who posted such junk? Shame!
Vladimir Waltham Sorry for wasting your time, but did you really expect to learn something from classic fm? I thought it had comedic value in the context of the various vibrato wars.  

Oliver Webber Not wasted at all: now you've learned that Classic FM publishes nonsense, which will save you time in the future 😁😊  

Neil Coleman Forgive my asking, especially when the topic is passing ripeness, but was the question of historical pedagogy raised? It seems to me that the matter of organic HIP singing is something of a chimera without vocal training - and with or without the castrati and so-called 'throw-back voices' - as it was practised in the past, otherwise we have what Christopher Page has likened to clip-on vocal accessories for the various repertoires. Andrea von Ramm did attempt to teach historically to some extent at the SCB, and wrote an article in Early Music (c.1978) detailing the various strictures necessary to cover most of them. Specialist singers are often refreshingly frank about their pedagogy as they are perfectly aware that their teachers have been more or less accommodating to their voices while establishing a modern technique tailored more or less to them. Another can of worms opened...  

Timothy Tikker From what little I've read from actual historical singing treatises, I find many things that are virtually absent from consideration, let alone actual practice, in modern HIP singing. I fully intend to read more such treatises in order to get to the bottom of all this...  

Beth Garfinkel Well, that's a whole 'nother can of worms. If Tosi is to be believed, for example, if you're an alto or soprano, your chest voice _IS_ your voice, and it is the head voice that is an add-on and must be blended into the chest voice. Which means that we have to start imagining that Handel would have written "Rejoice Greatly" for someone (male or female) who practiced vocal technique à la Betty Buckley or Jill Scott. Probably also a lot more nasal than we tend to prefer now as well.  

Beth Garfinkel And according to Julianne Baird (in “A Performer's Guide to 17th-Century Music”), it also applies backward to the 17th century.  

Neil Coleman The ramifications are legion, but getting back to those documented Roman singing schools of the mid seventeenth century where the trill was practised for hours every afternoon, Tosi's insistence on trills and messe di voce throughout the range, and differentiation between major and minor semitones etc. takes a lot of work. As Tetrazzini stated a century ago, singers are too often satisfied with too little. In the Agricola translation and Hiller's treatises, it seems expectations had risen and vocal refinement was extreme.  

Neil Coleman Julianne Baird has done some good work on these.  

Beth Garfinkel Neil Coleman Are those major and minor semitones where the diatonic semitones are wider or the chromatic ones, or do we know?  

Neil Coleman With the voice it could be either really, but from what I've seen they liked a minor semitone between, for instance, d-sharp and e, and a major semitone between, say, e and f.  

Neil Coleman I read that in a French treatise. Somewhere...  

Beth Garfinkel Weird!  

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Neil Coleman Not really, Beth: the d-sharp is going to be closer to the e than the e is to the f, hence the more sour third from b to the d-sharp, and the narrower and sweeter third from the c to the e.· 1 October at 19:50 · Edited

Neil Coleman I daresay some voice teachers work on this, but how many?· 1 October at 19:49

Timothy Tikker The 18th century transverse flute had one key, for Eb. When Quantz added a second key it was for... D#! By the same token, woodwind fingering charts in the 18th and even early 19th century give separate fingerings for various enharmonics, and not just Eb/D#, but even as remote as B#/C. So there was a concern for accurate intonation in those days, which of course is the antithesis of a modern singer sporting a vibrato a major third wide.· 1 October at 20:07

Timothy Tikker Neil Coleman not nearly enough...· 1 October at 20:15

Beth Garfinkel Neil Coleman In which system? They’re both diatonic semitones. The chromatic semitone would be from e-flat to e, but on an instrument without fixed pitches, e-flat and d-sharp don’t have to be the same pitch. Disclaimer: I play the harpsichord, so I’ve had to do a fair bit of dealing with this. As a singer, I suspect that it’s much easier to adapt to that than teachers think it is.· 1 October at 20:19

Neil Coleman It’s become more of a problem in early music: there was another baroque opera broadcast last night that made me wonder how worthwhile it was to have instruments playing in mean-tone temperament when the voices sometimes were so far from even just intonation to great applause.· 1 October at 20:20

Neil Coleman Beth Garfinkel: there wasn’t any mention of a system. It was from the first half of the eighteenth century in France. Sounds like it might have been something rather generalised and generally acceptable like the rules for tuning published in the Harpsichord Preceptor (?) in London in the 1730s. Mattheson describes a general temperament in which all the minor thirds are such and such, and all the fifths narrowed slightly etc. I also read that melody instruments did not tune themselves to these. Hopefully I’ll find that in my notes.· 1 October at 20:28

Beth Garfinkel Neil Coleman Live audiences are easily pleased. OTOH, I know that singers can do precise tuning; Ensemble PAN did some darned good Pythagorean in their recordings, and the Consort of Musicke did a recording called Madrigali Erotici, which is Monteverdi madrigals from his Book 7 that’s in a pretty convincing mean tone.

When I play and sing in meantone, I do my darnedest to stay in tune with it, to the point of having turned a past teacher’s vowel rotation exercise in a consonant rotation exercise--play and sing the text, with all the consonants, but turn all the vowels to "ah" and use the extra concentration energy provided to tune the consonants, because if they’re at the right pitch, the vowels will follow.· 1 October at 23:19

Neil Coleman Yes, the public will applaud all sorts of singing, and Harpsichords giving them pythagorean thirds at the top of chords. I once attended a course with the Hilliard Ensemble where tuning was discussed. The real test is changing between vowels as certain combinations give a shift in pitch that has to be compensated for. It was said that it was only a handful of ensembles that were able to sing in different temperaments
then. I'm loathe to list them, but you'll have an idea of who they were. It sounds like basic hard work that has to be done again.

Oliver Webber Neil Coleman picking up on your comments about semitones: D sharp to E, and E to F, are *both* diatonic (large - 16:15) semitones. E flat to E is a chromatic (small - 25:24) semitone. This is seen in singing treatises, string treatises (e.g. fingerboard diagrams) and works of music theory right up to the early 19th century. D sharp to E would only be narrow in a keyboard temperament where D sharp was not favoured - bringing the note closer to E flat, in fact. Attached is Corri’s explanation - it’s much later, but I happen to have it to hand. What is not 100% clear from his advice is how to practice this effectively with a keyboard, however!
FB Vibrato Wars  V27, 25 Dec 2017 & subsequently  Page 67

V27. Klaus Miehling, launched 25 December 2017, and Richard Bethell later in 2018

Posted in “Vibrato is a Bizarre and Unnecessary Affectation

Vibrato  Klaus Miehling  25 December 2017

For those who read German:

Vibrato
Wie allgemein ist wohlbekannt,
Der Teufel Jazz und Rock erfand.
Doch konnte, dieses anzu hören,
Er nicht jedermann verführen.

Dass auch jene, welche massig
Renaissance hör'n oder Klassik,
Nicht durch allzu reine, schöne
Harmonien, sauber're Töne
Ihren Sinn auf Gutes lenken,
Galt es, sich was auszudenken.

Als die Höllenflammen züngeln,
Da beginnt's bei ihm zu klingeln:
Könnte man nicht solch Benehmen
In die Tonkunst übernehmen?

Alte, Bässe und Tenöre,
Auch Sopran, wie man höre,
Ließ er mit der Stimmie zittern,
Dass bei solchen Klangewittern
(Die man bald „Vibrato“ nannte)
Man den Ton nicht mehr erkannte.

Satanstöchter Ihr und -söhne,
Gebet uns doch reine Töne!
Könnt Ihr nicht bei Eurem Zittern
Satans böse Absicht wittern?
Lasset Euch zum Tremolieren
Doch vom Diesem nicht verführen!

Doch der Teufel flüstert ein,
Dass anders es könnt' gar nicht sein:
Das Vibrieren sei natürlich,
Reine Klänge ungebührlich.

Und der Sänger viel im Land
Den Nutzen haben bald erkannt:
Einst schalt man sie zu hoch, zu tief –
Doch jetzt man ihnen „Bravo“ rief,
Sangen sie nur hoch und laut:
Auf den Rest wird nicht geschaut.
Auf und ab winkt jeder Ton,
Ob C, ob Cis, wer hört das schon?
Das Publikum, sogleich verführt,
Applaudiert, wem's nicht gebühret.

Auch der Streicher, infiziert,
Hin und her die Greifhand rühret,
Dass im ganzen Opernhaus
Es schwankt und wackelt, welch ein Graus!

Octaven, Quinten oder Terzen:
Sauber nur geh'n sie zu Herzen.
Wird die Harmonie verwässert,
Bleibt der Hörer ungebessert.
Einst als Katharsis gedacht,
Wird Musik zu Gift gemacht.
Gleichwie im Hals die Töne schwanken
Tun im Hirn es die Gedanken.

Mag es auch noch Manche quälen,
Satan bringt es weiter Seelen.
Nicht nur Elvis und John Lennon
Ewig in der Hölle brennen,

For those who [don't] read German:

Vibrato
As General is well known,
The Devil Jazz and rock.
But could listen to this,
He is not a man.

That also those who are
Renaissance hear or classical,
Not too pure, beautiful
Harmonies, CT're tones
Guiding your sense of good,
It was a thing to think about.

When the flames blazing,
It starts to ring with him:
Couldn't be such behavior
In the music?

Old, basses and tenors,
Also Sopranos, as you hear,
Let him tremble with the voice,
That sounds like lightning
(which soon called "Vibrato")
You didn't recognize the sound.

Satan's daughters and sons,
Don't you worship us?
Can you not shake your trembling
Satanic evil intent?
Let yourselves be to
But not to seduce him!

But the devil whispers,
That's not the way it is.
The Vibration is natural,
Pure sounds unbecoming.

And the singer much in the country
The benefits soon recognized:
Once you turn it too high, too deep -
But now they were called "Bravo"
They only sang high and loud;
The rest won’t look
On and off every sound,
Whether c, CIS, who can hear it?
The audience, and he leadeth,
Applaud who's not gebühret.

Also the strings, infiziert,
And the finger rühret,
That all the opera house
It sways and sways, what a travesty!

Octaves, fifths or thirds:
Just go to your heart.
Dilute the harmony,
The Listener will be better.
Once conceived as catharsis,
Music is made to poison.
As in the throat the tones vary
Do it in the brain.

May it torture some others,
Satan brings it far away.
Not just Elvis and John Lennon
Burning in hell forever,
Auch die Sänger, die vibrieren,
Müssen sich dort einquartieren –
Und der Hörer große Schar,
Die in den Konzerten war.
Hätt' Gott geschrieben in der Bibel,
Dass Vibrato ist von Übel,
Beispielsweis' als eft' Gebot,
Dann wär' geringer wohl die Not.
So mancher hätte sich besonnen,
Satan nicht so leicht gewonnen.
K.M., 2017

Also the singers who vibrate,
There must be a
And the listener of large numbers,
That was in the concerts.
If God wrote in the Bible,
That vibrato is bad,
E.G. ' as eleven s' bid,
Then it would be a little trouble.
Some would have been prudent,
Satan has not won so easily.
K. M., 2017

Richard Bethell
2 January
In response to Klaus Miehling's post, here is a funny poem dating from 1861
“TREMOLO”. —The following capital verses “from a Musical Sufferer” we find in the Boston Transcript. As they are equally applicable in this latitude, where our vocalists are striving for the ridiculous "wiggle". We give them insertion:

Do enlighten me, —is it from weakness or choice,
Comes this villainous tremolo habit of singing, —
This new "wiggle" —as somebody terms it—of voice,
Which these lyrical songsters are constantly bringing?

If I go to the opera, —big, burly throats
Of the amorous tenors and chivalrous basses,
That appear as if formed for sustainment of notes,
And the even prolongment of all vocal graces. —

Their heroics declaim in a quivering way,
That all vocal propriety clearly outrages,
And in shaky cadenzas their passions convey,
To remind one of ague in all its bad stages.

And obese prima-donnas—whose figures suggest
An addiction to lager, if not a style largo,
With their arias wavy with vocal unrest,
On legitimate pleasure lay hopeless embargo.

Cavatinas are corkscrewed, and recitatif
Is a weak undulation of vocal delivery,
Nor does sonorous unison bring its relief,
But is tipsy in tone, and in climaxes quivery.

If at church I attend—where some petted quartette
Of their florid accomplishment give exhibition,
In the place of devotional method—I get
The same tremolo, only in cheapened edition.

I had thought that the concert-room nuisance had reached
Its extent in the ignorant chatter and giggle, —
But let ballet be sung or bravura be screeched,
There's a trial yet worse — the inveterate "wiggle".

The great organ is played,—I am there, —for at length
Is the fortunate time to hear harmonies semblant
To the instrument’s massiveness, finish and strength;
The performer commences—and out comes the "tremblant".

It would seem that all vocalisation, before
It were fit to the auditor's ear to be taking,
Must, like physic, observing medicinal law,
Undergo the anterior process of shaking.

"Wiggle" on, then, ye singers, both lyric and local,—
Fashion tolerates, so I submit without blinking;
But, as strange as it seems, such performance as vocal
Are, in popular phrase, "no great shakes", to my thinking
(Chicago Tribune, Jan 23, 1864, Tremolo)
Richard Bethell 5 April
Herewith this example of "high art" published in the Evansville Journal of 8 June 1901.

The soprano stood up and sang "The Star Spangled Banner" as a solo.
She pulled out the tremolo stop, and the effect was about as follows:
"O-o-o-o, sa-a-a-y, ca-a-a-n you-u-u-uu
se-e-e-e-e, by-y-y the daw-aw-aw-n's
ea-a-a-erily li-li-li-light,
Wha-a-a-t so-o-o prou-ou-ou-oudly wee-e
ha-a-a-illed a-a-at the twl-i-i-li-li-light's
la-a-a-ast gle-e-e-aming.
Who-o-o-o-oose br-r-o-a-d stri-i-ipes a-a-and
bri-i-light sta-a-a-ars, throu-ou-ough the pee-er-lou-u-u's fl-i-light,
O-o-o-oer the ra-a-a-aampa-a-a-arts wee-e
wa-a-a-ached wee-e-e-e so-o-o ga-a-a-
al-a-a-a-a-antl stre-e-e-aming,
and so forth.
But this, be it observed, is high art.

Beth Garfinkel I think we're probably the only country that requires our national anthem to be sung as a solo. 6 April 2018


“What think you of Topsqualler’s silvery tones?”
Asked Jones of a keen criticiser,
“When she’s singing ‘The Largo’,” he said unto Jones,
It reminds me of ‘Laughing Eliza’.

“She certainly nibbles the vocal top-fruit
And touches the plums and the peaches,
But you can’t judge a voice by its tiniest toot,
Though portions altissimo reaches.

“She shivers too much on her upper b-flat.
A kind of blanc-mange vibrato,
Recalling the rackety rat-tat-tat-tat
Of Lewis guns’ jerky staccato.

“Each critic who hears it in honesty owns,
Though there’s many a sweet enough stave in it.
You’ll know, by its timorous, tremulous tones,
Her voice has a permanent wave in it!” 13 May 2018

Richard Bethell From the Daily Herald 31 Dec 1936
There was once a tenor vibrato,
Who sang an excessive rubato,
The start was staccato,
The middle legato
The finish—a rotten tomato. 17 May 2018

Richard Bethell From New York Dramatic Mirror 27 Mar 1882: ‘She [Mlle Marie Vachot] tripped on, opened her mouth, gasped and began “o-o-o-na-vow-ow-ce p-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-ow-co fa!” I thought the woman was going to have a fit; but no, she smiled, shrieked in such a way as to put an Apache’s war-whoop to shame, wobbled around the keys in a fearful vibrato, and instead of enjoying the performance I felt as if I were in a medical college clinic room attending an illustrated lecture on “Ague of the Vocal Chords”’ 30 May 2018
Richard Bethell Quiz and the Lantern, Adelaide, 24 Nov 1893: 'Editor Ted Clark talks of a tenor with “a sympathetic vibrato”. It is an audience which deserves sympathy when there is any vibrato around.' 30 May 2018

Beth Garfinkel And then there's the book on how to sing from the early 20th century, which says that if you have a vibrato or tremolo, it means you’re trying to be too loud. 30 May 2018
Max Hummus

· 31 December 2017 at 01:08 · Sheffield

***Badly worded original to which many have taken offence:

"Is there a point at which a rigid adherence to historical performance research could/should be set aside in favour of the performance itself?"

***Alternative wording, offered in the hope that people will leave me alone and stop assuming I am meaning them any ill-will:

"Is there a point when we, as musicians who bass all or part of our practice on historical performance research, could/should make pragmatic decisions that benefit our performances?"

Even this is almost certainly riddled with errors/oversights/perceived direct insults, but if, dear reader, you are tempted to have a go at me, please step back and cut me a generous length of slack.

Cheers.

The following discussion occurred on page 82 of the thread:

Joe Bolger I think perhaps the way in which the original question was worded is not so much about how people perform but the rhetorical style many HIP researchers have used in print to defend their positions. Now, my experience pretty much exclusively pertains to singing, but I have encountered quite a lot of literature from 1965 to the present day which makes unfounded assumptions about the attitudes and aptitudes of 'modern singers'. Frequently, both the criticism of these (often imaginary) singers and the specific ways of singing researchers think they should be adopting are expressed in very 'rigid' terms. Plenty of examples upon request.... 9 Jan 2018

Edited

Daniel Ungermann One of the problems is the terminology: Tosi/Agricola talks about "Stossen aus der Brust" This cannot be the similar thing like we sing today (diaphragmatic breathing) - but the knowledge of anatomy and so the terminology as well is not the same today as in the 17th/18th century, that's the problem. On the other hand: Especially in the States of Southern Europe there are people who sing automatically with a vibrato - without to know why - it seems to be a anatomic phenomenon.....Each early text needs an interpretation, because the language and the terminology have changed.· 9 Jan 2018

Edited

Oliver Webber Having read what Max later wrote to explain his question, I'm not sure that's quite what he was driving at, but it's an interesting point nonetheless: plenty of examples of "straw man" criticism in every field, sadly. I'd be interested to see some examples.· 9 Jan 2018

10:22, 18 Replies

Joe Bolger In my necessarily hurried perusal of this thread your offerings have been among the most sensible and interesting!. 9 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Here is an example from Richard Bethell "...today’s ‘one size fits all’ operatic voice is, more often than not, hated by early music fans. I believe that there is extensive, inarticulate, subterranean discontent with this tremendous debasement of classical singing by the professionals.". 9 Jan 2018
Joe Bolger And John Potter: 'Rather than seeing the past as a creative opportunity, singers have tended to ignore the implications of any research which might undermine their professional credibility.' 9 Jan 2018

Oliver Webber Ah. Richard is notorious. He has done absolutely tremendous archival work, especially on the subject of vocal vibrato, collecting and categorising reviews and other comments over centuries. This has the potential to offer great insights - including (if I may be so bold) a rethinking of what the ideal qualities of a voice might be, and a questioning (always healthy) of some trends in modern singing teaching. But - and it's a very big but - he has an unfortunate tendency to write in a very insulting and generalising way, which I can assure you is rejected by most of us working in the field. 9 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Audrey Ekdahl Davidson: 'All too often contemporary singers sing with constricted throats, and they fail to support their tones adequately with the breath. Often they do not even recognize the wobble in their voices.' 9 Jan 2018

Oliver Webber John Potter: that brief comment is, it's fair to say, too generalising - but I would argue that it contains a kernel of truth: there is often resistance to considering certain types of vocal approach which might be suggested by the sources (in areas like vibrato, breathing, recitative sung in a speaking manner, etc.), because of a fear of not being taken seriously in auditions or by conductors and directors. This is a genuine issue faced by many singers, and to a lesser extent by players, especially in the early stages of their career - but it does create a problem for the development of historical performance. So I think John was right to point it out, but he could have used less loaded language. 9 Jan 2018

Oliver Webber Audrey Davidson: "all too often" may be a reflection of her own experience, to be fair. I'm not qualified to comment on vocal technique or constricted throats, but I have encountered situations where vibrato has evolved into a pitch wobble without the singer being aware. It's the over-generalising that is the problem - we should all be careful to avoid it! 9 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Oliver Webber I have a lot of respect for John and the way he approaches things. These examples are all part of a wider discussion on this topic which will form one chapter of my Ph.D... I'm not concerned with 'calling out' individuals so much as revealing patterns of language which make these kinds of loaded statements all too easy for researchers to fall back on. 9 Jan 2018

Oliver Webber No, I understand that it's not personal; and I think there is great danger in loaded language which can detract from the sometimes very valid points which may lie behind some of these comments. 9 Jan 2018

Roger Evans Oliver Webber And "wobble" is not just a matter of vocal quality, it has serious pitch implications when, in major opera houses, the orchestra's harmonies are too often [sic] the only clue to what note the singer thinks he or she is singing, the wobble making too many possible choices available. 9 Jan 2018

Barbara Norton Oliver Webber, I agree 100 percent. 9 Jan 2018

Richard Bethell Oliver, thanks for your kind comments on my work. And, vis a vis your final sentence, I suppose I’m guilty as charged. However, my generalisation on “this tremendous debasement of classical singing” is quite mild set against some of the angry 19th C tirades against vibrato singing. And, I have on a few occasions got into trouble crossing the boundary from generalisations into telling it how it is, including naming names, which I won’t do again. 9 Jan 2018
Richard Bethell Oliver, as you know, laryngeal development is an important component of the singer’s formant, which today’s singers are trained to achieve. But in the 18th century, it was described as guttural, throaty, thick, or fat singing and unanimously rejected by Tosi, Quantz, Mancini and all the critics. Certainly, the best singers avoided it. Dibdin commented [Musical Mentor, 1805]: “Fat singing is also a favorite mode, as if a man had eaten too much after dinner; but I know of nothing that so completely destroys the effect of singing, and at the same time is so comical in itself, as swallowing the words”.· 9 Jan 2018

John Mark Rozendaal Richard Bethell I do see that you are describing a large consensus of eminences. But might this be one of those cases where the fact that somebody was critiquing fat singing means that somebody else was doing fat singing so somebody liked fat singing? So there was more than one way to do it? (I'm a naïf here, really asking, not fishing.)· 9 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger John Mark Rozendaal this is an absolutely central point. As Oliver Webber has said previously knowing the life circumstances of your theorists is absolutely key. In my experience, most singing theorists adopt a pessimistic attitude. Rather than saying what they like about the singers of the day, they complain about what they don't like. Compare this with the more 'journalistic' attitude of Burney who, on singing at least, appears not so much a theorist as social commentator.· 10 Jan 2018

Roger Evans Joe Bolger Not to mention that somebody like Verdi never seems to focus on vocal production or quality. He shows concern only for how the singer embodies the music and the persona being represented.· 10 Jan 2018

Richard Bethell John Mark Rozendaal Your “large consensus of eminences” amounted to a rule-bound hegemony, controlled by the Italian castrati, which I believe was ultimately benign, because they delivered artistic sound and style. But, on your specific point, you’re quite right. As this is HPR, I hope you don’t mind if I give you some informative sources in support, which I’ve studied in some detail. First, Burney was 100% in step with the Italian hegemony in his criticism, for example, in his Rees article [1810] on Testa, under Italian Singing, where he writes: ‘Tosi says: “let the master attend with great care to the voice of his scholar, which, whether it be di petto, or di testa, should always come forth neat and clear, without passing through the nose, or being choaked in the throat; which are two of the most horrible defects in a singer, and past all remedy if once grown into a habit” ’. Second, he was backed up by Charles Smyth [1810]: “Singing in the throat is occasioned by making a kind of tone which conveys to a hearer the idea that the singer has a swelling in his throat; and in addition to this inconvenience has a chord tied tight round his neck...The Italians, who hold guttural singing in utter abhorrence, always practise to some such word as "La", "Fa", or the word "Amen". I never heard an Italian sing in his throat. . .” Third, Bacon agreed in QMMR [Quarterly Musical Magazine, 1818], while making clear there were exceptions: “We never heard an Italian singer to our recollection in the slightest degree guttural, we have very rarely indeed heard an English singer, whose voice could in all parts be said to be absolutely free from the throat. There is a thickness even in Miss Travis's tone (though we do not accuse her of singing in the throat) which we are persuaded arises from the tone not coming from quite so high a site in the passage, as the Italians would have taught her to bring it.” Other QMMR sources do indeed suggest that some singers in London were inclined to throaty production.· 10 Jan 2018

John Mark Rozendaal Richard Bethell Thank you for your informative response!· 10 Jan 2018

Richard Bethell John Mark Rozendaal Thank you for your informative response, Editted
Kate Bennett Wadsworth So you read “singing in the throat” as a low larynx? That seems like a bit of a leap... 11 Jan 2018

Richard Bethell No leap at all! "Choaked in throat", "Swelling in throat", "Cord round neck", "tone not coming quite so high in the head" all point to low larynx! Also, read Mancini, who is quite clear on this. I am collecting all references and will be publishing in due course. 12 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Accepting your greater familiarity with the sources Richard, might ‘choaked’, ‘cord round neck’ etc be indicative of tongue root tension? 12 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Also excessive use of middle constrictor could be a factor... 12 Jan 2018

Neil Coleman Oliver Webber Of course. Perhaps it’s better not to comment after Sunday dinners. I was thinking of keyboards, of course, with which wind and string players were told not to play in tune, as you mentioned, in a source I read only last month; still hoping to find it. That’s a nice example there. Thanks for that. 3 October at 08:19
What might HI performers learn from today’s pop musicians? [Joe Bolger](http://www.fbw.com/v29) 29 January 2018

20:36

29 [Alberto Sousa](http://www.fbw.com/v29) Freedom to ornament and rubato

Joe Bolger How about anything to do with sound/timbre? Richard Bethell - I'm thinking of you... 29 Jan 2018

Alberto Sousa I think that’s a can of worms better left unopened, Joe... 29 Jan 2018

Alberto Sousa I’ve the feeling most HI performers and audiences would not like the answer to that question. 29 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Well they might just find out 😊... some of us have very little to lose! 29 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger And cans of worms are rarely much use left unopened. 29 Jan 2018

Alberto Sousa It’s a thorny issue that messes with people’s own notions of vocal registers and technique and people can get very defensive about that. I’ll just say I think the vocal production of pop singers, in terms of how and especially WHERE they deal with register breaks, is probably much closer to the way baroque singers sang than the modern classical singer’s approach. I don’t want to start a discussion on it, though, because I know it would be painful and Facebook isn’t the best place to have these discussions. If anyone is terribly offended by my statement, please ignore me, I’m just a dumb tenor. 29 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger I'm not at all offended and the relationship between register breaks and timbre is, I think, a fascinating thing to explore. In exploring my 'rock' voice and the relationship between primal sound, register and affect I have found a lot of expressivity that I felt was not open to me as a classical countertenor. The key thing though is to not give a damn... which is difficult, cos you still want to get booked for stuff! Your comments are far from dumb and I think many would welcome your thoughts on the issue. 29 Jan 2018

Alberto Sousa I’d happily discuss it over a coffee, if you want. Still, ultimately, I’m not sure how desirable/productive/sealable it would be to try and reconstruct that sound. It would require serious retraining for most singers, audiences probably wouldn’t like it and it is possible that the modern sound is just a product of better way of singing... That’s why I say it’s a can of worms better left unopened. 29 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger I'm in the midst of writing up some stuff on this. Ultimately I think these are experiments that will exist outside a saleable model, at least in the immediate future. For what it's worth I think the re-training is more a matter of will than possibility. I have found that my own retraining has not had any impact on the quality of my countertenor singing and has actually had quite a speedy development curve. 29 Jan 2018

Richard Bethell It’s a can of worms alright. If singers were really to adopt the historical record for all early music up to and including Rossini, they would have to jettison continuous vibrato, laryngeal development, exclusive use of chest voice and shrieking/bellowing of high notes. All these were denounced as faults by Tosi et al and avoided by the best singers through the long 18th century. Perhaps vocal practice should be taken out of the conservatory and restored to the amateur domain, which would do wonders for singing as a social activity. 31 Jan 2018
Esha Neogy No can of worms should be left unopened in a field like this. Opened, commented upon, and then put aside for practical purposes, now that's different. 😊 3 Feb 2018

Esha Neogy I also disagree that Facebook is always a bad place for such discussions. Nowhere else do so many people have such open access to a conversation (except for maybe some listserv discussions). Yes, some things about the format can be difficult, but if you have participants who can handle it, the flow and exchange of ideas can be superb. 3 Feb 2018

Alberto Sousa You’re absolutely right, Esha, I guess I’m just a bit tired of Facebook discussions at the moment. People can get very defensive here and not particularly open to an actual dialogue. That sometimes includes me, though I’m making a conscious effort to be slightly less of a wanker online.

Joe Bolger Sometimes I wonder if fora like this actually reveal more accurately the passion with which we hold our convictions. In conversation we are so conflict averse that FB becomes a place to vent what we actually think. I wonder if we haven't become a little over sensitive? My mum just completed her philosophy phd - she told me that when she went to conferences scholars would be arguing very vigorously during proceedings but would then be having a pint and a laugh together in the pub after. Surely learning to distinguish academic discourse from personal attacks is something we can all aspire to? 3 Feb 2018

Esha Neogy Well said! (both of you). 4 Feb 2018

Kris Martin Blackthorn Improvising and audience interaction. 29 Jan 2018

Danny Purtell 29 Jan 2018

Robbie Haylett 29 Jan 2018

Ben Thapa Liberation from self imposed constraint, and the embracing of individuality of timbre and vocal production over a generic impression of a period interpretation. I learned so much from this. So oft played but relevant to this discussion, even if it’s not quite “today’s”... https://youtu.be/Y11AMsuh6Ls 29 Jan 2018  Jeff Buckley Didos Lament HDyoutube.com

Liza Graham Extremes of costume and fancy hats. 29 Jan 2018

Alberto Sousa . 30 Jan 2018

Jim O'Toole No sheet music on stage. 29 Jan 2018

Benjamin Stein Just put in a thesis proposal on that very subject! Popular music training that is not taking place at colleges is repertoire based - learning a set of "standards" within a particular musical style - jazz standards, rock standards, country, metal, etc. The repertoire becomes a set of schematic models to internalize, vary, combine, and above all, to memorize and play in any key. I think a similar set of "standards" could be applicable to HI. For some players, this is happening already - they are very comfortable with ground bass models, for instance. I'm arguing for something even more basic - that musicians should be taught cadenzi (cadences), the rule of the octave, and various moti di bassi (bass schemas), and that varying these models should be built into practice from the beginning of training. Also, that it should be part of the training of all musicians, not just continuo players and the occasional
adventurous soloist. This is happening already with some performers and curricula - but my sense is that it's not as widespread as one might hope. 30 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Love this Benjamin - keep us updated! 30 Jan 2018

Jim O'Toole And harmony and counterpoint? Does understanding music from the creator’s point of view inform how to play it? 30 Jan 2018

Benjamin Stein Counterpoint is absolutely key. There’s a lot of work being done on historical improvisation here and there - keyboardists learning to work on partimenti (Neapolitan improvisation drills) and vocalists improvising in a Renaissance style. An awareness of the bass at all times, and how an improvised line fits in with it both melodically and intervallicly, is an aspect of how they created divisions. And that type of synthesized linear and harmonic awareness is something you pick up in jazz and rock improv - the chord changes function as a bass line model, and you have to keep those parameters in your head as you solo. 30 Jan 2018

Jim O'Toole I would have thought that the compositional techniques of counterpoint, species etc., ought to precede actual improvisation - if you suspend "real time" first and work out how to actually compose fluently, you might stand a chance of doing successfully that in real time improvisation, no? 30 Jan 2018

Benjamin Stein That's where models come in handy - they can be memorized, internalized, and varied. I believe that counterpoint is learned more effectively by practicing it than by writing it down. That's what partimento drill was all about. I'm not a fan of the species method as commonly taught in conservatory classes - too much writing, not enough playing. 30 Jan 2018

Tim Braithwaite Just come from a rehearsal where I'm teaching a bunch of enthusiastic (nerdy) singers how to improvise counterpoint and it's so much faster and more natural to learn the basics as an aural skill than by writing it down! 31 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Tim it's amazing how often researchers assume singers are not at all nerdy and completely incapable of the kind of learning you are describing! 31 Jan 2018

Tim Braithwaite Joe Bolger Especially since counterpoint was an entirely vocal and aural tradition, I'm amazed how many instrumentalists fall apart when removed from their instrument! (No offence to the instrumentalists on the post!) 31 Jan 2018

Joe Bolger Too often we forget it is a physical and technical skill. In the same way that sports people learn somatic schemas that they can adapt to changing circumstances, musicians learn ways of using their bodies that increase their facility in analogous situations. 31 Jan 2018

Jim O'Toole I still maintain that written 4 and 5 part counterpoint has enormous value though. Imho considering the whole, from the composers perspective, teaches you to hear multiple lines at once. This means when playing you are able to broaden your awareness of how your own line interacts with the other voices and enables you to play with understanding, even when sight reading an unfamiliar piece. 31 Jan 2018

Benjamin Stein When you think about it, the skill necessary to be in a bar or wedding band shows the importance of memory and aural skills, which are not always well-fostered in training focused on score execution. I've seen musicians learn and arrange songs as they were being played in front of them, on stage. If you analyze the process by which this is achieved, an aspect of it is learning and recognizing models, keeping them in the memory and being able to quickly sort, organize and reproduce them in a given order. That's a skill
that partimento training gave to musicians - it's similar to popular music training in a number of ways. And, yeah, it involves physical as well as cognitive memory - which is probably a false dichotomy, but anyhow...! 31 Jan 2018

**James Savage-Hanford** How about multi-instrumentality as an aesthetic ideal? And extending this to a figurative (or, in the case of singers, potentially literal) notion of 'multi-vocality'? 30 Jan 2018

**Joe Bolger** Absolutely. Certainly I think our current notions of voice are unnecessarily pigeon-holing. (Terrible sentence - but you get what I mean!) 30 Jan 2018

**David Cane** The return of the haute-contre. 30 Jan 2018

**Joe Bolger** Very much so! If we classical singers could let go of the need for fully integrated registers this could be a real possibility. 30 Jan 2018

**James Savage-Hanford** I already make judicious use of my falsetto on a Sunday morning.. 30 Jan 2018

**Joe Bolger** ...just as I make judicious use of my chest, *James*. 30 Jan 2018

**David Cane** **Joe Bolger** might this be framed socio-historically.. the notion that the late 18th century and the 19th century saw a increasing restriction of vocal-register ‘disintegrative’ freedoms. Perhaps Foucault might call this the ‘repressive hypothesis of vocalism’.. 30 Jan 2018

**Joe Bolger** **David Cane** that is a fab proposition. Where is that foucault quote from? He makes it into my phd at times. 30 Jan 2018

**David Cane** **Joe Bolger** ah it wasn’t so much a quote as a mish-mash of ideas. In ‘History of Sexuality: Will to Knowledge’, Foucault describes how it has often been thought that the ‘Victorians’ brought about a kind of restriction of sex.. he calls this the ‘repressive hypothesis [of sexuality]’.. but he goes on to describe how more accurately, in Victorian times, Sexuality was actually proliferated, but more strictly regulated through discourse.. (I’ve not explained that well.. sorry!!)

All of this may be quite irrelevant to talking about music.. but I do wonder whether, on the one hand, the performance practices of the late 18th and 19th century might coincide with what could be called a ‘repressive’ cultural climate.. but that, on the other hand, the tendency to see HIP as a liberation from Victorian aesthetic ideals could benefit from a Foucauldian discourse analysis.. (a la his treatment of the repressive hypothesis of Sexuality).. that is to say, what are the power structures that inflect our performance practises..

Sorry that all sounds like tripe.. I’ll have a think again in a bit about what I’m trying to say!!! 30 Jan 2018

**Joe Bolger** Not at all tripe. And totally fascinating. We should definitely meet for a coffee on this. 30 Jan 2018

**Richard Bethell** And Monteverdi was aware of the falsetto register [Monteverdi Companion, P. 73, letter dated 24 July 1627]: "If the chest voice is not joined to that of the throat, the gorgie become quite offensive and ill-defined. But when both are functioning properly, the gorgie become sweet and well-articulated, and this is the most natural way.” 30 Jan 2018

**David Cane** **Joe Bolger** definitely! I'm based up in Manchester these days - how about you? 31 Jan 2018
Tim Braithwaite I was under the impression that, at least through the baroque, the French haute-contra was a mostly chest voice singer as opposed to the Italian approach which involved a natural and easy change to falsetto. I know that the situation changed later in France but I'd be interested in any evidence from the esteemed academics of this page which suggests otherwise. 1 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger 'Natural' and 'easy' are highly loaded terms when the basic assumption is that historical methods will be unnatural and uneasy for modern singers. 1 Feb 2018

Tim Braithwaite Joe Bolger ok, apart from the careless use of adjectives, it's fairly clear that the Italian school of singing generally involved a shift to falsetto in the higher register until remarkably late (be that natural and easy or not...) am I wrong in thinking that this ran contrary (pun intended) to French technique during the earlier part of this period? 1 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger Yes... it absolutely is. I have been having lessons with pop coaches in order to perfect my chest/falsetto transitions. This is a huge practical part of the research I am working on. 1 Feb 2018

Tim Braithwaite Joe Bolger awesome, I've been trying similar things as well (as a falsettist originally.) there are unfortunately way too many similarities to pop/rock technique for it to treated as serious endeavour by most modern Classical or HIP singers, a sad symptom of the perceived superiority of modern Classical techniques in wider society. 1 Feb 2018

Richard Bethell Classical to pop crossover is common. But successful crossover in the opposite direction is rare, e.g. Sting’s Dowland. Are there any other examples? 2 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger Richard Bethell I can't think of any... 2 Feb 2018

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell not from pop to classical, but I rather like performances based on or using traditional Corsican singers such as those of Ensemble Organum. 2 Feb 2018

David Cane Michael Bolton released an album of famous tenor arias. 2 Feb 2018

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Portamento di voce! Especially in the sense of making a change of syllable and a change of pitch at slightly different times, which makes singing sound more like expressive speech. 30 Jan 2018

Tim Braithwaite Absolutely! Some sort of revolution of HIP singing technique is definitely in order... 1 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger Watch this space... 1 Feb 2018

Tim Braithwaite Joe Bolger ditto. 1 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger Tim perhaps we should talk... I have just had a paper accepted that delves into these issues. Where are you based? 1 Feb 2018

Tim Braithwaite Joe Bolger the Netherlands, you? 1 Feb 2018

Joe Bolger Tim in the UK, but happy to travel... can you PM me your email and I can send you the proposal I have just had accepted. 1 Feb 2018
Listening to a lot of Nigel Robson at the moment as I prepare a couple of (Handel) roles for concerts and one (mid-period Mozart) for stage in the coming months. The voice doesn’t wobble, but it nearly always has a vibration on it that keeps the voice shiny.

I have many thoughts on different types of vibrato, but wanted to really assess where people stand on it in voices (I know it’s a thorny topic!). It’s not always the prettiest of voices (whatever that means, anyway), but I really respect what he does, and his artistry.

Kate Brown I know exactly what you mean by shiny, like the little bit of butter you whisk into a sauce, not so much that it becomes greasy, just enough to make it glossy and rich.

Beth Garfinkel It's something to be in control of. You want it in Your Arsenal, but you don't want to use it willy-nilly.

John Bryan I remember NR as a young tenor, when he could do the spitting imitation of Peter Pears, with that particular slow vibrato. Just shows what real vocal control (and good ears) can do.

Matthew Hopcroft I think a really predictable vibrato stops being affecting and sort of fades into the background whereas someone judicious makes it a subtle affectation.

My background as a flute player gives me some insight as some play with very exaggerated and shrill vibrato. I don't like it as much as the players / singers who know it is an ornament.

Richard Bethell For me, Nigel Robson’s continuous vibrato isn’t right for Handel or Mozart. But I won’t fault him for this, as he would have to be super-brave, to the point of foolhardiness, if he were to oppose the vocal hegemony by correctly singing in straight voice.

Ben Thapa Interesting. What would you like to have heard him sing?

Richard Bethell I spent some time yesterday evening listening to his account of Handel's masterpiece "Waft her Angels through the Skies", and comparing it against other versions from Mark Padmore, Paul Agnew and others. NR got the tempo right and I enjoyed his piano singing of the da capo repeat. He didn't (in this piece) attempt a Messa di Voce or cadential trill. In my view, Martin Vanberg's performance was the best, albeit taken at a ridiculously fast tempo.

Oliver Webber If I may temporarily leave the vibrato issue aside (though I know it was the main point), I’d just like to comment on his mastery of Monteverdi’s ornamentation, something equalled by very few today. The brilliance and fluidity of his diminutions is exceptional; I do wish others hadn’t so slavishly copied his invented rising 4th cadential ornament, though!

Edit: stupidity/not reading the question alert. As David Hansell has astutely pointed out, I was thinking not of Nigel Robson but of Nigel *Rogers*. So my comment is even less relevant than I thought.... Sorry! I am not totally trained in the ways of John Thapa.

Robert Rawson This is a good research area, actually. Perhaps one that could encompass jazz as well. We are talking about genres that demand improvisation and spontaneity, though so many performers just ape other performers (which is not necessarily a crime, of
There was a CD around 20 years ago where Andrew Manze mashed-up the Mell and Baltzar divisions on 'John come kiss' and added his own purple patches and a 'knees-up-mother-Brown' ending—and I can't tell you how many times I've heard those ideas in performances of the same divisions. 27 February 2018

David Hansell Oliver Webber are you confusing Robson with Rogers? And I ascribe THAT ornament to a little-known recording by Roger Norrington as a solo tenor (!) in Schütz. 27 February 2018

Oliver Webber David Hansell oops! Yes I am! Will edit. 27 February 2018

Anthony Robson Richard Bethell I don't know about Nigel's voice nowadays or how he now uses it but all I can say about his Handel singing is that in the title role of Jeptha in Gottingen years ago he had all Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists in floods of tears. I also agree with Oliver Webber that he was astonishing in the Monteverdi Vespers which I also had the pleasure of performing and recording with him with the same organisation. And btw, we are not related! 27 February 2018

Michael O'Loghlin I'm not a singer so I can't really "feel" vocal vibrato, or know what it means to a singer. I have noticed that Baroque sources reject it as a constant part of the tone. Montecclair (1736):"If the flaté were used on all important notes, it would become unbearable in that it would render the melody tremulous and too monotonous." Tosi (1723) is much more disparaging, and makes fun of it. 27 February 2018

Richard Bethell You are right about the historical record, Michael. NEMA's latest newsletter, due out this weekend, includes my article "Straight Tone Singing through the Long Eighteenth Century". This quotes Tosi at length and sets out all the evidence, showing clearly that vocal tone didn't feature permanent vibrato. 27 February 2018

David Badagnani Is it a little similar to the way Peter Pears used to sing? War he sung is toil and trouble Handel Alexander's... youtube.com

Ben Thapa Much freer sound than pp. 27 February 2018
Jim O'Toole shared Benslow Music's post.

* 1 March at 16:03

**Benslow Music**

Like Page

28 February at 13:00

😂 #BaroqueViolins (also violas and singers), we have some spaces available on our #BaroqueOpera course in April! It's always great fun and we are looking forward to it! Please see more info/apply here: [http://www.benslowmusic.org/?PageID=1983 Baroque Music]

Esha Neogy I hear they have whatever (bass) viols they need. I suppose I could take my tenor viol and be an honorary viola. 1 March 2018

Michele Chele Geminiani wanted the vibrato. Maybe the policeman name is Tartini. 1 March 2018

John Moraitis Actually, Geminiani classified the vibrato as an ornament. He may have indeed suggested that it should be used as often as possible, however in his written-out example "as often as possible" turns out to be six or seven times in the entire example (if I remember correctly). There is also another passage, where he writes "were we to make Beats and Shakes continually without sometimes suffering the pure Note to be heard, the Melody would be too much diversified." At any rate, the policeman would more likely be Robert Bremner

Job Ter Haar The 'as often as possible' is for vibrato on short notes! 1 March 2018

Oliver Webber He doesn't classify what he means by "short", though. Crotchets? Quavers? Semiquavers? 4 March 2018

Job Ter Haar I think he means notes with a dagger. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber Does he say that? 5 March 2018

Robert Hollingworth Guys, guys.... not again.... 5 March 2018

Job Ter Haar No, he doesn't say that, but it makes more sense than supposing he means any short note value. Tartini compares vibrato to the resonance of a bell or a string; I think that association is made by more writers. Also, notes with daggers don't occur very often, and in Geminiani's music they seem to be a special effect; therefore it would make sense to vibrate them 'as often as possible', which doesn't make much sense if he means any short note. I know it's all rather speculative but there is not much else we can do as musicians if a source is not very clear and there are no other sources saying the same thing but more clearly. It's not something I would write in a dissertation, but it does work well in practice. 5 March 2018

Dario Luisi I would point out some evidences, just to make things more clear: 1) Geminiani doesn't use the word "vibrato" 2) Gem. use the word "shake" for three different types of ornaments which are identified as: a) "plain" b)"Turn'd" and finally c)"close". 3) Further on, in his treatise he specify (in Italian) the three signs explaining them with examples written with notes, in his "Essemp.XVIII" he translate the plain shake with "trillo semplice", the turn'd shake with "T(rillo) composto" and again, finally, the close shake with "Tremolo". 4) A shake is not always a shake, a) and b) are "trilli", while c) is a
tremolo, which is greatly explained and should "be made use of as often as possible". 5) The sign for tremolo, identified here as a sort of today vibrato is only to be find once (as often as possible, sic!), in the "Compos. I" (third line, second bar). Please "tell" me if I'm wrong............ 6 March 2018

Kate Bennett Wadsworth NOOOOOOoooooooooooooooooo 1 March 2018

Esha Neogy The nature of this format is ever thus. People will wander in and start up topics without knowing what's gone before. 😞 1 March 2018

John Moraitis I know what's gone before (I even participated in some of it 😊), but I have seen Geminiani misquoted (or quoted out of context) so many times that I feel it is necessary to set the record straight. But I won't go any further, I promise 😊 1 March 2018

Esha Neogy Oh, I didn't mean you, John - and I thought your clarification was not only blessedly brief but very good! 😊 1 March 2018

Michele Chele Don't be afraid of vibrato! Just use a bit of taste 😊 2 March 2018

Esha Neogy The question of "taste" occupied a massive thread here which is now called Vibrato Wars. You can find a copy of it in the Files section. 😊 2 March 2018

Michele Chele No Thanks 😊 2 March 2018

Esha Neogy Exactly why people are going "Nooooo!" on this thread! 2 March 2018

Michele Chele I've read a lot and i made my opinion. I don't like wars with archeological musicians 😊 2 March 2018

Esha Neogy Then you may be in the wrong group! Good luck and enjoy! 2 March 2018

Oliver Webber "Archeological musicians"?! I wonder what that means, exactly. Anyway, I don't like "wars" either, and it's a bit ridiculous that the discussions have been called this.
Those discussions are actually a veritable mine of interesting information and thoughtful discourse - as well as the odd heated moment, to be fair. 4 March 2018

Esha Neogy You know, you're absolutely right. It'd be much to the good if people (in general, not just ones on this thread) scoffed less at the very existence of a discussion and found ways to appreciate it more. And if topics get repeated as new people come in, that's just the nature of the thing - hold your nerve, be patient, and all will be more than well. 4 March 2018

Jim O'Toole Basically, this debate ought to be held twice annually. We could self organise into sides, and the winner takes home a jar of Leopold Mozart's ashes... 2 March 2018

Matthew Hopcroft Yes the baroque police can infiltrate any supply and demand of bad 19th century editions and make arrests. 2 March 2018

Kate Bennett Wadsworth I’ve just submitted a dissertation on the value of bad 19c editions as a resource for historical performance. 2 March 2018

Roland Hutchinson I’m so glad that someone has done that. I’m immensely looking forward to reading it! 5 March 2018

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Aw shucks! 😊 will post the link when it goes online at Waitrose. 5 March 2018

George KennawayGeorge is an administrator in this group. I refuse to believe that there is an organism larger than an amoeba that has not experienced this topic. It must surely be being discussed even as I write this by creatures on the remoter moons of Saturn. In the depths of the Marianas Trench there are weird creatures that have adapted to a totally dark environment who earnestly debate Geminiani. (Some of them have read what said about vib in his work on the flute, which is more than I can say for some homo sapiens). 2 March 2018

Roland Hutchinson It is, after all, a topic that attracts extremophiles.

Just sayin’. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber How many people have quietly thought “Oops. No idea what Geminiani wrote about the flute!” and promptly looked it up on reading George’s post...? (I certainly did!) 5 March 2018

Roland Hutchinson Thought that and made a mental note that I have to look it up. (I had a rehearsal to get to.)

Looking it up this morning. 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke Folks, I think the meme is less about vibrato than the existence of a body of self-identifying individuals who feel compelled to “police” and shame the efforts of others for their perceived transgressions against the fairly arbitrarily-set boundaries of 21st century HIP code... which is a modern practice based upon the interpretation of sources that were themselves subjective interpretations of often personal practices.

Oliver Webber The meme is a joke. It’s quite funny. But it doesn’t mean that anyone who raises the issue of vibrato is some kind of authoritarian- it’s possible to have really interesting, nuanced discussions about the range of opinions in any given period from the past, and how that might give us something to think about and experiment with today. 5 March 2018

Jim O'Toole I'm with D.I. Webber 😊 5 March 2018
Esha Neogy  Is there actually such a group, or does it just feel like there is when individuals argue a point of interpretation? Or comment on a practical compromise one's made? 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke  The meme hardly parodies those who genuinely engage in nuanced discussion. Quite the opposite - it parodies those who believe that modern consensus is unassailable dogma that defines the parameters of “their” community. The Early Music Police are quite opposed to thinking and experimentation. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber  Does this mythical body actually exist, though? 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy  I just edited my comment above to take out the word "body" since I know there's of course nothing official - but that is my question too. 5 March 2018

John Moraitis  I don't think there is such a body. What happens is that many people who are used to the way things are (i.e. traditional 20th-century performance) do not like it when anyone dares suggest that perhaps there are other ways of doing things, or that there is more than one way of musical interpretation. But the mere suggestion of exploring different ways of interpretation is mistakenly seen as advancing some kind of dogma by those that would rather continue to do things the way they always have. 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke  No. The Secret Society of Early Music Police emphatically denies its existence. Move along. Nothing to see here. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber  Of course there’s no actual body- it’s clearly meant figuratively. But I do think this is a bit of a straw man- it has made up his mind on the topic, and doesn’t want to have an argument with “musical archaeologists” or even read such a discussion. That’s fine- everyone can make their mind up about something and it’s fair enough to have had enough of a certain topic - but isn’t it a little ironic that the “archaeologists” get accused of being opposed to thinking and experimentation...? 5 March 2018

John Moraitis  Dear Christopher, perhaps you would be so kind as to back up all those grand assertions of yours with some evidence. Otherwise it is really a bit unkind to accuse your colleagues of dogmatism, policing, setting arbitrary boundaries, etc. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy  Go on, name names! OK, I jest - but I’ve been lucky enough to see nearly none of this. 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke  I once posted a live recording of myself performing a piece on baroque guitar to an early music forum. A commenter - a respected scholar on the repertoire - responded with, “I can hear that you have an upper octave on the 3rd course. Take it off immediately!” Several others piled on to agree. I have no idea if this individual pays dues to the Early Music Police, but the order as to how my guitar “may” be strung qualifies the person and cohorts for membership. The irony was that not only did I NOT have an upper octave on the third course; I had a lower bourdon on the 5th, a definite historical stringing that is not the standard choice of most performers today. The Police, hearing a divergence from normative HIP modality, assumed it was transgression, rather than taking a moment to listen without a judgmental mindset in order to appreciate how experimentation with empirical findings might lead to broader understanding of the music. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber  That is certainly ironic! I hope you put them right? 5 March 2018

John Moraitis  And yet, is it not a bit unfair to all the musicians involved in the early music scene to take an unpleasant exchange with a few individuals and project it to the HIP
community in general? Sure there are extreme positions in every field, but that does not necessarily mean that the field is overflowing with these extremes. 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke Another anecdote: when I released my first album, reviews were mixed, but all commented on the exceptionally warm, full quality of the tone. Shortly thereafter I received a private message from a professional asking how I’d achieved such a lovely sound. I responded with a note of thanks saying that I was surprised to get such nice feedback since I’d recorded the album playing with nails on synthetic strings at 440. Said person pulled a 180, chiding me for this "disappointing" information, pointing out that, although there is plain historical evidence stating that some players used nails, it was impossible to get any kind of decent tone. (Yes, the person had just said how nice my tone was!) Furthermore, if I was to continue “disrespecting” the music in this way, I should just give up because I had no right to contribute to the degradation of the field. That’s not policing. Move along.

Nice words of encouragement to a young performer! I knew there was more I needed to know (and still need to know) about performance practice, but wow, what a kick in the balls! I did indeed pursue further studies in early music. Needless to say, not with that fellow. 5 March 2018

Oliver Webber That’s more vigilante than police... 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Also decidedly one illogical individual! Grr. 5 March 2018

Christopher Wilke The point is not to relate my personal experiences with cranks, but rather to show that a mindset of “thou may not” (even when the “not” may be empirically shown to have been done) exists among some in the community. Just because they have not organized into a formal non-profit does not mean the attitude does not exist. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Right. And your examples have helped me understand. I do still think John is right and these individuals aren't in a big subcategory. Or at least that's my experience and my hope. Not to belittle your experience at all, though. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy These people sound very frustrated. Perhaps they feel they toil in obscurity and it's the "can't be bothered to think about any research" subcategory that's obscuring them - which they overgeneralize to being anyone who makes decisions such as yours. I don't know. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Ultimately, this may be about personality and have little to do with the specific field. Not that that makes it any better to encounter such. 5 March 2018

Brad Walton Christopher Wilke The world of music, like the world of literature, is (in the words of Sir William Jones) divided between "men of learning with no taste, and men of taste with no learning.” My own view is that musicality is more important than performance pedantry. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Sounds good, but it's a false dichotomy. The reality is much more beautifully complex, subtle, and interesting. Musicality can be heavily informed by what we first hear or what we're first taught (which might or might not be pedantry). By learning more of what others might have done at other times, we can add to our palette of musical and interpretive choices. That should only *increase* our musicality.

Oliver Webber If there was one thing I wish we could eliminate from discussions here (and in fact everywhere on the internet) it’s false dichotomies. There was a long thread recently which started from the apparent suggestion that one could have *either* attention to historical detail *or* “musicality” (which is what, exactly, by the way?). It seems
bizarre to me that these are seen by some as mutually exclusive in some way. Speaking 
personally, I’ve found that my historical studies have only ever expanded the expressive 
palette available in performance, so I certainly don’t share this categorisation. 5 March 
2018

Esha Neogy A copy of said thread can be found in the Files section here and on the 
NEMA (National Early Music Association [UK]) website, should you want to see it, Brad. 
5 March 2018

Brad Walton Esha Neogy Thanks. 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Not sure you’ll thank me later, but you’re welcome! 5 March 2018

Esha Neogy The image in this meme is actually a bit painful, because it looks like the 
violinist is getting a ticket for busking. 5 March 2018

Benjamin Stein Interesting discussion. I think Early Music Police is a reasonable euphemism 
for the type of individual that Christopher Wilke describes, and which the meme rather 
accurately depicts. For what it’s worth, I don’t think they are more numerous in EM than any 
other musical style. Being less of a specialist than an all-rounder, I’ve met similar types in the 
areas of church music, synagogue music, jazz, rock, blues, pronunciation in Yiddish song, 
etc. Joe Klein’s Woody Guthrie biography describes the battles in the 1940's folk scene that 
carried on up until (and past) the point that Dylan went electric. You learn to recognize ‘em, 
learn what you can from their perspectives, which can be very interesting - then tune ‘em out!  
5 March 2018

Esha Neogy Oy. Good point, though. 5 March 2018

Kate Bennett Wadsworth Also, living pedants are kind of a pain, but the dead ones are our 
best friends when it comes to learning extinct styles of playing. 5 March 2018

Jed Wentz The problem, as I see it, is in allowing the discussion to become one about vibrato 
as such without placing its use in the context of 18th-century aesthetics: for instance the need 
for both consistency and variety (a tension discussed in contemporary treatises on beauty), or 
the relationship with the expression of the passions (as the voice does shake when a certain 
level of emotion is reached). It is the reduction of art to a simple rule (non-vibrato is 
Baroque) that leads to problems. And really, doesn’t Mattheson tell us that no rule cannot be 
broken in order to express something? 6 March 2018

Oliver Webber Exactly: some discussions can become misleadingly binary, as if you are 
either “for” or “against” vibrato. Would anyone ask if you were for or against trills, or 
dynamics? Another problem is giving questions about vibrato too much importance in the 
overall aesthetic picture: my reading suggests it was one of many, many expressive tools 
which some musicians had an opinion about while many others remained silent. 6 March 
2018

Jed Wentz Yes, I agree...we became obsessed with it in the 20th-century, probably 
because its use has become so extreme in Classical music generally. For traverso players 
non vibrato playing has become THE most important thing... 6 March 2018

Richard Bethell shared a link.
· 18 March at 12:33

NEMA’s latest newsletter is just out. Members can download our 97 page bumper edition from our website. The issue has my article on the incidence (or rather, absence!) of tremolo/vibrato during the long 18th Century. My exclusive focus has been on the historic record. So I would be very interested in members’ views on the article, especially evidence supporting or disputing my conclusions. George, I do appreciate this post may generate yet more “Vibrato Wars” threads. Surely no bad thing, as it allows a thousand or so new members who’ve joined this group to join the debate since this topic was last discussed. My piece was triggered by the programme “Throwing A Wobbly” [Radio 3, 6 August 2017], reviewed by John Briggs in this issue. And, Joe Bolger and Oliver Webber, my article [edited] is all about the historic record. No sweeping generalisations here! OK, perhaps one, when I conclude that the history of vocal sound since the long 18th century has been a process of “degradation from beauty into ugliness”.

I accept this post is a tad self centered. But the issue also has contributions from at least 3 people who post to this group: [1] Francis Knights [NEMA’s Chairman], besides editing the newsletter, has an article on ‘John Marsh’s house organ’, [2] an article on Pepusch describes Robert Rawson’s work with the Tickle Fiddle Gentlemen, and [3] there’s a fascinating 17 page interview with Jeremy Montagu outlining his long musical career, including his experiences with Musica Reservata and the Galpin Society.

See more

National Early Music Association (UK) - useful information regarding early and historically informed music
earlymusic.info

Esha Neogy A question on detail that I realise would probably be answered by reading the article: Is it possible that “ugliness” came about in order to project or cut through in very large halls? 18 Mar 2018

George Kennaway George and 2 others manage the membership, moderators, settings and posts for Historical Performance Research, "Beauty into ugliness"? Haha, Richard Bethell, no question that that's a generalisation!!! 18 Mar 2018

Roland Hutchinson Yes, but at least it avoids introducing subjective opinions. 19 Mar 2018
Oliver Webber I would have been interested in reading this, but your quoted conclusion has put me off completely! Any conclusion which denigrates the aesthetic of an entire era is unlikely to engage with people who have a different view, so if you want to change anyone’s mind, this is not the best way to go. We should be building bridges, not drawing up battle lines. 18 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey That last sentence also strikes me as the mother of all sweeping generalizations. I don't think I'll be reading this either. Sorry. 18 Mar 2018

Christopher Price Pontifex I think that is a bit unfair to Richard. Even if you disagree violently with his conclusion he makes no bones about the fact that it is his opinion and separate from his analysis of the contemporary historical record of the 18th century. How about some open mindedness before closing ranks? 18 Mar 2018

Oliver Webber Indeed. Starting by not dismissing an entire body of creative work in a post purportedly “all about the historic record”! 18 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell You may be right, Oliver. But is bridge building between two deeply opposed hegemonies possible? If you and Bruce choose to ignore my new research on 18th C vocal sound, fair enough. But my (deeply felt) conclusion is implicitly supported by 95% of (mainly amateur) EM fans, who heartily dislike the one-size-fits-all voice. And thanks, Christopher, for reminding us that the whole purpose of this group is to review the historic record. Finally, Esha, you are right that huge spaces were part of the problem. I'll come back with a good quote when I find it. 18 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hw9wGOh9KdQ It's not a question of vibrato or not. it's a question of HOW, and WHEN. 18 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly Or, in another repertoire, 18 Mar 2018
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S70lbq8locManage

Christopher Price Pontifex Graham O'Reilly, and HOW MUCH. Just as with instruments. 18 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Here's the promised quote, Esha, from Friedrich Wieck [Piano and Song, Didactic and Polemical, 1853, P. 167]: “If one builds a larger hall [than the preferred size seating 900 to 1,200 listeners] in order, perhaps, and from time to time, to accommodate 2,000 to 3,000 people for special occasions, difficulties of every imaginable kind arise, severely limiting its general usefulness and, consequently, reducing the considerable income yielded by a more perfectly designed hall. Consider the following:/ ……(5) That singers, male and female, can make an effect in such a hall only when, instead of singing, they shout in the most modern French, Italian and also, unfortunately, German manner. Thus, instead of helping to re-establish and promote the pure, chaste art of song, now represented, with few exceptions, only by Jenny Lind and Henriette Sontag, they would, on the contrary, render grievous assistance to the unnatural.”

Of course, large opera houses were built in earlier times, although they were sometimes disapproved of. Louis Spohr said of San Carlo [Naples] in 1817: “Military movements of infantry and cavalry, battles, and storms at sea can be represented here without falling into the ludicrous. But for opera, itself, the house is too large. Although the singers, Signora
[Isabella Angela] Colbran and the Signori Nozzari, Benedetti, etc., have very strong voices, only their highest and most stentorian tones could be heard. Any kind of tender utterance was lost.” Not surprisingly, New Monthly Magazine judged in 1824 that “The bloom and freshness of her vocal powers [Colbran’s, aged 39] are evidently on the wane”. 19 Mar 2018

Esha Neogy Aha, thank you. 19 Mar 2018

George Kennaway George and 2 others manage the membership, moderators, settings and posts for Historical Performance Research. Some of you will know how much I don’t want to go there. But I do think - with all respect to strongly held views etc. - that it’s not entirely helpful if research is blended with aesthetic value judgements. I’ve certainly tried very hard to avoid that in my own published work. Were I to go against that principle, I’d happily write about performance topics in Rossini with a proviso that it doesn’t matter how you perform it because it’s rubbish. But I know all too well that any discussion that ensued would focus on that (NB sincerely held) value judgement, rather than whatever research I was offering. I want to know how they sang in ye olden daies; I want to know what they, and others, thought they were doing and why they liked it; I’d like to hear singers doing their best to sing like that so we might get a new insight into the music - so far, so uncontroversial. What I prefer to listen to in the privacy of my own home is just my business. 18 Mar 2018

Esha Neogy This, exactly this. 19 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell "Rossini . . . it's rubbish." Sorry, George, but I don't understand that sentence! 19 Mar 2018

George Kennaway George and 2 others manage the membership, moderators, settings and posts for Historical Performance Research. Snap (the beauty/ugly one)! And that’s why value judgements should be avoided…I can’t resist fanning the flames, though: if a violinist or a pianist concentrated on repertoire that largely needed mere dexterity in scales and arpeggios (Paganini? Czerny?), with the occasional tune with a bit of a sob, they would be judged technically superb but musically limited and superficial. And yet, singers who favour this repertoire are lauded as the guardians of a tradition. I’ll get my coat. 19 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell A key reason why Rossini composed no operas during the last 40 years of his life was that he hated the singing, including: vibrato, high Cs and Ds from the chest (instead of beautiful falsetto) and cavernous laryngeal development (caves were for growing mushrooms!). 19 Mar 2018

Ian Gallacher Well, but who is that George? There isn’t much music after . . . Bach? Mozart? Certainly Beethoven . . . that doesn’t require dexterity in scales and arpeggios. If you’re talking about people who specialize in Paganini and related repertoire, I might agree but who are those people these days? And who are the Rossini singers who would cause you such pain? If there are such instrumentalists and singers, you might have a point, but I’m not sure you’re not setting up a straw argument here and you’re putting on your coat to bolt after lighting the blue touchpaper. Take your coat off and stay awhile! 19 Mar 2018

Robert Rawson I will resist the temptation to defend Paganini here—he’s not Dittersdorf, for God’s sake. 19 Mar 2018

Nate Tabor Luthier Vibrato makes my stomach queasy. 18 Mar 2018

Graham O’Reilly Vibrato is like eggs, better for the stomach if poached rather than fried. 18 Mar 2018
Nate Tabor Luthier Bel canto and modern Steinway pianos. Comparable to a greasy egg on a hangover morning. 18 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey It was probably wrong of me to say I wouldn't read the research. I admit that was churlish. But my opinions about vibrato are not based on some kind of main-stream prejudice or "one size fits all" mentality. Far from it. I dislike excessive or inappropriate vibrato more than most, I think. My opinions are the result of more than 40 years of studying the historical record about singing in the 16th and 17th centuries and wind playing through the 19th, and a fascination with the multitude of techniques and devices called "tremolo" that were employed in an attempt to imitate the human voice. 18 Mar 2018

Christopher Price Pontifex There are extreme opinions in most fields of inquiry and endeavor. However, I think part of the problem with the vibrato discussion is that the “anti-vibrato” camp is usually misrepresented as being crazy extremists opposed to any vibrato at all when almost all “anti-vibrato” proponents are in fact talking about reduced vibrato and the flexible application of vibrato. And the use of different kinds of vibrato according to different styles of music rather than the all-purpose heavy shuddering almost universally sung in today’s baroque and classical period musical drama productions. Although, there are some repertoires where I think (albeit untutored) that the way the music is written suggests that almost no vibrato at all except as an explicit effect must have been the norm - such as the relatively short-lived style of Stradella and his contemporary Italian composers, whose particular melodic style, fine attention to chromatics and long spun out lines interrupted by bursts of high-velocity floridity seem to me to be destroyed by continuous or near-continuous vibrato, whether strong or light. 19 Mar 2018

Tim Braithwaite I totally agree that the term "tremolo" is far too quickly assumed to be a euphemism for modern vibrato, when historical descriptions give us such an extreme range of sounds which fall under this term. My own experiments with some of these different sounds (as well as the many other graces in historical sources) always tend to draw me uncomfortably far from what my colleagues’ preconceptions of how historical (and indeed Western) music should sound. 19 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey I think discussions of this topic would be best served if the word "vibrato" were entirely banned. It is necessary in any case to completely break apart the equivalency, or even the relationship, of the words tremolo and vibrato. They didn’t exist at the same time and they refer to entirely different, though related, concepts. The concept of tremolo included all the different sorts of fluctuations that could be produced on any instrument as well as with the voice: intensity, pitch or a mixture. The fluctuations could be articulated or unarticulated - in both cases they were still seen as tremoli. It is inevitable that some of these fluctuations will overlap with what we think of as vibrato, but the introduction of that term only causes confusion by bringing with it later techniques, concepts, and tastes. 19 Mar 2018

Tim Braithwaite I personally consider the vibrato topic to be rather far down on my list of priorities anyway...if singers are encouraged to have a different (historical) relationship with registers, vowels and dynamic variation then the I've come to find that the vibrato question very rarely needs asking. 19 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Bruce, Thank you for this statement. It is somehow related to the somewhat unfortunate legato-nonlegato - discussion on keyboard instruments - long ago I abandoned using those terms and try to describe matters using vocabulary of Bach's sons and pupils like "Ordentliches Fortgehen"... 19 Mar 2018
Richard Bethell: Nomenclature is a problem, certainly, especially in earlier repertoire around 1600. In the 19th century, the terms tremolo and vibrato were roughly interchangeable. For example, Ernesto Nicolino [Patti's husband] was critiqued between 1866 and 1887 some 74 times for tremolo [or variants such as trembling, tremulousness or tremulando], 44 times for vibrato and 3 times for wobble or wabble. Only in a couple of cases is it clear from the reviews that the effect was of the pitch rather than the emphasis variety; in all other cases, it was simply something that reviewers hated, as painful, unpleasant or disagreeable. Towards the very end of the century, efforts were made to distinguish between varying degrees of offensiveness, with vibrato being narrow and therefore mild (even attractive), tremolo wide and bad, and wobble (or wabble in the US) as very wide and absolutely disgusting. Measured thus, modern opera singers oscillating a minor 3rd are of course wobblers.

Werner Lamm: Richard, the problem is using nomenclature of a later period for describing phenomena of an earlier period— you'll end up confusing matters...

Richard Bethell: That's true, Werner. 19 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey: Richard Bethell what to your knowledge is the first use of the term vibrato? I don't recall ever having seen it in the first half of the 18th century when looking at flute tutors. They all used "Bebung", or "tremolo". 19 Mar 2018

Oliver Webber: Is the equivalence between tremolo and vibrato in the 19th century complete? I recall an entry in Lichtenthal's dizionario which defines vibrato as something like “fortemente marcato”. 19 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell: After sorting my 20,000 row spreadsheet into date order, I note that vibrato starts to come into use around 1835, for example:

The Public Ledger wrote of Antonio Tamburini in April 1835: “He is, in truth, a miracle in music—his bass so round, rich, and mellow—his tenor so high, so brilliant, so full and flexible—his chest notes so splendid—and, above all, his astonishing vibrato passages so instrumentally true in the minutest semitone.”

John Edmund Cox, in Musical Recollections, wrote [25 May 1835]: “A Belgian violoncellist, M. Servais, débuted on this occasion, but made little or no impression, his tone being thin and wiry….M. Servais manifested that unusual manner of producing his tone which has come into fashion, not quite meritoriously, since Piatti in a measure took the place that Lindley vacated…The fact was the M. Servais produced his tone by that intense pressure of the fingers which has since been better understood by the term vibrato, and this was at once denounced to be spasmodic, and a not altogether creditable trick.”

The Morning Post [10 Aug 1836] wrote: “imitation [by Pantaleoni] of his maestro [Giovanni Battista Rubini], although servile—for he favours us with the vibrato—is not unpleasing.”

Of course, there were much earlier references to the "Half Shake" [by Galliard in his Tosi translation] and to "waving or vibrating on a single tone" [Anselm Bayly]. 19 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell: Oliver is right in saying that vibrato was used to describe a different effect, e.g. when Thomas Busby offers this definition in his 'Dictionary of three thousand terms [1840]': "Molto Vibrato. (Ital.) Very bold and triumphant. See Vibrato. Vibrato. (Ital.) A term used in the Italian opera, to signify that at the note, or passage, to which it
refers, the voice is to be thrown out, in a bold, heroic style." Robert Toft is good on various types of vibrato [Heart to Heart, pp 30-36] and he notes: "The fourth type of vibrato was known variously as vibrazione, voce vibrata, or vibrated note and was introduced into England in the mid 1820s." 19 Mar 2018

Esha Neogy Ahem, Joe Doody...this subthread, and in fact the whole thread, is what I was referring to. 19 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly Richard Bethell "wabble" is a fantastic word, whatever it means.😊 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell It's the Americanized version of "wobble" and means the same. 20 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey I've never seen it in the US. Looks very strange! 20 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Seems a phonetic spelling 😊 20 Mar 2018

Bruce Dickey Someone may have used it, but it never became standard American English. 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell I counted 18 occurrences, although only a couple after WW1, by which time the heat had gone out of the issue. At the risk of over-burdening this sub-thread, here they all are, some quite amusing: 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell This is the first I could find: “She [Mrs Rice Cook] labored under the additional disadvantage of being accompanied by a piano tuned above concert pitch, which made the high tones of her solos more difficult, yet her singing was very enjoyable, and the pleasure was heightened by the absence of affectation and “wabble” or tremolo. Her voice is powerful, even, well poised, and satisfying, and Michigan has reason to be proud of her.” [Jackson Citizen Patriot, 23 Sep 1878] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next, a ferocious but prophetic anti-wabbling diatribe: “We mean not the voice of the pure female, but the pure voice of a female. It is fast degenerating into that shaking palsy, which is sometimes called the tremolo, sometimes the vibrato, but which is more correctly described by the vernacular term, wabbling . . . . So corrupted has the public taste become by this that it tolerates and even applauds such a wabbler as Teresa Singer, who in a whole opera never strikes a correct note. She scatters herself all around the note, like a charge of bird shot. She has no distinct note, only a blur. She can make runs by semi-tones or quarter tones as well as by whole tones; nobody can tell which they are, for they have no single tones. In the florid music of Casta Diva she made no articulation of notes; it was simply a mixing up of all—a muddle. Add to this her strokes of tremendous force in the prolonged high notes, on which her voice becomes a scream, and a manner of drawing out some particularly favored low notes into a prolonged howl, like Mme Roseau’s strain in “Baby Mine”, and the total is about the worst that has yet been set before opera goers as a standard for cultivation in music.” [Cincinnati Daily Gazette, 15 Nov 1879] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell I’ve already mention Nicolini in this context: “vicious wabble he calls the tremolo ..... Signor Nicolini has more than once been soundly hissed, and two or three years ago the curtains of Covent Garden had to be lowered owing to the loud cries of condemnation. All the great London critics have protested against Signor Nicolini, but the public and her manager are alike powerless in the matter. Imperious, self-willed and spoilt, Patti knows her worth and simply refuses to sing unless Signor Nicolini sings with her.” [Daily Gazette, Colorado Springs, 22 Nov 1881] 20 Mar 2018
Richard Bethell Two mentions in the Evening World, New York: “The boy’s voice [Cyril Tyler, boy soprano] was soft and sweet. It was marred somewhat by a tremolo, and the consequence was that it seemed to wobble.” [Evening World, 21 Sep 1892]. “. . . [Miss Tischier] appears to suffer from a distressing tremolo. Her voice wabbles. You feel that it wants propping up.” [Evening World, 3 Mar 1893] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell An early attempt to distinguish terms: “If the singer would only refrain from using the vibrato, which in her case is so pronounced that I took it for the tremolo. An eminent laryngologist informed me that it was a vibrato, pure and simple, and for reasons that it would take columns to tell. / In operatic parlance that strange wabble is a tremolo, however, and I do hope that Frl. [Lola] Beeth will strive to rid herself of the annoying habit.” [New York Herald, 3 Dec 1895] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell “In forte [from Wilhelm Grüning] there is occasionally a tremolo, and in piano passages there is at times a tendency to wabble.” [New York Times, 16 Feb 1896] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next: “Nor can Miss [Nella] Bergen be accused of that partly affective, partly natural habit of many prima donnas—a vibrant tremolo amounting to a wabble. She hits the notes square in the middle and holds the pitch fairly and firmly.” [Boston Daily Advertiser, 27 Dec 1896] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next: “Of late, however, his tones [Mr. Stephen Townsend, baritone] at times have a tendency to wabble, as was observed last night, especially in the air from Massenet’s “King of Lahore”. In the song by Schubert he displayed an enviable command of legato, and in the duet from “Eve” he again showed that the wobble was by no means chronic. ..... He should remember, however, that in the singing of songs such as he chose last night tonal beauty should never be forgotten, even in the most stirring climax.” [Boston Journal, 5 Nov 1897] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next: “His tremolo [William Ibos] was exceedingly disagreeable, and his intonation was often false. It is a pity that he bleats so persistently. He will show musical instinct, he will punctuate his musical sentences with understanding, he will be dramatic, even passionate; but at the same time his voice will wabble so that the hearer only observes that wabble—observes and shudders, and then is vexed.” [Boston Journal, 4 Mar 1898] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next: “The old controversy about the Wagnerian style of singing has broken out again with unusual virulence ..... If he [Andreas Dippel] goes on singing with his present method, he will have a wooden quality of tone, dead and without resonance, in about five years. Furthermore, his tones will all wabble with a tremolo which he will not be able to overcome, and he will be absolutely unable to keep the pitch. If you wish proof of the certainty of this prophecy, listen to Van Dyck, who is now showing the results of a method similar to Dippel’s.” [New York Times, 25 Dec 1898] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Vibrato OK, but not wabble: “There is some rare voices a vibrant palpitating thrill which is wholly desirable. This quality of voice will blend with others and give vitality and sincerity to expression, but the affected quivering in which inferior talent decks itself out, has neither of these virtues. /This “wabble” as performed by some ambitious singers, becomes absolutely intolerable in the prolongation.” [Comment by Frederick W Root in Minneapolis Journal 27 Jul 1900] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Next: “But she has a tremolo that wabbles all the way from Thirty-ninth street to Fortyeth, and in the quieter parts of the score you seldom knew in what parts of the block she thought she was singing.” [Brooklyn Newstand, 24 Dec 1910] 20 Mar 2018
Richard Bethell  Taken from a long article on bel canto and the perfect legato by William James Henderson, an undervalued early critic and musicologist, with a modern HIP outlook: “But vocal students will do well to note one small point. The singers whose art sounds the most correct are those whose voices wobble the least. The vibrato, that dearest acquirement of the so-called dramatic singer, is utterly out of keeping with this classic music.” [Sun, New York, 30 Sep 1914] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell  From long article headed ‘A Slap at the tremolo, New York Critic Regrets the Extent of Its Recent Cultivation’: “We are being made acquainted by degrees at the Metropolitan opera house with that most undesirable element in the singing voice—the tremolo, says Pierre V. R. Key in the New York World. Artists who in the past have seldom, if ever, disclosed this unfortunate trait have slipped during the present season into the habit of permitting their tones to wobble unnecessarily. To a greater or lesser extent this vocal tremulousness has hovered rather constantly through a considerable part of almost every performance since last November . . . . /It is a mistake to insist upon a "straight" tone, with no deviation from an absolute line. Such tones, as we have learned, are "dead". They seem to hang suspended, with no motion, and the effect upon the ear is also unpleasant, though less so than the tone afflicted with the tremolo.” [Springfield Republican 30 Apr 1916] The article later mentions several singers "addicted to the tremolo habit", usually attributed to voice forcing, including Johannes Sembach, Frances Alda and Margarete Ober. 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell  From anti-tremolo diatribe, by George Chadwick Stock: “The tremolo in singing is a wretched fault, and whoever uses it makes a great mistake. / Some deliberately cultivate it, others get the tremolo habit through voices that are so free in the beginning of study that they wobble.” [Hartford Daily Courant, 5 Feb 1922] 20 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell  “He [Mattia ? Battistini] did not yell, he did not bleat, he avoided the glottis stroke, he knew that there could be more of passion or sorrow in a beautifully turned musical phrase than in all manner of panting and sobbing. / Foremost of his virtues was the command of a long-breathed legato. He did not wabble; his voice was vital without the curse of the vibrato. His was a straight-line tone.” [Telegraph, Brisbane, 5 Mar 1929. NB: There’s a 1911 YouTube recording of Mattia Battistini featuring vibrato, but not wabbling!] 20 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm  Richard, the author of this describes exactly what happens to young singers nowadays when they venture to sing Wagner and Verdi at too young an age without the vocal means or the appropriate technique - especially loss of messa di voce... 20 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly  Richard Bethell I think wibble is not quite the same. But still perhaps a useful word for these exchanges ... 20 Mar 2018

David Badagnani  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK4gKgK8HJQ

William R Brohinsky  I will admit to having postulated long ago that it could be that constant vibrato might have been gradually introduced as intonation moved from beatless intervals to temperaments to mask or even keep up with the increased beating. I’ve never had the time to make any concerted historical study, and having misspent my life in pursuit of Electronics and Computer Programming, lack the academic background to do it now. So I continue to
wonder if anyone else has entertained the notion?

I am now retired, sort of coasting to official retirement on shoestrings and savings. Maybe in a year, at 65, I'll be able to talk someone in the UCONN musicology department into letting me into their classes... 19 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly It's an interesting idea, but seems to me counter-intuitive. When you listen to folk polyphony (3/4 solo singers in, say, Corsica, or the Alentejo) who work hard on the pure 5ths and 3rds, its unimaginable to me that they would ever decide to use less pure intonation, and then add vibrato to cover it up! Far more likely that in a more "art" context, as vibrato increases in solo singing, when those solo singers use it in polyphony the vibrato destroys the pure intervals. 19 Mar 2018

Richard Bethell Paul Paoletti posted several examples of these [See and hear them around Page 114/5, Thread 13, Vibrato Wars first PDF, available from NEMA's home page], including the superb Tenore Supramento Orgosolo, who produced a rich sound, rather like a well-tuned baroque organ. Michael Morrow would have adored them. 19 Mar 2018

William R Brohinsky Graham O'Reilly the inherent thought lies with "temperament". There isn't a lot of call for temperament with the unaccompanied voice, and even in polyphony with just voices or voices and unfretted strings temperament isn't needful, regardless of the polyphonic songs which, if both horizontal and vertical intervals are just, end a semitone lower than they start.

There are patterns of performance in the treatises which make themselves apparent. With instruments that can be varied in pitch around each note and skillful players, we get just intonation and fullness from reinforced partials and sum-and-difference tones in the non-linear ear. Ornamentation tends to florid additions, but purity of intervals is maintained. When this is applied to fixed pitch instruments, which require a fixed formula which allows a non-mathematician to place or replace frets, regulates his regal, or bend bronze in his harpsichord, we find a limited subset of keys, and a bunch of composers hankering after more. Temperaments with wolf intervals have characteristics that become attached to keys, some chords become associated with God, others with Satan... But the temperaments generally come close to just. But close means beats which may change from interval to interval. And solo music, one voice or instrument, against a keyboard with sustained notes, may find it hard to sound pure, sweet, interact positively with mixes of partials from almost-pure thirds and sixths, slightly damaged fifths and fourths, as the temperaments precess towards equal temperament. Vibrato, sweetening the human voice to mesh with the beating of the merciless strings...

With the onset of ET12, the stud seems to me to drop any pretense of refinement. Messa di voce is damned as that Baroque thing that makes every note sound like a pregnancy ready to drop. (I refuse who said that to whom, in 1971.)

That's why I suspect Bel Canto and the notorious foot vibrato (first use of that name came from a saxophone major.)

I have heard HIP performances of a chorale by Bruckner, 6 voices, all heavy enough to cut out of the air with a sharp knife and lubricate auto hub bearings with, but wobbling, each at a different frequency, making voice leading uninterpretable, chord structure as dangerous as a skyscraper in a Richter-6 earth quake. All I could do was hope someone left a few pages out in their research. But there is little denying that constant vibrato and
swan-necked swoops adorned orchestral recordings from the turn of the 20th Century, and it is difficult to accept the theory that the men who engineered the recordings sought the world's most unrepresentative and worst musicians to memorialize for eternity. 19 Mar 2018

Graham O'Reilly "There isn't a lot of call for temperament with the unaccompanied voice, and even in polyphony with just voices or voices and unfretted strings temperament isn't needful" You mean that the singers just sing the pure intervals and everything is hunky dory. No compromise. Hmmm. Maybe. "regardless of the polyphonic songs which, if both horizontal and vertical intervals are just, end a semitone lower than they start." Really ? Show me how that works. 19 Mar 2018

William R Brohinsky Graham O'Reilly no, you are right, and I have conflated Margaret Brent's paper on diatonic ficta with a paper by Frank Harvey titled 'You cannot just say "I am singing the Right note". The former concluded that a correct application of diatonic ficta to a section of a Josquin Gloria resulted in a shift of tonal base (the interpretation being the cause of some debate between Ms. Bent and Roger Wibberly, neither of whom, am I qualified to fasten their figurative sandals). The latter was addressing vertical and horizontal intonation, and the possibility that surviving the possible conflicts of differing perceptions of simultaneous intonation (vertical) and sequential intonation (horizontal) either inferred that period musicians in the medieval and possibly later eras either had no clue where they were, or where they'd end up pitchwise, or that musicians must have agreed on loosened constraints on one or the other (whether by explicit negotiation, implicit acceptance of give-and-take, rigorous training, inherent musicality, or a constantly balancing of all the above. I apologize for the mix-up. 20 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm In organ building, the attempts of imitating the human voice (registers called 'voce umana', voix humaine or vox humana) usually involved a tremolo-device (at least in France, Italy and Portugal) - either by a tremulant & a soft reed (France) or by two soft open 8' ranks that were slightly distuned to each other, thus achieving an audible undulation. Don't remember the sources exactly, but it was done to imitate the human voice with its trembling. 19 Mar 2018

Henk Florie I learned from an organist that these registers are not the same; one of them is a reed register, that sounds "throaty", and has no vibrato; the other one is a combined register that gives a slight undulating sound because 2 pipes are deliberately tuned 1 or 2 Hz apart from each other, causing a "vibrato-like" sound. Maybe some of the members who know more about organs can explain this right? 19 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Your friend is partly right. A well-voiced "Voix humaine" is not throaty when you hear her in the nave. It is a reed alright, but in French custom it is used with tremolo. The 'voce umana' in Italy and Portugal is an undulating double flue, as you described. 19 Mar 2018

Roland Hutchinson As I understand it, the vox humana reed stop doesn't have vibrato/tremolo on its own, but at some point it became customary to use it together with the "tremulant" -- the latter not being an actual stop (although it usually is activated with a stop knob), but a device that produces a fluctuating wind-supply that affects an entire division of the organ. 19 Mar 2018

Roland Hutchinson On the subject of organ tremulants, I'll point out that in 17th- and early 18th-century string playing "tremolo" could name or indicate a sort of portato bowing (to use a more recent term), generally four eighth notes to a bow, in moderate tempo, that was supposed to be in imitation of the organ's tremulant.
A familiar example (though not explicitly labeled as tremolando) might be the opening sinfonia of JS Bach’s Actus Tragicus.

I read this as evidence for the speed of the organ tremulants of the time: closer to 2 Hz than to the 6 Hz or so that is typical modern “vibrato”. 19 Mar 2018

Henk Florie I have a considerable number of treatises and dictionaries on music from the 17th. to late 19th. C., originals and facsimiles. One will search in vain to find the word “vibrato” in most of them. Some 18t and 19t C. sources mention the word to describe “vibrations” of an acoustic body; but that’s something quite different from the current topic. Some 19t.C. sources mention that the word “vibrato” is added by a composer to indicate that the bow of a string instrument should be used with extra force to make the string „vibrate“ more strongly than usual. This clearly refers to giving it extra „amplitudo“ with the bow through the right hand, but does not refer to any other manipulation of the vibrating string through the left hand.

One can find several words in many sources, that designate the formation of a sound that we might call "vibrato" nowadays, but other words are used for it, and the perception and use of it obviously are a world apart from „modern“ habits.

In several French sources from c 1700 till c 1870 one finds the word "chevrotement" (i.e. a sound that resembles a goat “chevre” in French) indicating a defect of the ageing voice, leading to “vibrato automatique” as opposed to “vibrato contrôlé”, or a defect of a singer who cannot sing a proper trill, when the 2 separate pitches of the ornament are not clearly perceivable, and this is dismissed as a "Tremblent Bâtard" i.e. a Bastard Trill due to lack of technique.

A "dictionaire de musique" from c 1870 mentions that, in recent times (being c 1870) there appear some singers who are under the illusion that frequent use of vibrato is “en vogue”; but this is dismissed as a new fashion betraying bad taste and ridicule.

In many of the sources, the chapters regarding ornaments make a difference between a trill/shake and vibrato. A trill or shake should be executed thus, that the 2 or more (in case of fore- or afterbeats) different pitches of this ornament are clearly discernable.

Well let’s be honest about another topic: most singers in our time simply do not master this properly, even "baroque" singers. Reason for this is, that they are not well trained in it.

I found no concrete mention in French sources, but some Italian sources tell that singers in 17/18th. C. practiced trills for hours a day, coloratura for hours a day, and messa di voce for hours a day, before they even started practicing any repertoire.

This clarifies why most "modern" singers cannot properly execute these techniques. - - In old sources a vibrato is indicated with different names, like different gradations of “tremblement”. From c. 1600 till 1870 sources mention that it can be used most appropriately on a long note before the concluding note of a phrase. Only occasionally writers find it necessary to add, that change of pitch or force of the note should be perceivable only faintly, because this was self evident. - -

More powerful forms of shake, that DO markedly affect the pitch (as many singers and instrumentalists use constantly nowadays), are associated with strong emotions of sadness and bereavement. One finds words like "Flatement" or "Plainte" (finger-vibrato on
woodwinds or double-finger-vibrato on viola da gamba or other strings) or "Miolement" (literally meowing like a cat) on a plucked string instrument like a lute (for example in a Lamento or Tombeau). In German one finds "Bebung" (to shiver or shake; mostly associated with the clavichord, but I found it in Flute methods too). "Bogen-vibrato" or "bow-vibrato" is a special ornament (or rather effect) whereby subtle changes of pressure on the bow create an oscillation between softer and louder without interrupting the proper sound or change the direction of bowing, that can vary from ever so slight to very markedly and from slow to quick. A comparable effect is used especially in Italian singing of the Caccini and Monteverdi era, and was called a “trillo” (being a kind of stuttering sound, mostly starting slowly and gradually getting quicker) while the word “gruppo” was used to indicate what we call a “trill” now. And by the way, one of the very few singers that I ever heard execute the Trillo to perfection was Cyril Auvity in Monteverdi’s “Possente Spirto” - -

Overwhelming numbers of early sources indicate clearly where mild or strong, even "howling" ornaments should be applied; and one can clearly see that composers asked for their use sparingly. To mention a few examples: F. Caccini, Nuove Musiche - Marin Marais, Pieces de Viole - Emanuel Bach in many of his Clavier-pieces - Felix Mendelssohn, Violin concerto - - Many sources specify that loss of control in old singers (e.g. dictionary 1870) or flute-players (e.g. Tromlitz) can induce a shaking tone that actually may cause nausea in the listener. - -

The problem is that many musicians hardly seem to be trained (or interested for that matter) in other ways of “shaping a note” or "doing something" with any note besides vibrato. The consequence is that, if vibrato is left out, the results painfully reveals the lack of ability of application of other means of expression, or even proper intonation. - - This tendency has been going on for some generations; I would say the breakpoint of the “older”, "controlled" and “modern", "automatic" vibrato lies somewhere between the 2 World Wars; a French Flute Method from c 1970- plainly states that use of vibrato on flutes commenced in 1930. The general public has since been so increasingly "conditioned" (in the Pavlov sense) on constant vibrato, that they miss it when left out (often without being aware of that), but also the public is generally NOT TRAINED TO PERCEIVE other means of expression. And since the majority determines what is being played/sung, by whom. and how, this is disastrous- -

Listening WELL to music is an Art too. It is complex, requires training, knowledge, willingness to discover what you don’t yet know and make an effort towards developing taste. The ability to discern good music being well executed is a precious talent. For this the brain requires what I call "wiring", namely nerve-connections between all the parts of the brain that can receive or send complex signals involved in musical perception, in those cortical areas that are linked with perception of sound, rhythm, language, emotion, pitch, proportion a.s.o.. This process is still only remotely understood. (to be continued - sorry)

19 Mar 2018

Henk Florie (continuation) A simplified example to illustrate the workings of the mechanism: when a child is born in China, it will probably never hear the sound of the French pronunciation of the letter “R” and consequently will not learn this, because it won’t develop the wiring of the brain needed for that ability. But if the parents move to France with the child still young enough (maybe younger than 8 to 12) and if it hears this “R” often enough and is encouraged to speak it, it will acquire this ability. But it’s parents in most cases won't. Not only will the parents never learn to pronounce the proper “R”;}
they won’t even be able to discern the sound of it. The neuroplasticity of their brain required for the ability to learn to speak or recognize this sound is lost after a certain age!! Human ability with regard to perception of intentional or automatic use of vibrato, or other means of musical expression, is somewhat comparable to this example.

In this sense the discussion between pro and contra can resemble a discussion between colour blind men disagreeing about the colour of an item. - - If one does not fully perceive subtleties of colouring, shading, tone shaping, timing, rubato, ornaments, diction, text expression, or one has insufficient stylistic understanding, instinct, or awareness even of basic technique, a musical execution will not "arrive" in the brain of the listener and will not meet its entire emotional or esthetic potential.

I dare say that this complex mechanism is one of the deeper grounds of “querelle sur le vibrato”, use and abuse of vibrato, conscious versus automatic use of vibrato and even stubborn neglect to open up to other options.

For learning to listen to colouring and intelligent use of text in singing I recommend listening to Ninon Vallin (Fauré’s favorite singer) singing Fauré’s "Les Berceaux" - or to Irene Joachim (granddaughter of Joseph Joachim) singing Brahms’s Regenlied (Rain song), or any song of Debussy, or maybe Alban Berg’s “Schlafen nur noch schlafen - or to Elizabeth Schumann singing Brahms’ “Der Tod das ist die kühle Nacht” (Death is like cool night) or Wolff’s “Wie scheint der helle Mond” (how the Moon does shine so bright) - or [maybe a dangerous suggestion] Elizabeth Schwarzkopf singing Richard Strauss’s "Freundliche Vision” (when she sings “eine Wiese voller Margeriten” I really see and feel a Meadow full of Daisies) or Wolff’s “Mignon” (when she sings “die Gold-orangen glüh'n” I see the Golden Oranges Glow). Please study the texts in advance, to develop feeling for the crucial emotional charge of the key-words and keep the texts before you; when you listened a few times, you will remember their meaning and you will notice that the emotional charge affects you increasingly.

For an example of varied use of Vibrato (from none to very markedly, and varied in tempo and intensity) listen to Violinist T.A. Irnberger playing the Violin sonatas of Niels Gade, accompanied by Jörg Demus on an old Streicher piano. For examples of shaping the tone with other means than vibrato listen to Dorothea Seel playing the “Undine” flute sonata from Carl Reinecke, accompanied by Christopher Hammer (the Cd contains a very well written text booklet).

For an excellent example of how to shape a tone and play the softest instrument of Western civilization "with balls", listen to Sigrun Stephan’s Cd “Kinship”, where she plays 2 different clavichords with emotion as well as technique like you never heard before. By the way: the Clavichord is THE instrument “par excellence” where a musician needs to search for optimum balance between consciously shaping every tone, and musical instinct … Try it, if you can gain access to a good clavichord. The instrument will teach you a lot if you open up to it and you will learn on what notes and to what extent vibrato works well, or other expressive means work better. You simply cannot play vibrato on every note; it will all come very natural ! 19 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Roland Hutchinson , not quite: Samuel Scheidt refers to this as to "imitatio violistica" ('Tabulatura Nova', 1624) - four 8th notes on a beat - given, that a half note would be in 'tempo ordinario', you would end up with a frequency of roughly 5 Hz. 19 Mar 2018
And yet, when it's the other way around (strings imitating the organ), I can't think of examples where anything that fast would be sensible.

Obviously, I intend to keep thinking about this, and I'll be sure to have a close look at the Tabulatura Nova. Thank you for bringing it to my attention in this connection! 19 Mar 2018

Okay: a quick look at the Tabulatura nova and some of the secondary literature relating to it explains why I had no recollection of Scheidt's collection in connection with the organ tremulant and the and the string "tremolo" effect of the portato bowing that I was talking about: they are two different effects, with no direct connection between them.

Some controversy apparently exists as to whether Scheidt's "imitatio violistica"/"besondere Art, gleich wie die Violisten mit dem Bogen schleifen zu machen pflegen" refers simply to playing legato like a string player slurring four notes under a single bow, or whether it intends something more subtle or specific.

However, in any case this much is clear: Scheidt's markings occur on groups of four SIXTEENTH notes that move predominantly stepwise, occasionally by leaps of a third, and only rarely by any larger interval.

The tremolo that I am talking about occurs on EIGHTH notes, and involves exclusively or overwhelmingly predominantly pitches that are repeated in groups of four or sometimes groups of two (in the latter case, very frequently still with four notes to the bow).

So, two different things altogether, and one involving roughly twice the speed of the other, so that in the end there is no contradiction between Werner Lamm's and my attempts to approximate their speeds numerically.

I'll close by mentioning another thing that I read from the string-tremolo/organ tremulant connection:

It is of course possible to execute a portato bowing with varying degrees of articulations between the notes, ranging from a barely imperceptible emphasis on the beginning of each note without any break in the sound to strongly marked notes separated by silence such that we might be tempted to call them (on-string) staccato rather than portato in the language of modern string playing. (Modern notation can also hint at the degree of separation by choosing between dashes under the slur or dots under the slur. For most of the 19th century, only dots were used for either type, and back in good ol' C17 it was just a slur with neither dots nor not-yet-invented dashes in connection with repeated pitches to indicate the tremolo).

However, since an organ tremulant -- whatever speed it is adjusted to -- produces only a fluctuation in the wind rather than a repeated interruption that would result in intermittent silences, I conclude that when we are called upon to imitate the effect of the organ with our bows in these early examples, we are not meant to completely stop the sound between notes, but rather to keep the bow moving, and the string sounding, throughout. 19 Mar 2018
Roland Hutchinson  More to Scheidt: In the selfsame Tabulatura nova, part 1, where the "imitation violistica" is introduced and explained, the fifth variation of no. 10 (Niederlandisch Liedgen/Cantio belgica ['Ach du feiner Reiter']) is a "Bicinium imitatione Tremula Organi duobus digitis in una tantum clave manu tum dextra, tum sinistra." (page 195). 19 Mar 2018

This "Bicinium by shaking imitation of the organ using two fingers [alternately] on one key, now in the right hand, now in the left" employs EIGHTH notes in groups of four or of two repeated pitches.

My naïve conclusion must be that Scheidt (who was certainly in a position to know) agrees with the composers for strings that an organ tremulant is best and most recognizable imitated with a rhythm of eighth notes. 19 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Roland Hutchinson  Alas, math never was my forte... 19 Mar 2018

Roland Hutchinson  To the contrary, your math is fine! It's just that we were inadvertently talking briefly at cross purposes about two different things.

The Scheidt is quite interesting to me as one of a number of early 17th-century sources that allude to slurs or legato playing as imitation of bowed instruments of one sort or another (violin, "lyra", or whatever). (Bruce Dickey could probably name all of those sources off the top of his head; I can't.) So I thank you for bringing it to my attention. I expect I had seen the imitation of the violin bit before and simply forgotten about it in the meanwhile, but I'm pretty sure I never knew about the imitation of the organ tremolo by alternating fingerings on keyboard--it's the sort of thing I would specifically remember.

So in the end I am very much indebted to you for a fruitful conversation. 19 Mar 2018

Werner Lamm Roland Hutchinson  Yet I have to confess I mixed things up a bit by having not read the source properly... As an organist (and worse: carillon player) I constantly dream of getting the sound of "my" instrument(s) a bit more vivid... 19 Mar 2018

Roland Hutchinson  Well, aside from the fact that we all misread sources at one time or another and shouldn't beat ourselves up too badly over it (in part because there are always people online who will gladly undertake that task for us), Scheidt practically invites misreading by printing his slurs over notes on a single degree of the staff on the page where he explains the meaning, making them look (aside from the shorter note values) for all the world just like the OTHER sort of thing that I was talking about.

I'm tempted to guess that he quite possibly sent off his manuscript to the printer with notes written without staff lines at that place, but that the printer didn't have any music type for notes without staff lines. Or not.

BTW, we had a great tour of the carillon at First United Methodist Church of Germantown (Pennsylvania) a couple of months ago when I was there for an all-day Sacred Harp singing. Impressive instrument! 19 Mar 2018

George Kennaway  George and 2 others manage the membership, moderators, settings and posts for Historical Performance Research. Re the organ part of this thread, David Hurwitz's article on 19C vox humana, in Music & Letters a few years ago (2012??) might interest some here.
Does anyone happen to know of any sources that talk about how recitatives were performed in the eighteenth century?

Jorge Andrés Garzón Ruiz  Quantz maybe, or Leopold Mozart. 23 March 2018

Andrew Munoz  Thank you. I should have thought of Quantz haha. 24 March 2018

Richard Bethell  Quantz's advice on recitative accompaniment, especially. 24 March 2018

Johannes Čapulcu Pausch  There is hardly any source that would work for all of the 18th c.  For the 1st half of it maybe Telemann, Preface to "Harmonischer Gottesdienst" and Stoelzel, "Abhandlung vom Rezitativ". 24 March 2018

Werner Lamm  Johann Mattheson:  "Der vollkommene Capellmeister", Hamburg 1739; "Grosse Geberalbaß-Schule", Hamburg 1731; "Die neueste Untersuchung der Singspiele", Hamburg 1744. Perhaps: "L'arte armonica" (Georgio Antoniotto 1760); Johann Joseph Fux: "Gradus ad Parnassum", Vienna 1725. 24 March 2018

Jacob Reed  Tosi/Agricola/Baird for the first half. 24 March 2018

Jacob Reed  Türk for the accompaniments, second half. 24 March 2018

Jed Wentz  The singer's preceptor by Domenico Corri. 24 March 2018

Neil Coleman  Mary Cyr's essay "Declamation and Expressive Singing in Recitative" in "Opera and Vivaldi" is a good place to start. Patrick Rogers' book "Continuo Realization in Handel's Vocal Music" discusses modern-day assumptions and the primary sources rather well. 24 March 2018

Oliver Webber  Very interested in this and everyone's recommendations. Jed mentioned Corri: he is particularly fascinating because he gives examples of recitative by Handel and other composers (treatise published in 1810...) with detailed performance instructions including rubato and dynamics. 24 March 2018

Christina Thaler  Following! 24 March 2018

Richard Bethell  Giambattista Mancini's 'Practical Reflections on Figured Singing' [1774 & 1777] has some useful advice to the effect that recitative should be spoken not sung: "Now the cantilena of the one and the other of these recitatives [i.e. both secco and accompagnato], however intoned, should always be loosened in such a manner that it resembles a perfect and simple spoken declamation. Thus it would be a defect if the actor, instead of speaking the recitative with a free voice, should wish to sing it, tying the voice continuously, and not think of ever distinguishing the periods and the diverse sense of the words by holding back, reinforcing, detaching and sweetening the voice, as a gifted man will do when he speaks or reads."  [Page 60 of Foreman's edition] 24 March 2018

Oliver Webber  Thank you Richard! I've just questioned a review which complained that a certain singer's recitatives were sometimes “declaimed, rather than musically enunciated”. This is the perfect riposte! 24 March 2018

Miles Golding  There's Polyphemus in Acis and Galatea, and then there's "... und ging hinaus und weinete bitterlich, und weinete bitterlich." from Bach's St John Passion. I don't see how one can convincingly declaim the latter. 26 March 2018
Oliver Webber Well, the review *was* about Polyphemus, so seemed particularly off the mark. Peter's regret in the passion is a rather special case - but perhaps all the more so if the rest of the recitative is closer to speech where possible. 26 March 2018

Miles Golding I'd probably walk out of any performance of Bach in which recitative pitch notation was not observed scrupulously. There is such a thing as good taste and common sense.

Hmmm.. Haendel's Messiah .."Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts" where the bass entry reflects the orchestral rising dotted rhythm arpeggio... I can't see how the rhythm and pitch in such instances can be interpreted in a sprechstimme manner.

We have become accustomed to "gluten-free" menu items ..... look out for “This performance will be declamation-free.” 26 March 2018

Oliver Webber I don’t think “declamation” means ignoring the pitch. Why would it? In fact Mancini goes on to say that the pitch must be observed accurately. It is more to do with the quality of voice and style of delivery. I would think a declamatory style is one where the energy of the words, the detail of the consonants, the precise vowel shapes, the punctuation and grammar (and therefore sense) are given a higher priority than sustained legato and beauty of tone. 26 March 2018

Oliver Webber Incidentally I was involved in the Acis that was reviewed - there was no distortion of pitch or rhythm from Polyphemus, just a particularly impressive delivery of the text. I have no idea what the reviewer would have preferred, or why! 26 March 2018

Miles Golding Phew! 26 March 2018

Miles Golding Richard said that Mancini "has some useful advice to the effect that recitative should be spoken not sung". Confusing. 26 March 2018

Oliver Webber Yes- to be fair, Mancini says “resembles”. Elsewhere in the chapter he stresses the importance of accuracy of pitch- I’ll have to find it later. However, there is a common theme on many of these sources which makes it clear that recitative is to be delivered in a unique way to aria, more akin to speech, even if it preserves pitch and rhythm- something we don’t always hear clearly enough IMO. I’m not sure Sprechstimme is quite the right comparison: it’s worth bearing in mind that the origins of recitative were rooted in the recital of poetry, which had already in 1600 a centuries-long tradition of unwritten semi-musical performance, and V Galilei says that in singing monody we should imitate the declamation of a well trained actor. Again I don’t have the exact quotation to hand so this is a paraphrase- the point being that the delivery of actors is likely to have been more stylised and projected than ordinary speech, and this advice was given relating to recitative with very precisely notated pitch and rhythm, often with a strong affective content, so there is no suggestion the notation should be ignored. 26 March 2018

Neil Coleman That passage from the St. Matthew Passion is an arioso, so, yes, it is sung rather than declaimed. Those recitatives from Acis and The Messiah are different in that they are accompanied by instruments in addition to the continuo section. Mattheson says that in this type, more attention has to be paid to the beat than in secco recitative, but the singer’s delivery must not betray its dependence on it; a fine balancing act at times. 26 March 2018

Joe Bolger One of the key psychoacoustic markers of speech is pitch indeterminacy. It is one of the ways we distinguish speech from singing. With this in mind I think it is useful consider that any source endorsing 'spoken' recitative is using a simile - we cannot literally
'speak notes'. This is not to say that recitative cannot be more or less 'speech-like', but such a description is only useful as a comparator, an indeterminate jumping off point between speech and song. It is worth remembering that a great variety of singers have been either condemned or praised for their declamatory style. Peter Pears serves as an instructive example; his command of text and affect were exemplary in spite (or because of?!) weighty, vibrato-heavy voice and he received both praise and criticism for his 'mannered' style. Understood in this context, endorsements of declaimed singing cannot be said to delimit an inviolable set of vocal aesthetics (as I would argue many sources and researchers have implied), but rather a marker of a particular taste. I'm sure Richard would remind me of the overwhelming evidence base for declaimed singing, but, as musical styles proliferate and diversify, 'declaimed' comes to mean different things to different audiences, all of whom hear in their own way. If early music singers, wagnerian baritones, Broadway stars and death metal screamers can all be said to declaim, the term ceases to operate as an aesthetically coherent category. This might explain Oliver your, in my opinion warranted, confusion over the review. Evidently your version of declamation is not in step with the reviewer's! This then begs the question of whether we should criticise audiences and reviewers for not having the depth of specialist understanding that performers do. I would argue not: let taste be taste and words be words, however problematic and confused the multiplicity of meanings they imply may be. 26 March 2018

Oliver Webber Interesting points, Joe, and just a brief response to your last point: I don't think a different understanding of "declamation" explains my puzzlement about this review - the reviewer complained that the recits were too "declaimed" (his word, not mine)- so he evidently did not like the *idea* of declamation in singing recit. Whatever you think "declamation" is - and I take your point that it might not define every element of delivery, and that therefore his idea of it might be different from mine - the idea that it doesn't belong in recitative is contrary to say the least, and suggests that the reviewer misunderstands the point of recitative.

And regarding the role of reviewers: yes and no. If you are reviewing an opera, and don't really understand what recitative is, then it could be argued - given the importance of recit to the genre - that you are perhaps not the best person for the job. That sounds harsh, but is it really? I've got various special areas of interest and expertise - if I wrote a review of, say, a CD of Rodgers and Hammerstein numbers, I wouldn't really expect to be taken very seriously, for example! 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell As Joe suggests, there is indeed an evidence base for speech-like recitative. I’ll supply some in the following posts. Most, John Hawkins apart, back Mancini’s position. Edgcumbe’s description of recitative singing as “noted declamation” is good. 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “A specimen of recitative music, in the form in which it was originally conceived, cannot at this day but be deemed a curiosity; as must also an air in one of the first operas ever composed: for these reasons the following dialogue and duetto are inserted, taken from the fifth act of the Orfeo of Claudio Monteverde:-- / 2 pages of music follow / Notwithstanding that this kind of melody is said by the inventors of it to correspond with the method of enunciation practised by the ancient Greeks and Romans, it may well be questioned whether the difference between the one and the other was not very great, for this reason, that the inflections of the voice in the modern recitative do not preserve a medium between speaking and singing, but approach too nearly towards the latter to produce the effects of oratory.” [John Hawkins History, 1775, P. 528] 26 March 2018
Richard Bethell “THÉVENARD, Gabriel Vincent, of Paris, in Biography, born in 1669, became in the operas of Lulli the first singer and actor of his time. He had a tenor voice, which made the public forget that of Beaumavielle; it was sonorous, mellow, and extensive in compass. He sung a little through the throat, but by dint of art, he found the means of rendering this little defect even agreeable. His appearance on the stage was dignified, and his performance wonderful! It was to him that the present manner (1780) of speaking recitative is due…. He sung more than forty years at the Opera, and only retired in the year 1730. He died at Paris in 1741, at the age of 72.” …. [Laborde, Quoted in Charles Burney’s Rees article] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “We may now define recitative to be an expressive and elegant manner of speaking; which if the composer would set, and the singer execute with sense and gracefulness, let them ask themselves how an orator would pronounce the words, preserving the grammatical construction, touching lightly, without any appogiatura, short syllables and unemphatic words, and giving a due, but not fierce, energy to the emphatic.” [Anselm Bayly, Alliance of Musick, Poetry and Oratory, 1788, page 72] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “Naldi’s style of pronouncing the Italian language is so perfect, that to every hearer in the least degree acquainted with that tongue, every syllable he uttered was perfectly intelligible.” [Allatson Burgh, anecdotes of Music, May 1806] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “Q. Is there not a certain style of singing approaching nearer to speaking than songs or airs? A. Yes; it is called recitative or reciting, and is nothing more than recitation, with musical sounds added.” [Gesualdo Lanza, Elements of Singing, 1813, P. 89] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “The besetting sin of most English singers is, that indistinctness of pronunciation which even in a song is one of the greatest blemishes, and in recitative is still more faulty. The Italians never talk of singing it, but call it reciting, and so it is and ought to be. It is not melody, it is noted declamation; and the first object is, not to warble it into an air, but to deliver the words with distinct articulation, sensible expression, proper emphasis, and with just punctuation, if I may so call the necessary short pauses for taking breath, which are like so many commas. In short, it should be assimilated as nearly as possible to good declamation. To lengthen it out by slow delivery is as wearisome as the dull recitation of a bad actor, orator, or reader.” [Richard Edgcumbe, Musical Reminiscences, 1834] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “…The first few bars of her recitative she gave with such truth and firmness, with such perfect tranquillity, and so simple and touching was her reading, that the audience, even at this early stage of her performance, began to give spontaneous demonstrations of their delight. And here it may be observed, that Mrs. A. [Alfred] Shaw seems to be the only English singer who thoroughly understands the use to be made of recitative, which is so often little more than mere speaking. She grasped it thoroughly, made it musical, avoiding without an effort coarseness on the one hand and feebleness on the other, and giving every sentiment its proper force. Her voice is a contralto cultivated to the highest degree, her intonation as true as possible, her execution perfect, every passage being turned in the most delicate and finished manner, and given with the most beautiful variety of light and shade.” [Times of London, 3 Oct 1842] 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell “Of these, two only are analagous in quality of voice—[Balbina] Steffanoni and [Teresa] Truffi….The same imperfection is revealed by one and the other, which is an inequality more or less sensible in her finer notes, and a slight tremulousness (tremolo) of the larynx, which although very effective in certain impassioned movements,
becomes a defect when involuntarily produced in a recitative; which should be given in a round and full volume of sound.” [Spirit of the Times, New York, 14 May 1849] 26 March 2018

Oliver Webber Richard, these are very helpful resources, thank you. Would you know where I could best look for earlier references even than these? I'm particularly interested in the 17th century, especially in Italy. 26 March 2018

Richard Bethell Oliver, I confess that I’ve concentrated more on the 18th century and that I haven’t studied the 17th C too closely, certainly from the recitative angle. I imagine you might find some useful comments by Jacopo Peri and Giulio Caccini. Emilio Cavalieri did write in a preface: “As I say, if you want to put the show on, necessarily every element should be excellent: the singer should have a beautiful, well-pitched voice, they should keep the voice steady, they should sing with passion, piano and forte, without divisions (ornamentation) and in particular that they should pronounce the words well so that they [the words] are understood, and they should accompany them with gestures and motions not only of the hands, but of steps as well – these are most effective aids in moving the passion.” 26 March 2018

Johannes Çapulcu Pausch Well spoken words in the ear of a long experienced and tasteful singer, dangerous in the student's. 24 March 2018

Oliver Webber Why dangerous? Surely students would be better to learn these things early rather than late? 24 March 2018

Johannes Çapulcu Pausch This cannot be learned by mere words, you'll need a good teacher and example. If you try to realise what you understand from the words alone, the result might become ridiculous. 24 March 2018

Oliver Webber Yes. But who said they should learn from words alone? 24 March 2018

Oliver Webber The words in this case are especially important, of course, since they run counter to many assumptions about what constitutes good singing. But there’s no reason why a student can’t discuss a passage like this with a good, well-informed teacher to achieve the best realisation. 24 March 2018

Jed Wentz Singers need to learn to declaim...with gusto, in sustained tones and using all the colours of meaning and inflection. Declamation used to be much closer to singing than our public speaking today suggests. Then the step from declamation to singing is but a small one. 25 March 2018

Luise Gündel In Joseph Haydn’s Letters you can read many instructions how to do a accompagnato or secco recitativo... 24 March 2018

Andrew Munoz Really? Interesting. I’ll look into that. Thanks😊 24 March 2018

Rafael Palacios GRIMAREST, Jean-Léonard le Gallois de, Traité du récitatif dans la lecture, dans l'action publique, dans la déclamation et dans le chant, avec un traité des accens, de la quantité et de la ponctuation, Paris, J. Le Fèvre, 1707. 24 March 2018

VERSCHAEVE, Michel, Le traité de chant et mise en scène baroques, Bourg-la-Reine, Zurfluh, 1997 (préface de Gustav Leonhardt).

Neil Coleman A couple of points that might not be found in any of the sources named so far: the stringed keyboard instruments used to accompany recitative included the ottavino (it was the commonest in Italy), clavichord, lute-harpsichord, and piano; the latter had been used to accompany recitative probably since the day that Cristofori presented his new instrument at court in Florence c.1697; later in the next century the acciaccature were chromatically inflected, so roughly from Jommelli onwards. 27 March 2018
FB Vibrato Wars

V34. David Badagnani, launched 15 April 2018

David Badagnani to Richard Bethell

15 April at 03:56

I have created a new YouTube playlist featuring videos of early music singers who don't use any detectable vibrato at all. Most of the repertoire is pre-Baroque with the exception of Gerlinde Sämann singing Bach in the first video, which makes it clear that this repertoire can be sung in such a manner without the listener feeling anything lacking. Can you make any suggestions of any other videos to add? [NB. Readers wanting to hear Gerlinde Sämann’s Bach need to be aware that the YouTube video is designed as a trailer for Benjamin Alard's excellent organ and harpsichord skills, only enabling the singer to be heard 3:10 minutes from the beginning. In Spotify’s account, the singing starts 2:08 minutes in.]

Early music singers who sing without vibrato - YouTube

Comments

Christopher Price Pontifex Marc Mauillon is vibrato-free apart from ornamental vibrato in his new recording of Michel Lambert’s lecons de tenebres. from This video, it is a very successful recording (I have it on order at the moment).

https://youtu.be/XcCHHsRbbnsManage 16 April

Marc Mauillon, Lambert, Leçons de Ténèbres (Album…

David Badagnani Thank you for the recommendation--the music and singer are excellent. He does allow his note endings to dissolve into a very modest, nearly infinitesimal vibrato on most un-ornamented long tones, a habit which I have noticed being used by many other mostly non-vibrato singers, and which leaves me unable to add their videos to my playlist, just for the sake of adhering to the definition. Richard has separate playlists for non-vibrato and "almost no vibrato."

16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex I think there is some historical justification for this from the sources, although heavily abused by many singers, even those who can sing a straight line through both straight or noodly passages. The shimmer that Mauillon adds to soften or taper off certain final notes is what I have always imagined the historical texts that mention varieties of vibrato (in different terminology) meant. 16 April

David Badagnani You may be correct. Maybe Richard can shed some light on the historical existence or non-existence of this "shimmer," which I hear on long notes as well as the ends of notes (what I think of as the "straightaways"). It's of course a normal part of Broadway musical singing, and I like its use in that context. 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex It is salutary to remember that heavy vibrato is generally only the most obvious element of a whole approach to vocal performance that has other facets that are tied to, for want of a better term, traditional modern opera house style. The pro and con side of the non-vibrato debate often seem to fall into the trap of discussing vibrato as if it is the only issue. Look at, for instance, Franco Fagioli, my particular bugbear, whose whole manner is a caricature exaggeration of everything from the traditional
modern opera house, but because he happens to be a countertenor many think he is good for baroque opera. 16 April

David Badagnani It's interesting that Gerlinde Sämann, who normally uses vibrato in her performances, chose to use none in what sounds like a German Lutheran chorale; archaic Protestant traditions such as the religious singing of the Amish sect, not to mention the Old Regular Baptist lined-out hymn-singing tradition of eastern Kentucky which informed the style of early country music and bluegrass, still typically use none, as does barbershop quartet singing. If this Sämann example is the only extant example of a truly non-vibrato performance of a Baroque opera aria, so be it. I will be on the lookout for more. 16 April

David Badagnani Jaroussky is more pleasant for me to listen to than Fagioli, but he's also still doing (albeit more modestly) what so many 19th- and early-20th-century critics objected to in the hundreds of reviews Richard has uncovered. 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex Yes, Jaroussky's increasingly persistent and wide vibrato has been getting on my nerves a little lately, although he is a splendid artist. The last live concert of his I went to, during the Utrecht Early Music Festival, was disappointing for me, owing to his over-the-top delivery, where everything had to be shouted or delivered with exaggerated "meaning" like a children's pantomime with a heavy dose of the shakes. 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex I think completely non-vibrato is not historically justified. There are contemporary texts from 16th to 18th centuries I believe that refer to the use of something that, despite the different terms used (none of them "vibrato"), is like an ornamental vibrato. Much in the way violinists, gambists, cellists (usually too heavily) and even lutenists use vibrato. 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex That is to say, not persistently but here and there to colour notes or shape passages - but more a shimmer than a shake of the kind many, many modern baroque opera singers use. 16 April

David Badagnani If early music singers truly used that expressive device in the way you describe, I would like it. It's so interesting that so many of the 19th- and 20th-century reviews demand a pure, straight tone as the model of good, traditional classical singing. 16 April

Richard Bethell I agree with Christopher that much of Jaroussky's work is, shall we say, unfortunate! However, he can sing baroque pieces properly. Here he is, with Julia Lezhneva, singing Pergolesi without vibrato, probably encouraged by Diego Fasolis. 16 April
https://youtu.be/KaCPnMA8R9sManage

Julia LEZHNEVA - Philippe JAROUSSKY:... YOUTUBE.COM

David Badagnani That's beautiful (and I agree with Jaroussky that this singing style is well suited to the music)! In other sections of the video (following the first slow duo) they revert to using vibrato on long notes again. 16 April
David Badagnani Richard, is there historical precedent for the "shimmer" added by both singers to the final note of the phrase at 0:40-0:42 (and again at 2:25-2:26)? This is what we were asking about before.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaCPnMA8R9s&t=00m40sManage 16 April

Richard Bethell Two things. (1) I agree that both singers relapse into their habitual vibrato style in allegro movements (such as II Cujus animam gementem and IV Quae moerebat et dolebat*), rather strongly; it's sometimes impossible to say whether they are trying to do a trill or a pitch vibrato! However, slower suspension-laden pieces like I [Stabat mater dolorosa] and XII [Quando corpus morietur] are certainly delivered vibrato free, (2) Regarding the "shimmer" I wonder whether the point you mention [0:40-0:42] could be an attempt at a somewhat perfunctory cadential trill, apart from the final note of the phrase. As to whether there is historical evidence for it, it depends which source you look at. I think Tosi would have disapproved. However Anselm Bayly might have been happy: "The manner of waving or vibrating on a single tone with the voice, like as with the violin, especially on a semi-breve, minim, and a final note, hath often a good effect; but great care must be taken to do it discreetly and without any trembling" [P. 74 in Alliance of Poetry] [Also in Practical Treatise on Singing and Playing]

* I'm using Spotify, which is a much better source, as it lacks the running commentary. This shows, incidentally, that Diego Fasolis's version is very popular, with "Stabat mater dolorosa" getting over 1 million views, very high for a baroque piece.

David Badagnani Thank you for your insightful response, Richard Bethell. At 0:40-0:42 it definitely is a cadential trill on B-flat to the A-flat below, but I was only referring to the final G that comes after this trill, which is given a very slight vibrato by both singers. Was it normal in that era to always do that to the ends of long notes? Because most early music singers, even those who use little or no vibrato, seem to do this. 18 April

David Badagnani d. 1794

Richard Bethell Curiously, the end-of-phrase vibrato is also a mannerism common to jazz trained singers. 18 April

David Badagnani True, and also in Broadway-style musical theater singing (where I really enjoy it). 18 April

Christopher Price Pontifex Mauillon’s other recordings from Machaut well into the baroque period show that this is his basic approach. 16 April

David Badagnani The performance of "Orfeo" I just attended featured this lead singer, who used vibrato almost all the way through on every long note. Since the last time I heard this orchestra perform the same opera about 20 years ago I hoped they could find singers who could sing without, but I was not so lucky.
https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07B3BDMZR/ref=dm_ws_tlw_trk9Manage 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex Oh, I just ordered that recording 2 nights ago. The short samples I could hear sounded ok. As so often, I shall find out the truth when the disc arrives. 16 April

Oliver Webber Have you listened to the Andrew Parrott version? 17 April
Christopher Price Pontifex Oliver, the earlier one with Nigel Rogers or the more recent one with Charles Daniels? 17 April

Oliver Webber You might be thinking of London Baroque, not Andrew Parrott. As far as I know AP has only recorded it once, with Charles Daniels. 17 April

Richard Bethell Thanks for commenting on my page, David Badagnani and Christopher Price Pontifex. Certainly, the truth and sheer beauty of pure, natural vocal sound is what we want to hear in music from the long 18th C. We are starting to get this sound, increasingly from mainland European groups, although very little from the UK or US, so far. First, may I ask if you’ve seen my paper “Straight Tone singing through the Long 18th Century”, published in NEMA’s recent newsletter? I did publicise this in FB’s Historical Performance Research Group, but responses on the content have been zero to date. If you are a NEMA member, you can download this from our site. If not, could you both please let me have your email addresses, so I can email it to you? I’ll revert later on some of the points you’ve raised. 16 April

Matthew Hopcroft I agree that vibrato is overused. If only for the purpose of logical extreme, no vibrato might bring a hidden luminance and vitality to the repertoire. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite Just wondering, is the pursuit of a pure, vibratoless sound an effort towards an historically informed singing style, or simply the pursuit of an aesthetic preference? When it comes to the singing of baroque music and earlier, there are so many other elements of an historically informed style which are much more routinely ignored in performance, and yet don't receive half the attention in these discussions. While an informed conversation on vibrato is obviously important, where is the playlist of early music singers using slides/portamento, or some of the extended ornamental techniques we read about? Altering approaches to vibrato in baroque and earlier vocal sounds would be beautifully complimented by nuanced uses of all of the type of essential ornamental techniques we read about. For example, where is Ganassi’s ornamental tremolo of a third in Renaissance singers today? Or Monteclaire’s sanglot or son glissé? There are some amazingly detailed studies of ornamental neumes in medieval music and yet how many performances of actually use these? I think I can count the one's of which I'm aware on one hand, and these things are certainly not taught in HIP singing courses at conservatoires. Where are the impassioned online debates calling for their use? 16 April

Matthew Hopcroft I think if vibrato is approached as personally as the choice of other vocal adornments we might have more variety. Actually that’s it.

We need more variety.

We have adopted our singing from listening to recordings rather than following our own instincts and what might considered in good congruence with the style of music. 16 April

Christopher Price Pontifex Use of a constant heavy vibrato is the most obvious and most frequent feature of singers in much so called HIP performance today. It is precisely because, applied indiscriminately like a thick paste over the whole, it obscures the written in and implied features of the written musical text that contemporary writers and audiences appear to have expected to be rendered by any good singer. As for aesthetic preference, that may be an incentive for the anti vibrato proponents, but that is no reason to simply ignore the whole issue and assume that today’s standard singing style (so heavily influenced by both recent historical tradition and modern popular music styles) is no different from 18th or earlier century style. Those who espouse the singing style whose elements include a constant heavy
vibrato, shrieking increasingly as the pitch increases and ignoring the sound and articulation of the accompanying period instruments or those who simply say anything should go because we can never really know how they sang in earlier times are following aesthetic preference as much as those who prefer little vibrato. It’s not a valid argument to dismiss one approach simply because those favouring it prefer it aesthetically. If that were an acceptable argument, we should simply ignore any early music we like because of the risk of liking it for the wrong reason. Sorry for the rambling and off the cuff-ness of this post. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite It's certainly foolish to say we can't know how they sounded to justify a lack of interest, and I'm as distressed by the constant vibrato as the next person! I would say that the number of HIPers who sing without vibrato is substantial, although still not a majority. However, the number who use sliding sounds and techniques such as those I described in my post above as part of their ornamental toolbox is substantially fewer. In comparison, the vibrato issue is a well worn topic and fairly mainstream! 16 April

David Badagnani If you can make more suggestions for videos to add to my playlist, I will do so. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite David Badagnani I'll have a think 😊 16 April

Tim Braithwaite https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9mED0NYv1gI 18 April

Tim Braithwaite How this - certainly a mostly straight tone with some striking embellishments throughout. Great tremolo from the sopranos at about 1:17 18 April

Tim Braithwaite Any thoughts about the track I recommended? 19 April

David Badagnani Thank you, Tim--I had not seen your post earlier. It's wonderful--I cannot identify the composer or era. Of course, in all types of choral music (including choirs singing contemporary music) directors often request straight tone from the singers. Those ornaments just after 1:00 sound somewhat Arabic or Bulgarian.

The sound is powerful--like an aural representation of the columns of a Gothic cathedral! If architecture is frozen music, is vocal music, properly sung, living architecture? 19 April

Christopher Price Pontifex We actually need more intellectual honesty in this debate. Richard is criticised for openly stating that not only does he prefer no (or very reduced) vibrato but also dislikes the modern traditional opera house singing style. But that is no reason to dismiss his research and the academic views he comes to altogether. Even less reason to be scornful of his ideas or of him personally, which is a bit of the flavour of some responses to his posts on the topic. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite I hope my comment didn't come across as scornful of him or his research, I have the utmost respect for his academic scruples. I simply find it frustrating how this often feels like the only conversation in historically performed performances when there is so much more that needs to be discussed. 16 April
Richard Bethell Thank you Tim. I agree, other features of vocal sound were probably more important, as I've noted in my reply to Matthew Hopcroft's post in David Badagnani's parallel thread. If you would like to read my paper, but aren't a NEMA member so can't download it from our website, do message me your email address and I'll send it to you. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell thank you, I would actually very much like that, I'll send you my email now! 16 April

Richard Bethell You should have my email & attachment now, Tim. 16 April

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell thanks! 16 April 16 April

David Badagnani I would very much like to read your article too.

David Badagnani It's so instructive to listen to historical recordings like this, which Richard has recommended. Only at 1:05 do we hear a wide vibrato--and then realize that it's not vibrato at all, but actually a trill notated in the music! The portamentos are also very distinctive. If this very modest vibrato (which is even less pronounced in some of her other recordings) provoked such criticism in the early 20th century, it's easy to see what the vocal ideal was in the minds of many at that time.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnfglz8teKAM

Emma Albani sings Handel's "Largo" on Pathé 50330…. 16 April

Graham O'Reilly You say "If this very modest vibrato (which is even less pronounced in some of her other recordings) provoked such criticism in the early 20th century, it's easy to see what the vocal ideal was in the minds of many at that time." Did it ? 19 April

David Badagnani Can you clarify your question? 19 April

Graham O'Reilly Did it provoke criticism ? From whom ? 19 April

Richard Bethell You bet it provoked criticism, on no fewer than 80 occasions between 1873 and 1906. It's quite obvious from the comments that critics expected straight-voiced singing. I give you three reviews, the first in 1881 from the Globe: "Her fine voice was in excellent condition, and she sang with more than usual pathos and expression. On two occasions, however, she condescended to introduce the commonplace and mechanical device of the artificial tremolo and on both occasions the effect of her otherwise delightful singing was much injured. The tremolo was so obviously artificial that the listener found himself suddenly awakened from the dramatic illusion previously created by Madame Albani’s spontaneous and natural pathos, and the perfunctory voice-trembling—bearing some likeness to an imperfect shake—could not for a moment be mistaken for the involuntary tremor of genuine emotion. Madame Albani on so many other occasions has proved herself able legitimately to command and enchain the sympathies of her audience, that her employment of a stale device, unworthy of so admirable an artist, was much to be regretted." [corrected] 19 April
Richard Bethell Next, from the Chicago Tribune in 1895: "It has since occurred to Mme. Albani that her old master [Lamperti] was short-sighted and that after all she is a dramatic soprano. She has encouraged the idea and has, indeed, indulged it. And it has had its revenge. But it is not responsible for everything. Whatever class of music she may choose, there is no shadow of reason why she should shriek, why she should not sing in tune, why she should sing frontale, why she should encourage a vibrato, why she should slur up and down to every other note, or, for that matter, even why, after having delivered some particularly bathetic passage— if I may use the expression— she should wildly clutch at the signboard of the pianoforte next which she happens to be standing, and cast her eyes up at the peculiarly dispiriting ceiling of the Queen’s Hall. I say there is no reason why she should do any of these things, and she does them all." 19 April

Richard Bethell Finally, a rare complimentary review from the New Zealand Herald in 1907: "Her pianissimo, or sotto-voce, singing, is perfection, and the full beauty of her voice is revealed in the upper register. Here the quality of her notes is exceptionally beautiful—rich, round, mellifluous, and sweetly penetrating. Her mastery of the art of vocalisation is superb, her light and shade, her modulation, and her phrasing, perfect. Albani makes free use of the vocal shake (as distinct from the tremolo), and very effective it proves. She does not altogether discard the tremolo either, this being noticeable from time to time in sustained notes." 19 April

Graham O’Reilly Thanx for those Richard. The first one sounds as if the comment is directed towards something like the big trill she does in the middle of the largo, rather than "ordinary" vibrato. The second guy is obviously ill. Nothing she could have done would have pleased him, except perhaps commit suicide. In all three, it's interesting all the different terms employed : artificial tremolo, voice-trembling (sounds like a term Grainger might have invented), shake, vocal shake, (real) tremolo, as well as, once, vibrato. In our discussion here "vibrato" seems to be used for all of these, which I think is leading us up some blind alleys. And no-one here has broached the enormous difference between pressured and un-pressured vibrato, which for me is the key to it. 20 April

Christopher Price Pontifex Another very interesting recording from a few years ago features a wonderful, under-explored repertoire of airs by Marc Antoine Charpentier sung by Jolle Greenleaf, accompanied by solo theorbo played by her husband, lutenist Hank Heijink. It shows a very interesting approach to minimal vibrato and how to use it. Jolle also has the most extraordinary, thrilling trills I have ever heard.
https://store.cdbaby.com/cd/asprodolce#Manage 16 April

♫ Songs Of Love & Loss - AsproDolce. Listen @cdbaby

David Badagnani These may not be available outside the U.S.: 16 April
https://www.youtube.com/.../UCfLiEl0NzwAuEHypwDDhH1g/videosManage

Jem Hammond Rights blocked in GB, unfortunately. 😞 17 April

Christopher Price Pontifex They are available. The CD is well worth buying. 16 April

Werner Lamm This whole vibrato-nonvibrato - discussion reminds me of idolatry. Do your homework, guys. 17 April

Tim Braithwaite What should we be home-working on? 17 April
Oliver Webber Discussions like these *are* homework! The issue is a live one, and an interesting one. It is nuanced, subtle and occasionally misleading. Frequent discussion, with examples, is no bad thing. 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King Greta Haenen Vibrato in Baroque Music (in German, 1988). 17 April

Werner Lamm Tim: practise. Practise more. Go found your own ensemble. Teach at university. Become Director of music. Sing in public. Practise more. Get acquainted with singers. Accompany singers. Get in trouble when 2 days before a premiere, or on the 2nd day of a record production, your favourite singer goes to hospital. Practise even more. Study. Sing every day, and do at least 50 concerts per year. If you have done all this, we can start a discussion. 17 April

Werner Lamm Tim: Practise. Practise more. Go found your own ensemble. Teach at university. Become Director of music. Sing in public. Practise more. Get acquainted with singers. Accompany singers. Get in trouble when 2 days before a premiere, or on the 2nd day of a record production, your favourite singer goes to hospital. Practise even more. Study. Sing every day, and do at least 50 concerts per year. If you have done all this, we can start a discussion. 17 April

Tim Braithwaite Werner Lamm I actually do all of this already, although, being young, not all on the level I'd like to, and we can always practice more! Am I allowed to be involved in the discussion or does my youth disqualify me from seeing issues in the current world of early music and wanting to be instrumental in changing it? 17 April

Richard Bethell Idolatry? Of what? I have no academic credibility whatsoever. And my days of doing 50 concerts a year were half a century ago. But I've certainly done my homework, having studied the vocal sound world of the 18th and 19th centuries for nearly 20 years. So I have something to say. 17 April

Benjamin Stein Agreed. Attempting to pull rank to end discussion is a poor substitute for argument. I'm enjoying the back and forth, and always learn something from both opinions and questions that require all of us to clarify our thinking. 17 April

Tim Braithwaite https://youtu.be/87es-k94drE?t=3192Manage 17 April

REQUIEM - A. Divitis? A. de Févin?. ENSEMBLE...

Jed Wentz I think it more important that the singer actually express the text. That would be a rhetorical approach. The text should sound as if it comes from the heart. If in doing so the singer uses vibrato, then I don't care. If the singer applies vibrato because it 'sounds nice' that is another matter entirely. 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King I suggest that there is a larger question lurking beneath this and similar discussions. Whatever period practice concerning vibrato might have been, was Vibrato as important a topic back then as it is for us today? Chat-group discussions today often focus on Pitch, Temperament & Vibrato. But period evidence does not support prioritising these topics.

The underlying question is "What were the priorities in a particular period/place?". If we fail to examine this question, then we are digging in the wrong place, and no matter how deep the hole is dug, it will always be in the wrong place!

In 1601, Caccini defined Music as 'nothing else than Text & Rhythm, with Sound last of all.
And not the other way around!". Here is a period prioritisation (not the only possible one, of course) that would inspire quite a different set of questions today. 17 April

https://andrewlawrenceking.com/.../music-expresses-emotions/Manage

**Tim Braithwaite** I do absolutely agree that there are other things to be talking about, rhetoric being definitely one of them. While I have the utmost respect for those (such as yourself) who prioritise rhetorics in Renaissance and early Baroque singing, it is, in my opinion, a little unfair to say that other issues are not prioritised. 3/4 of the sources we have on singing from the 16th and early 17th century are improvisation manuals in which rhetorics are not mentioned at all. Yes, the Italian Seconda Practica was about a reestablishment of the prioritisation of text in music but I would argue that it was fairly unsuccessful in this effort! Most later writers such as Praetorius discuss the Italian style through a description of ornamental types and passaggi. Bernhardt lists ornaments and singing styles with barely a paragraph on how the text is important.

Ornamented manuscripts such as Egerton 2971 show that Caccini's rather strict instructions were being fairly routinely ignored and indeed, the 17th century saw the rise in the fame of the virtuoso castrato singer, with Baroque opera being famous for its overt embellishment.

While I absolutely agree that there is much much more to talk about than vibrato, I don't believe that all singing was an extended form of acting as some do. I think in reality most musicians met in the middle, with both declamatory delivery and virtuoso coloratura being alive on the stage at the same time and, as Niels Berentsen has pointed out, the two don't necessarily contradict each other. As such, I think that, while it's absolutely necessary to encourage singers to work from a more rhetorical point of view, this shouldn't cloud other elements of historical singing from our view! How many higher male voices truly perfect the art of uniting the registers for example? And yet it's repeatedly stated as the gold standard of good singing.

However, I don't mean to be too confrontational! I do love the work you've done and find your blog to be enormously helpful! 17 April

**Niels Berentsen** Tim Braithwaite, is it really a contradistinction? An ornate delivery is also a part of rhetoric. 17 April

**Tim Braithwaite** Niels Berentsen I pressed enter too early and am currently finishing the rest of the post! 17 April

**Niels Berentsen** I absolutely agree Tim, and I'm always horrified to hear it when somebody opposes what would have been fairly standard ornamentation for the sake of "rhetoric" (which they confuse with some kind of "werktreue" to the supposed intentions of the composer). 17 April

**Tim Braithwaite** Niels Berentsen I think that I agree with your previous post though about ornamentation and rhetoric being linked. In a way, we need to question our idea of ornamentation and ask why something we see as extra was seen as 'essential.' I think that it IS linked to rhetorical practices, after all it's very hard to imagine a vocal style which respects the heightened, song like style of baroque declamation not making use some sort of nuanced sliding aesthetic. If anything, graces like the port de voix or la chûte suggest a
much more fluid and organic manner of vocal delivery, and as such, their study is
intimately bound with that of declamation! 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King Tim Braithwaite and Niels Berentsen - lovely discussion,
gentlemen! And this is my point, we can use period sources to examine priorities, to
indicate which questions to consider, as well as to answer our questions. And, clearly, as
we change repertoires, periods, countries, even as we follow different individuals in the
same cultural milieu of the past, we see different questions to ask, and different answers to
those questions.

My point is that Vibrato is rarely a good question to ask. And when it is, the answers need
not detain us for very long. There are many more interesting subjects to consider! 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King By the way, there is some nice stuff on the theme of
"ornamental" rather than "rhetorical" delivery in Peri's Preface to Euridice, where he notes
that some performers do his music in the old-fashioned ornamental style, in spite of all his
previous remarks on the rhetorical basis for his composing. 17 April

Richard Bethell I like Emilio De Cavalieri's balanced advice, in his introduction to
"Anima & Corpo" [1600]:-- 'As I say, if you want to put the show on, necessarily every
element should be excellent: the singer should have a beautiful, well-pitched voice, they
should keep the voice steady, they should sing with passion, piano and forte, without
divisions (ornamentation) and in particular that they should pronounce the words well so
that they [the words] are understood, and they should accompany them with gestures and
motions not only of the hands, but of steps as well – these are most effective aids in
moving the passion.' 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King I'm also a great Cavalieri fan. 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King 57 performances of Anima & Corpo so far, and still running in
repertoire, at Theatre Sats in Moscow. 17 April

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell lovely quote, we need to be careful not to group
divisions and accenti/graces together though. There are other sources (such as Zenobi)
who talk about how certain pieces require no ornamentation, simply accenti, gruppi, trilli
etc. 17 April

Richard Bethell Let's look at the long 18th C first. I've found no evidence for continuous
tremolo/vibrato, whether natural or assumed, by named singers during this period. So why
would people make a fuss about something which wasn’t done? Also, qualified observers
such as Johann Quantz, Charles Burney, the Mozarts, William Gardner, Mount Edgcumbe,
Richard Mackenzie Bacon and John Waldie would not agree that sound is unimportant. They
made it clear that they wanted to hear pure, clear, generally tremolo-free vocalism. Thus,
Bacon wrote in 1823: “When I hear such a singer as Miss Stephens or Mrs Salmon, the power
ductility seems carr...
or a sort of trillo? Bruce Dickey certainly has views on this. By the way, we will be discussing this at our conference with BREMF on 20-21 October on Vocal Sound and Style 1450-1650, at which both Greta Haenen and Robert Toft (amongst others) have agreed to contribute. 17 April

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Richard Bethell - "no evidence for continuous tremolo" "why make a fuss?"

This is my point entirely. The question of vibrato is very little mentioned in period sources, so it is a shame that so much fuss is made about it today. There are better fish to fry. 17 April

**Richard Bethell** It is surely inevitable that we fuss about vibrato today, when singers routinely perform Handel and Bach with massive tone-wide vibratos. Understandably, Christopher Price Pontifex, myself and others commenting in this thread get upset about this. What we want to hear, but hardly ever get, is pure straight toning. 17 April

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Pure straight is one possible option for an 18th-century long note.... 17 April

Christopher Price Pontifex But those examples, Andrew, do not show the option of a constant, almost unvaried, markedly pitch altering vibrato such as we hear today from, for example, almost every countertenor singing in a baroque opera. Moreover, not even Richard is suggesting that, measured with scientific instruments, a singer will or should produce a perfectly smooth sound. Some variation of sound, including vibrato, is always present, but not always perceptible. What the sources he has found seem to be criticising, when they express displeasure with a singer’s vibrato, is, first, heavy shaking vibrato and, secondly, the unrhetorical or unexpressive use of vibrato. Richard will correct me if that is incorrect. 17 April

Andrew Lawrence-King Roger North, cited by Greta Haenen in the Wobbly Bible (aka Vibrato in Baroque Music) 17 April

Richard Bethell Quite right, Andrew. But Roger North also expressed a preference for the first option: "It is rarely observed, but let it pass for a truth upon my word, that the greatest elegance of the finest voices is the prolation of a clear pure sound. And I may ad, that in voice or instrument (where the hand draws the sound) it is the most difficult part to peforme. But our devious inclinations lead as well masters to teach, as scollars to press, the learning of tricks such as the trill, slide, &c., all which are good in their tie. But the fabric must be raised, before the carving, such as that, is putt on." 17 April

Richard Bethell Anyway, my bed calls. Will look up further posts in the morning, perhaps from my US and Australian FB friends. 17 April

Michael O'Loghlin Whoops, Australian, that would be me. Unfortunately I'm a string player who can only learn from the other comments here. I'm sure Andrew Lawrence-King...
is correct, that it has been around for a long time but up till the end of the 19th century was not used continuously by strings or voices. Have a listen to any modern performance of the ensembles in Verdi's Requiem: a horrible experience where all harmony and most melody is lost in 3 or 4 overlapping wabbles. Impossible that Verdi imagined that! 18 April

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Nice quote. As Devil's Advocate, I'll reply that Purcell's notorious Catch makes it clear that a long-pricked note would normally get a Shake.

And since I've already spent more time on the Vibrato Wars than the subject is worth, I'll sign off with the remark that (following period sources) I'm against continuous vibrato, and also against total avoidance of vibrato, in this repertoire.

I don't agree with the idea that Vibrato is like marmite (some people like it, others hate it). I think of it as pepper (wonderful in its place, and ruinous if over-used). 17 April

**Oliver Webber** Agreed. “Vibrato” vs “non vibrato” is a classic case of false dichotomy that so often blights historical performance discussions. 17 April

**Christopher Price Pontifex** Oliver, another classic false dichotomy is between historical fidelity in performance practice and expression/expressiveness. This lies behind some comments in the contra “non vibrato” camp it seems to me. 17 April

**Richard Bethell** Thank you, Andrew and Oliver, for your well-expressed responses. 18 April

**Andrew Lawrence-King** Christopher Price Pontifex I think you have identified the underlying point hidden in many HIP/mainstream debates: "expression/expressiveness". This term, which has unfortunately been used in wannabe scientific investigations of the history of recording (CHARM in Cambridge, good programs also in Australia), is so ill-defined as to be almost useless, except for creating arguments!

For many listeners, "expressive" is a code for a certain manner of performance. For some "expressive" = rubato (notice in Sibelius music-writing software, the choice between "espressivo/meccanico" in the rhythm menu). For some "expressive" = vibrato. For some "expressive" = portamento (a new war is bubbling up around this word, you might have noticed).

Each of these, rubato, vibrato, portamento, are performance options that were intended in 19th/20th century to indicate emotion.

The perspective of History of Emotions is helpful here (I was a Visiting Researcher for the Australian Centre, and there is a parallel organisation in London), Looking at 16th-18th musical discourse through this lens, emotions are indicated by composed dissonance/resolution, by pitch contours that reflect speech, and by contrasts in note-values; emotions are indicated by performers in crescendo/diminuendo on a single note (e.g. Caccini), or between one note and the next (e.g. Quantz on dissonance), by making the words audible, by changing tone colour word by word (Monteverdi), by Gesture (full body, and facial expression too).

I'm thinking about intense ornamentation ("Dalle piu alte sfere" the opening to the 1589 Intermedi thru "Possente Spirto" to mid-18th century Da Capo opera arias, if any such
continuity is a valid thought). It seems to me that florid ornamentation is not so much an indication of one or other particular emotion, and more a sign for super-human power. Room for discussion there...

A key aim of Rhetoric (including music) is of course 'to move the Passions', as well as delighting the ear and engaging the mind. But whose passion, whose ear, whose mind? Just to ask this question (though it is too infrequently asked!) is to reveal the obvious answer: the Listener's! Here is a crucial difference between the 19th/20th concept of the Artistic Genius "expressing" his (it usually is his, rather than hers) own extraordinary emotions, and the pre-1800 ideal of musicians seeking to move the listener's emotions. From this springs respect for our audience "A voi ne vengo" sings La Musica, "incliti eroi". The AUDIENCE are the heroes in a baroque opera hall! I love this respect, in contrast to the elitist disdain that seems hard-wired into a 19th/20th century view of performance, emotions and spectators.

But just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, being delighted by music is in the ear of the listener, being fascinated is in the listener's mind, being moved is in the listener's heart. Thus it matters intensely to an individual listener to hear enough vibrato, or enough non-vibrato, to indicate what charms, engages and moves THEM (plural to signify non-gendered singular).

If this is understood, the argument is no longer about HIP, but about personal preference. De gustibus non est disputandum, if those tastes are purely personal. Perhaps that can take some heat out of the discussion, so that light can be shed on historically information about period tastes in music, rather than arguing about modern tastes in period music!

Returning (warily) to the subject of Vibrato, I am personally rather anti-vibrato. As a teenager, I could not appreciate Freddie Mercury, because his vibrato seemed to me false, fake and insincere. I have come to appreciate well-applied occasional vibrato, and to thrill to huge vibrato when extremely well applied (for me now, it's not about how wide, but about how well the on/off switch is worked). Shirley Bassey "Hey big spender" - Yes! I teach both non-vibrato and continuous-vibrato singers to imitate Whitney Houston's "And I................ will always love you". Reading period sources has encouraged me to focus on other matters, in my listening and in my directing. As director, I find that working hard on those other matters, especially making the words audible, changing the tone-colour word-by-word, and avoiding false "expressivity" on neutral words or Bad syllables, all this tends to lead singers to apply vibrato selectively.

Some of my most inspiring work these days is with singers who use a lot more vibrato than I consider ideal. But I'm not going to "die in the ditch" for vibrato; I'm not going to risk the working relationship, the artistic trust, by attacking their use of vibrato head-on. Rather, I aim to win trust and build the partnership by emphasising all the other matters, which are anyway more important, and let the vibrato resolve itself, over time. Once trust is there, even these most delicate topics can be worked on.

I also do a lot of rehearsal with singers speaking. Spoken delivery tends to reset the vibrato gauge rather effectively! 18 April

Richard Bethell You make some interesting points, Andrew, raising the key question about the aim of rhetoric: "whose passion, whose ear, whose mind?" It is of course, the
listener, in partnership with the composer and performer. In quoting Garcia [The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is . . . first to feel those emotions oneself] Judy Tarling makes some interesting points about “mirror neurons” [Weapons of Rhetoric, page 72]. For example, I think that I am quite lucky in that I possess mirror neurons with Domenico Scarlatti because I really do “get” his music in all its myriad moods. But, to me, Liszt is a charlatan; obviously, I’m simply not on his wavelength.

Job Ter Haar Interesting, but some points need correction. "the Listener's! Here is a crucial difference between the 19th/20th concept of the Artistic Genius "expressing" his (it usually is his, rather than hers) own extraordinary emotions, and the pre-1800 ideal of musicians seeking to move the listener's emotions." After reading more than 3,000 19th century concert reviews I think I can now say that this is another false dichotomy, at least as far as the 19th century is concerned. I didn't read much (if anything) about this 'artistic genius' or 'the expression of extraordinary emotions'. Also, the theory of the affections is still used in 19th c and even early 20th century treatises, for instance in Hugo Becker's one about the cello, who quotes Quantz and adds that the only difference with today is that we now know more about the human psyche 😊 Reading all those concert reviews my impression is that words like expression and feeling are used in more or less the same way as we do today. It's also interesting that some 19th c writers complain that vibrato is often confused with emotion! 18 April

Andrew Lawrence-King Thank you for your expert comments, Job Ter Haar. My understanding of 19th/early 20th aesthetics is admittedly rather superficial. I am sure that the caricature of the "Artistic Genius" needs detailed reappraisal. Nevertheless, I think there is some grain in truth in it, even if that grain is one that has been misunderstood by later generations.

I would argue that adding a 20th-century footnote to the Theory of Affections to the effect that "now we know it's not true" distances performers from that Theory, and privileges a scientific, even reductionist view of psychology that does not mesh well with the more holistic, earlier Theory. Ironically, neuroscience and modern hypnotism studies are showing that the Theory of Affections fits well at the holistic level as a functioning model of emotions at work (even though we now view the micro-levels very differently). See https://andrewlawrenceking.com/.../the-theatre-of-dreams.../

Finally, I'm properly sceptical about assumptions like Becker's that "nothing has changed". Whilst the words may be familiar, the meanings may have changed, and the context certainly has changed. The past is a foreign country... Nevertheless, I would tend to agree with you that "expression" today has preserved much of its 19th-century meaning. I would argue that the 17th-century meaning was different!

But keeping Oliver Webber's warning (above) in mind, I accept that we should not create a false dichotomy of pre versus post 1800, any more than we should imagine that nothing changed. Complex truths are harder to engage with than easy fallacies! 18 April


Andrew Lawrence-King Richard Bethell I love the link between Theory of Affections and Mirror Neurons. (Both are poetic models rather than scientifically accurate descriptions, more like the book of Genesis than Hawking RIP).
And the question of how "hot" a performer should be is complex in any period: [deeply involved with the emotions of their role? could be effective, might lead to loss of control: pushing the buttons with cool detachment? might have more effect on the audience, if they don't notice the detachment; somewhere in between? for sure, and precisely where? ]

See Roach "The Player's Passion" for a thought-provoking discussion of changing historical views of this question. Our post-Method generation tends to be impressed by actorly involvement, but there is much to be said for the Olivier approach to portraying emotions. [Allegedly in response to Hoffman's "I have the line, I just don't have the motivation", Olivier is supposed to have replied "Try acting, dear boy".]

Modern studies of the physiology of emotions show that inside-out (feel first, this leads to showing) and outside-in (show first, this leads to feeling) both work. If you force a smile, you feel happier. Interestingly, if you apply electrodes to the facial muscles and produce an utterly fake smile, the smiler still feels happier.

I seriously wonder if this phenomenon (well-known to psychologists) could actually be used as a treatment for Depression. That, and an impressively expensive sugarpill labelled "Placebo, no added ingredients, scientifically proven effectiveness". 18 April

Andrew Lawrence-King Now I will be shot down in flames, but sometimes my impression is that Vibrato is employed like that sugar pill. "Vibrato, no added emotion or understanding, fools most listeners"

OK, I've put on the blindfold. Firing squad, take aim.... FIRE! 18 April

Job Ter Haar Andrew Lawrence-King I will look up Becker's exact words. Of course we can't assume that he understood Quantz's text the way Quantz understood it himself but it would also be dangerous to assume that there was something like a generally shared 18th or 17th century understanding or meaning of these terms that could be compared with Becker's understanding. On the topic of 'Artistic Genius expressing extraordinary emotions': interestingly that idea does seem to be present in the 19th century reviews I read, but mostly in the discourse about composers. I will try to give some examples in another thread. 18 April

David Tayler Thank God. 18 April

David Badagnani Did anyone have any comments about the videos in the playlist linked in the very first post in this thread, or have any other videos to suggest that I add to it? I thank you, Christopher, for your earlier recommendations, which I appreciate very much.

David Badagnani Andrew, can you please provide your interpretation of the line from the Purcell catch and how it squares with English vocal performance practice of that time (late 17th century)? 18 April

Oliver Webber Do you mean the line about a long prick’d note- something like “I’ll shake it when I come to it again”? If so surely that’s simply a shake- i.e. a trill. But perhaps it’s a different one you have in mind. 18 April

David Badagnani Yes, that is the quote, and I assumed, from the context Andrew provided, that it meant that all long tones should be given a vibrato.
**Oliver Webber** No, a shake is pretty uncontroversially a trill. Pricked means dotted, specifically. There are plenty of contexts in which a dotted note would often take a trill. Also remember this is a joke- primarily designed around the various puns and double entendres musical language affords- so perhaps not to be taken too literally. 18 April

**Bruce Dickey Oliver Webber** But don't forget that there is a kind of trill (and here the terminology confounds us) which is a kind of tremolo, functioning as a way of causing a note to bloom. This kind of trill has little to do with the 18th century trill. It's function is much more similar to what we would think of as a vibrato (much as I hate to introduce this anachronistic term) introduced into the middle of a note (especially a dotted one) to give it "vivacità". 18 April

**Oliver Webber** Sure- but I don't think that’s Purcell’s shake, which is (IIRC) defined quite clearly in several contemporary sources. 18 April

**David Badagnani** Oh, my-- I see now that it is a *long*-pricked note that is described; this reminds me of Mercutio's line in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet"--"...the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon"--something that may go over the heads of many of the students who study this play in school... 18 April

Not by Purcell, it seems. Since it's describing a keyboard lesson, I don't think there's much doubt about the kind of shake involved: 18 April

**David Badagnani** Mr. Bethell has recommended this album (only available via Spotify, but it seems that one can register for an account for free using one's Facebook account), and the singing (by soprano Miriam Feuersinger) is really excellent, with clear, pure tone and sparing use of slight vibrato. It's not at all lacking in emotional content, in my opinion; quite the contrary: the long, straight tones in the slow arias are truly electrifying (and so rare) to hear in this Baroque repertoire. 18 April
Christopher Price Pontifex The recording is a CD available to buy as a disc from the appropriate retailer or as a download from the appropriate website. 19 April

Tom Bethell Richard, good to see you on FB! 19 April

Richard Bethell Thanks Tom. Vocal vibrato is THE early music topic, although Bruce Dickey is right to insist on the term tremolo, certainly for early repertoire. There are regular FB discussions, with lots of well informed input. Normally these take place on FB’s Historical Performance Research group, but this one was posted to my home page by David Badagnani, who shares my interest in non vibrato vocalism. 19 April

Jenifer Tranier Try this: Hildegard von Bingen - Columba aspexit - Performed by Catherine Schroeder; or this: Gilles Binchois, Pierre Fontaine… Anne Delafosse, Angélique Mauillon - both on youtube. 19 April

Richard Bethell Thanks for these tips, Jenifer. I'll put both into my playlists. Catherine Schroeder is an interesting voice; but soprano? Certainly mezzo bordering on alto. And rich what I call "Passionara" timbre, the other extreme from the thin "cutie pie" sound. 19 April

David Badagnani Thank you, I hear Schroeder use a slight "flutter" on all long tones (maybe fluctuating less than 5 cents). Just for rigor's sake, I'm looking in this playlist only for artists who use a perfectly straight tone--something that does verifiably exist, and not only in classical music. 19 April

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G80fY0B8VMAManage
David Badagnani  Also beautiful; as with so many of the recordings suggested earlier I hear the modest "shimmer" added to the end of every long tone. Was this mannerism verifiably practiced all the way from the Medieval through the Renaissance and Baroque? 19 April
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_wLSxOoqv0Manage

Richard Bethell  David, I think Schroeder has a shimmer, but could it be a slight volume tremor? [I opened Cleartune, but the needle didn't move at all pitchwise.] But I do agree that either Anne Delafosse or Angélique Mauillon does sometimes feature a slight pitch shimmer. Is there anyone out there who understands audio technology, which I find impenetrable? 19 April

David Badagnani  Possibly volume tremor coupled with pitch change of c. 2 cents. The main thing is that very few early music singers seem to think it's a good thing to maintain the "straight" quality of a long note. My question was whether that really has always been the case from Medieval through Renaissance and Baroque. 19 April

Jenifer Tranier  David Badagnani  Not a 'flutter' it corresponds to the quilisma, (also found in gregorian chant) which musicologists now say was 'tremblé'. It is like a slight shake on notes written with the quilisma, pretty difficult to do actually! A bit like the fast repeated notes in Monteverdi only less so! 19 April

David Badagnani  Not having seen Hildegard's urtext scores, is that symbol really written on every long note in the song? Having not heard that in other recorded performances of Hildegard, did earlier singers just ignore it? I do see a marking like that (which looks like an ellipsis) on "est" in the famous "Puer natus est," for example, but didn't know if that just meant to hold the note three times as long, or to fluctuate the sound three times. 19 April

Jenifer Tranier  David Badagnani  No, just certain important ones. You can find the mss on line: http://hlbrm.digitale-sammlungen.hebis.de/.../titl.../449618 (music at the end) or : http://www.idemdatabase.org/items/show/160/Manage
HLBRM.DIGITALE-SAMMLUNGEN.HEBIS.DE 19 April

Jenifer Tranier  I'm not sure how audio technology affects what you are hearing, but neither Anne Delafosse nor Catherine Schroeder have any form of vibrato, flutter or shimmer in their voices, I can assure you - I have studied with both! 19 April
Richard Bethell Thanks for your comments, Jenifer. Good to have an experienced medievalist commenting. Most of us are into renaissance and baroque. But, to answer your question, audio technology can delineate actual waveforms, including those produced by Anne Delafosse or Catherine Schroeder. The excellent vocal science department at the University of York produced several for me of Peyee Chen singing single notes using very different sounds. To start with, here is the wave form of her Type A "Operatic" sound, producing a tone wide vibrato. 19 April

Richard Bethell Secondly, here is her Type B single note, which I characterised as "Early Music Mainstream". Dame Emma Kirkby uses a narrow vibrato of this type, roughly a semitone wide. 19 April

Richard Bethell Finally, here is her Type C single note, which I have called "Clear Smooth Sweet Chaste", which was how the voices of good singers were typically described in the Long 18th C. I can assure you that the note was absolutely straight, without any detectable vibrato. Interestingly, the waveform is slightly kinked. It may be that some people, perhaps including David Badagnani, have particularly acute ears, enabling them to detect "shimmers" produced by a voice of this type. 19 April

Richard Bethell And here is Peyee Chen singing Lascia ch’io pianga in type C voice, with ornamental vibrato. I think I’ve succeeded in downloading the section of my video,
including Peyee Chen's singing. I've mentioned your good work at the conference, Graham O'Reilly. 19 April

https://www.facebook.com/richard.bethell.77/videos/183221490196441/

Jennifer Tranier Thanks for the explanation Richard. There are plenty more medieval singers here in France who would correspond to what you're looking for. Vibrato is simply not done!! Out!!! I have a lot of CD's but don't know if they're on youtube and don't have time to look now: very big garden project on, and weather favourable for the first time in ages!! 19 April

David Badagnani Yes, because with the singers Jenifer recommended, they are not ever using vibrato on shorter notes, then it appears (if extremely mildly) on the longer notes. 19 April

David Badagnani Years ago I attended a concert by the female quartet Anonymous 4 and there was noticeable vibrato through the whole concert. 19 April

David Badagnani Are the Peyee Chen audio examples in this video? 19 April
https://tinyurl.com/y76gsyav

Tim Braithwaite https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/.../1ce8ba641325481a2bb9...

Here's a really great article by Timothy McGee on the sounds associated with neumes in medieval music according to theorists. Really worth a read (if you haven't already of course) when considering historical performance practices in medieval music (as well as later...debatably...) and thoroughly applicable to the Hildegard recordings! I'd love to know people's thoughts on his conclusions. 19 April

Richard Bethell David Badagnani, I've managed to include [a link to] the video containing Peyee Chen's singing above. 20 April

David Badagnani Many thanks, and it was good to hear these three examples once again (I had listened when the video was first released). I did then, and do now, hear exactly the same slight wavering almost throughout Ms. Chen's Type C example as I heard Schroeder apply only to the long tones in her singing of Hildegard. 20 April

Richard Bethell But you do like Miriam Feuersinger. Try Magali Léger in her Handel [Gloria V: Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi] There's quite a bit of ornamental vibrato, mixed in with some straight singing. 20 April

David Aurelius If you have never heard Ingela Bohlin sing Monteverdi, you should. 20 April

David Badagnani Her singing sounds like something in between standard bel canto and Type B (Emma Kirkby style). 20 April
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCsjLbGlR0kManage

Handel - Hercules 'Banish love from thy breast', Bohlin YOUTUBE.COM
Smusi Baroque I'm seriously struggling at the moment with wall-to-wall vibrato in French Baroque performances by Les Arts Florissant. Even where there are better soloists, the chorus is inevitably full of vib. 20 April

Artis Wodehouse of interest to his thread? 22 April http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi...

David Badagnani Very good article! Everyone should read this. 22 April

Richard Bethell Agreed, David. For those without German, Frederick Gable's translation of Greta Haenen's conclusions from her Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock is also required reading. https://www.york.ac.uk/music/conferences/nema/haenen/ 23 April

10. Greta Haenen - Music, The University of York YORK.AC.UK

Greta Haenen Gosh! I'd better start reading the English version, my daughter looked rather scornfully at my abstract... hmhm 23 Apr 2018

Christopher Price Pontifex There is vibrato in this example, but only a shimmer generally on only some notes. Ana Quintans has never sung like this before or ever again since, including in Baroque music. Her usual style is very traditional modern opera house, including a very wide vibrato. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFr1_1SF9BM 30 Apr 2018

Richard Bethell But not available in the UK. 30 Apr 2018

Christopher Price Pontifex https://www.mdt.co.uk/albinoni-opera-arias-and... 30 Apr 2018

David Badagnani I enjoyed that very much--and would never have found any of these recordings without your recommendations. 30 Apr 2018

Richard Bethell Some beautiful soprano [falsettist] and tenor singing of "Dos Estrellas Le Siguen" here [Full text of song: “Two stars follow the Sun, / Morena, Morena, / and give him light: / Do you want to bet, lady / Morena, Morena, / that the stars are your eyes.”], by the group Sete Lágrimas. Can anyone name the singers? https://soundcloud.com/.../cd-en-tus-brazos-una-noche-01... 30 Apr 2018

David Badagnani https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhPKo6jtK0E 30 Apr 2018

Dos Estrellas Le Siguen youtube.com

David Badagnani Beautiful! This says the singers' names are Filipe Faria and Sérgio Peixoto.
Richard Bethell  Composer Manuel Machado (Lisbon, c.1590 - Madrid, 1646) is new to me. The album "En Tus Brazos una Noche" can also be heard on Spotify. 30 Apr 2018

Smusi Baroque  This'll be interesting. Les Art Florissant singers are driving me mad at the moment with wall-to-wall vibrato. Looking for French Baroque where there is some point in ornaments, if there is no vib. Personally, I'm okay with some fast, minimal vib. 30 Apr 2018

Christopher Price Pontifex  Unfortunately, the French seem to be leading the full-on vibrato in baroque music these days. Some truly wobbly young singers have been emerging in recent years, sadly to enormous acclaim by the opera luvvies who seem to control the operatic world. 1 May 2018

David Badagnani  to  Richard Bethell
Take a listen to the singing in this trailer for a recent Chilean film (which just won an Oscar). It strikes me that the vocal technique is similar to that famous female opera singer who was recorded in the early 20th century, whose recordings you have shared in the past. [NB This was launched as a separate thread two days earlier] 12 March 2018

David Badagnani  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJHex4ZitgA A FANTASTIC WOMAN is the story of Marina, a waitress and…YOUTUBE.COM

David Badagnani  I found the full track--the singer was once a man but is now a woman. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ19W92c4ho 14 March 2018

Daniela Vega - "Ombra Mai Fu" (A Fantastic Woman…  YOUTUBE.COM

Richard Bethell  A beautiful voice, certainly, albeit the accompaniment is strange. In terms of comparisons, you are presumably thinking of Emma Albani, who was critiqued no fewer than 80 TIMES for her excessive vocal vibrato! 16 March 2018

Matthew Hopcroft  A huge vibrato was partly encouraged by the recording industry as a way of creating more of a dynamic presence. But it is often to the detriment of the music. Vibrato is like ketchup. A little is fine, just don't smother the dish with it. 16 March 2018

Richard Bethell  Occasional ketchup was OK. But other aspects of vocal sound were always more important, especially the messa di voce, extensions into the falsetto register, plus avoidance of laryngeal development and shrieking on high notes. 16 March 2018

Matthew Hopcroft  I agree that vibrato wasn't the only mode of vocal expression a singer could use. The mezza di voce and other extensions of vocal technique could induce wonder and delight. With all of these other techniques vibrato is usually natural and a charming affectation. 16 March 2018
How should Lodovico Zacconi’s tremoli be delivered? The issue was discussed in this group two years ago in the context of Zacconi’s advice: "[...] I say in addition that the tremolo— that is, the trembling voice—is the true door for entering into the passaggi and for mastering the gorgie, because a ship sails more easily when it is already moving than when it is first set into motion, and a jumper jumps better if before he jumps he takes a running start. / This tremolo must ...be brief and graceful, because the overwrought and the forced become tedious and wearying, and it is of such a nature that in using it, one must always use it, so that its use becomes a habit, because that continuous moving of the voice aids and readily propels the movement of the gorgie and admirably facilitates the beginnings of passaggi. This movement about which I speak must not be without the proper speed, but lively and sharp." [Translation posted by Bruce Dickey on 25 January 2016] My question is: Are these tremoli (A) articulated intensity fluctuations (i.e. a form of trillo), or (B) what would be described today as pitch vibratos? I wonder if Bruce Dickey is himself uncertain which they are, because in one place he posted ‘It does seem to me that a tremble in the voice which was anything close to what we think of as vibrato, would have made these rhythmical tremoli impossible to produce, or inaudible to the listener’ [26 January 2016], while suggesting elsewhere that Zacconi seems to be describing ‘a kind of continuous “vibrato” which presumable aids in the passaggi by keeping the larynx free and relaxed so that it can more easily produce the throat articulations required in the gorgie’ [25 January].

For me, the rhythmic argument is crucial. Take Example A below, offered by Zacconi himself as one of several cases [See Edward V. Foreman’s translation of Zacconi’s Libro Primo of “Prattica di musica utile et necessaria . . .”, P. 66] where singers could ornament the long notes with tremoli. In such a case, the singer could decide to ornament the final semibreve in the first bar, providing a launch pad for the subsequent gorgie (as suggested at Example B). What do people think?

Paolo V. Montanari Isn’t he writing about string instruments? 10 May

Richard Bethell No, definitely about singing. 10 May

Paolo V. Montanari Yes, I know. I was just hoping he wasn’t. 😁 10 May

Neil Coleman I agree with Paolo. The "ribattuta di gola" there prepares the throat for articulation including variable, accelerating ribattute, trills, and passagework. Fluctuations of intensity are, of course, possible but that suggests the tremolo stop on organs more than anything. 10 May

Tim Braithwaite I think one of the clearest descriptions of a singer's tremolo comes from Ganassi writing about recorder playing, after saying that the ornaments he describes are an effort to imitate the voice, he goes on to describe tremoli of various different intervals
ranging from a 3rd (!) to less than a semitone. The fingering charts he gives for these are also very revealing and can begin to give us a really interesting insight into some of the sounds he considers imitations of vocal practices. The many different type of tremoli described suggest to me a practice which was as infinitely varied as the human voice can manage and encompasses all sorts of vibrating and trembling sounds used for ornamental purposes.

Some of the most interesting that pop to my head straight away are:

The rhythmic pulsation of string tremoli described by Farina

The pulsations found in Italian organ Tremolo stops

The examples of tremolo given in the Capriola Lute book - especially interesting since it puts the tremoli in a polyphonic context - imagine if HIP choral groups did this today!

I would suggest that the various different solutions for notating the tremolo, as well as the manifold different ways of describing it hint at a tradition of variably vibrating sounds which are not able to be notated with conventional notation! 10 May

Tim Braithwaite I also am not convinced that pitch tremolo is an articulated sound in the way that many sources describe the singing of passaggi (not all - Severi for example, a castrato with the Sistine chapel talks about how glottal articulation brings confusion to an ensemble) the instrumental practices aimed at imitating the voice seem all to consider graces as fluid, ornaments on the Lute for example not being re-articulated with each note. A later English viol source (I think it's Christopher Simpson?) even describes them as "sliding." The various Italian 16th century descriptions of graces all talk about them being rhythmically undefined and almost lazy. 10 May

Bruce Dickey I also think we cannot read Zacconi in isolation. One of the most interesting sources on the vocal tremolo is Francesco Rognoni. He makes it clear that the trillo and the tremolo differ in that the trillo is "Battuto con la gola" and the tremolo is not. Having said that, he goes on to give a series of rhythms for the tremolo which are in some cases quite complex, especially as in the examples below of how to do the tremoletto on diverse figures. It is true, as Richard points out, that I am unsure how to understand Zacconi's tremolo. But it seems clear to me from Rognoni that there is a whole world of tremolo devices about which we have very little idea: rhythmicized, non-articulated note repetitions or fluctuations. I am not necessarily suggesting that Rognoni's tremoli are the same as Zacconi's. I'm just arguing that there is a whole world of devices and nuances between what we think of as the trillo or the tremolo and the devices described by the vilified "v" word. 10 May
Massimo Redaelli Besides, however painstaking the descriptions given by such writers, they codify important practices that they endorsed and applied as performers or heard as listeners. It is quite probably not the complete picture, and I suppose here is where the intelligence and musicianship of contemporary performers comes into play. 10 May

Domen Marincic Zacconi mentions tremoli in a few other places and warns against marking them with the head or with the body. Or in another instance against dividing the tactus into many tremoli. So they would seem to be articulated in some way [A]. I wouldn't translate 'succinto' as 'brief', 'clear' or 'precise' might be better. 10 May

Massimo Redaelli Succinto means succinct: gathered up, reduced, concentrated. Ideas of clarity or precision are not implicit in the word. 10 May

Domen Marincic Marked by brevity and clarity; concise? 10 May

Bruce Dickey Yes, but also possibly contained or reduced in the extent of their pitch fluctuation, if there is one. 10 May

Bruce Dickey Domen Marincic, can you give a reference for Zacconi’s comment about dividing the tactus into many tremoli. Seems very strange to me. 10 May

Domen Marincic It's on page 22 of the 1592 edition, Chapter 33, 'Della division del tatto & sua sumministratone': "[...] si che volendosi dar piacere e diletto, bisogna avertire di non dividere il tatto in tanti tremoli, ne di farlo languido, & semivivo, ò di strusciar il cantore, & simil altre cose." 10 May

Domen Marincic Bruce Dickey I think that I indeed misread this. One page earlier, Zacconi seems to be saying that those who beat time sometimes erroneously fill the tactus with ‘tremoli’, i.e. they tremble and shake the hand (fol. 21v): "Similmente ancora quel che
Bruce Dickey Let me just add, that I don't think the introduction of the v word into discussions of this sort is helpful, because it brings with it all sorts of practices, tastes, and prejudices that were simply not a part of the world of these musicians around 1600. That said, it is difficult not to use it because we are trying to describe effects that are very difficult to describe. Zacconi, Zenobi, and Rognoni all clearly had difficulty with the description, but they could count on their readers having a pretty clear idea what they were talking about. I think it is most likely that these tremoli of Rognoni had both an intensity and a pitch component to them. Does that make them v.......? I would say that question is entirely irrelevant.

Paolo V. Montanari The vibrato, as we conceive it today, is a natural phenomenon (the one that they were trying to mimic in the Renaissance and later with the "Vox humana" organ register). It's not something that one "does". When Zacconi and Rognoni are writing about tremolos and trillos they are speaking about intentional ornamentation.

Bruce Dickey I’ll turn the lights out on the way out, thank you. I’m not going to get back into the v wars here.

Paolo V. Montanari LOL Am I getting into trouble? 😂 10 May

Bruce Dickey No, Paolo. There's just an awful lot of water under the bridge here! 😊 10 May

Bruce Dickey I will say, though, that a singer with a good technique and a lot of experience in early repertoire can control their vibrato precisely, putting it only on the notes that require it and not necessarily all of the note. Also using vibrato very differently in ensemble music and solo music, and varying it from phrase to phrase according to the texture. I have much intimate experience of this. I would say that is something you do, however natural it might be. 10 May

Greta Haenen. Yes!. 24 May

Oliver Webber "In such a case, the singer could decide to ornament the final semi-breve in the first bar, providing a launch pad for the subsequent gorgie (as suggested at Example B). What do people think?" I think in this particular instance, the editor has misconstrued Zacconi's example. I don't have the original in front of me, so please correct me if I'm wrong, but it was very common practice in this period simply to place the ornamented version of a short phrase directly after the plain version. It happens throughout the dalla Casa and Rognoni treatises, for example. So the 3rd semibreve (E) is not the "final semibreve in the first bar" at all: rather, what follows the 3 semibreves is one possible way of ornamenting them. I'm assuming example B is a postulation by the editor - is that right? I realise this doesn't answer the bigger question but I thought it was worth clearing up. 10 May

Bruce Dickey I think you're right. 10 May

Bruce Dickey But I don't know of any case where a vocal tremolo is described as an articulated note repetition. 10 May

Bruce Dickey All the instrumental devices that were intended to imitate the vocal tremolo produce either a smooth pulsation or a fluctuation in pitch.
Fluctuation or alteration...? 10 May

What is the difference? 10 May

I mean, bending the pitch continuously, or alternating between two pitches, say a tone or a semi tone apart. 10 May

Yes, you are right Oliver, the second bar is an elaboration of the first. I'll load all 11 examples when I've got my scanner working. 10 May

Both are kinds of tremoli. A trill on a wind instrument or a keyboard was called a tremolo, but also a one finger vibrato on the violin was called tremolo (though Rognoni criticizes its use. 10 May

Yes they are- but the effect is very different. And pitch alternation, as opposed to fluctuation, is open to a wider range of articulations. Last time I looked at F Rognoni I was struck by another difference between trillo and tremolo but it now escapes me. I'll look again when home. 10 May

But the difference doesn't really matter, or better said, it is a matter of the sort of effect or affect you want to express. All fluctuations and alternations were called tremoli. An articulated alternation would be a diminution, or a groppo. 10 May

Here are the 11 elaborations, from Page 66 of Foreman's translation. 10 May

These are quite simple and very standard diminution figures for the unornamented phrases that precede them. It is important to bear in mind, though, that they wouldn't have been performed at all like this, but would have had all sorts of dottings and inequalities applied to them as well as various sorts of tremoli. 11 May

Yes, I understand. But could we get back to Zacconi’s central point, that the trembling voice is the “true door for entering into the passaggi and for mastering the gorgie”, i.e. with a “running start”. To me, it seems clear that Zacconi is emphasising that the trembling voice must be of the same character (i.e. a sort of trillo) as the rapid passaggi/ gorgie. Musicologist Frederick K. Gable took a similar view, when he wrote “Zacconi’s remark about the vibrato being useful for learning to sing ornamentally makes more sense, since the intensity vibrato could lead directly into note repetition (trillo) and then into a kind of articulation for fast notes. A possible scale of accelerating intensity fluctuations from slow, measured tremolo, to vibrato, to trillo, to passaggi could have
exist. These would all have been produced in the same way and have differed only in speed and application."

http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol5/iss1/9/ scholarship.claremont.edu 11 May

Bruce Dickey It's a conceivable explanation, but seems unlikely to me because I have never seen the word "tremolo" used to describe an articulated note repetition - i.e., trillo. 11 May

Bruce Dickey "A possible scale of accelerating intensity fluctuations from slow, measured tremolo, to vibrato, to trillo, to passaggi could have existed." This sentence makes little sense to me. First, the introduction of the word "vibrato" is unhelpful. Second, I do not see how a slow measured tremolo, a trillo and gorgie could have been produced "in the same way". And the idea of going through this whole process each time there is a passaggio ("when it is used it must always be used") seems preposterous to me. The keynote of the division style is the rapid and smooth movement from unornamented notes to passaggi and back, and probably without much forethought, since the passaggi were improvised spontaneously. And let's not forget there's text to be accommodated. The 11 examples of Zacconi are not very helpful because they give no context to the divisions whatsoever. 11 May

Oliver Webber Bruce Dickey "I have never seen the word "tremolo" used to describe an articulated note repetition - i.e., trillo." I'm not sure this affects the plausibility of the "scale of accelerating intensity", which I agree sounds a little contrived, but F Rognoni does in fact use tremolo in this way. "Il Tremolo si fà sovente, mà però con gratia, & si deve guardare di non farlo come fanno alcuni senza termine, che paiono Capretti; per il più il Tremolo si fà sopra il valor del ponto di ciascuna nota." His examples on the facing page (which make it clear that note repetition is intended) include a similar instance - tremolo on the crotchet *after* a dotted note, and several instances of a tremolo written out as a short tone-repetition, up to one crotchet's worth, while the trillo examples continue for longer - 1-2 crotchets or more:
Oliver Webber And then there's Bovicelli: "Il tremolo nondimeno, che non è altro, che un tremar di voce sopra ad una stessa nota..." 12 May

Bruce Dickey Oliver Webber A sort of note repetition yes, but not "battuto con la goal". So a rhythmic intensity fluctuation. 12 May

Bruce Dickey If it were articulated it would fall into his definition of trill. 12 May

Oliver Webber Do you mean Rognoni? How do you know it’s not “battuto con la gola”? It’s not at all clear to me, especially as the musical examples use the same note values. 12 May

Bruce Dickey He says it in the remarks on the page following the examples. 12 May

Oliver Webber After the examples, he goes straight into the step by step diminutions. On the page before the examples, he specifies that the trillo *is* battuto con la gola, but he doesn't say anything as specific about the tremolo - only to warn against those who do them endlessly and sound like baby goats. Or am I missing something? 12 May
Bruce Dickey Having just looked at it, I have to modify my comment and say that he implies that the tremolo is not battuto con la gola in the way he defines the groppo and the trillo. If the tremolo were articulated it would be the same as the trillo. 12 May

Bruce Dickey I think this discussion is the true door into my bed. We'll take this up tremulously another day! 12 May

Oliver Webber Agreed! Last comment, though, since I was already halfway through... I do see what you mean, but the meaning is not crystal clear. The goat warning could be interpreted two ways: (1) this ornament can by its nature be somewhat goat-like, so you must (a) execute it gracefully and (b) not do it endlessly, or (2) this ornament must not be executed in the way that we perform the (shortly to be explained) trillo and groppo, otherwise it may sound like a goat. One problem with (2) is that if that is the case, why is the trillo not also at risk of goatiness? 12 May

Richard Bethell Interesting discussion. Way above my head unfortunately, as I have no Italian and am not a trained musicologist! What do others in this group think? Your views, Greta Haenen? 12 May

Richard Bethell Having made the above reservations, it does seem to me that Zacconi, Roncogni, Bovicelli and Michael Praetorius [not discussed so far] could all be describing "articulated intensity fluctuations". Is there any actual proof that "pitch wavering" tremolos [the dreaded "v" word again] were commonly sung during this period? 12 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell there are a fair amount of instrumental treatises which talk about imitating the voice through various different graces, including tremolo. My favourite, albeit earlier, example which I mentioned is Ganassi who talks about pitch fluctuations up to a third and as small as less than a semitone with no mention of any separated articulation. Indeed the word fluctuate really suggests a lack of distinct articulation as opposed to some of the language he uses when describing diminutions.

Bernhard's famous dismissal of the tremolo is also rather revealing, not being quite as black and white as it first appears. Firstly, it should be mentioned that the term 'fermo' - keeping a 'steady voice on all notes' is also described as an ornament. He then goes on to describe how many old singers use the tremolo too much as they are unable to use the ornament fermo. He says that the tremolo is not used by the best singers EXCEPT in several situations, suggesting that his issue is more with a constant usage (which seems to be the same as Zacconi's issue also.) interestingly, I think Bernhard's description of the fermo as ornamental should be an indication that we need to rethink what that term means to us compared to what it meant historically. In the words of Elizabeth Kenny: 'the notion that too many trolls break up a pure line forces us to confront why the line should be pure in the first place.' I think it unlikely that Bernhard's tremolo which older men cannot help but sing due to their lack of skill could be related to the highly articulated trillo.

Praetorius describes it as being a trembling of the voice on one note, and says that it is the
same as an organist's mordant, obviously involving distinctly 2 pitches. The term trembling, as well as the comparison to a mordant doesn't particularly suggest articulation.

In the later Division Violist by Christopher Simpson you can find the close shake being written as a rapid alternation between 2 notes and notated with a slur. He also actively stresses that these should be made to imitate the voice and should use only one motion of the bow. There's also a great passage about how the 'smooth' graces should 'seem to draw as it were, the sound from one note to another, in imitation of the voice' and that 'sliding' up or down a third is always done on one string.

There are many other sources, these are just some of the ones immediately at my fingertips. It’s fairly clear that some sort of unarticulated pitch fluctuation ranging from less than a semitone up to a third was a common part of performance practice in the 16th and 17th centuries (and later - some of the French baroque descriptions of tremoli are very revealing.) it's also clear that a certain amount of intensity fluctuation was common looking at Farina's violin treatise as well as organ Tremolo stops, also neither of which suggesting an articulated performance - Farina describing it as a 'pulsation of the hand which has the bow, imitating the manner of an organ tremulant.'

There's a great quote by Timothy McGee which I think might ruffle a few feathers but is rather eloquently put. Although he is writing about Medieval vocal style, I think that it's equally valid for 16th/17th century.

'In order to imagine the sound of the medieval (Renaissance!) voice one must realise that the rapid articulation, pulsating notes, sliding pitches, and non diatonic tones were part of the basic technique (there’s something similarly fundamental about Quantz's later description of "essential" graces) and not just unusual and colourful sounds that were introduced into a vocal style that was otherwise similar to the modern practice.'

This essential nature of these various fluctuations seems similar to Zenobi's description of the perfect soprano saying that 'he must know how to sing the piece in it's simple form, that is, without passaggio, but only with grace(s), trillo, tremolo, and esclamatione.'

Sorry for the extremely long winded answer, I'm on the train back from a gig and am rather bored - any spelling/grammar errors blame my phone! 12 May

Bruce Dickey Tim Braithwaite I think that’s well put. We mustn’t also forget Zenobi’s ondeggiamento - that is, some kind of waving motion which the singer “must have”. 12 May

Tim Braithwaite Also, I think that the V word is unhelpful here, it's clear that they're linked, but most of the descriptions of tremolo seem much more varied than modern classical vibrato. If anything, I'd say that the tremolo might have more in common with Arabic Maqam singing styles, being an ornamental fluctuation similar to a mordent (to use Praetorius's comparison.) 12 May

Tim Braithwaite Bruce Dickey agreed, which seems much more likely to be similar to modern ideas of vibrato. 12 May

Richard Bethell Thanks Tim and Bruce. You've some good points. But I do feel on firmer ground now we are into the High and Late Baroque. Two points here on the sources you mention.
Surely Bernhard was pretty dismissive in writing: "Elderly singers feature the tremolo, but not as an artifice. Rather it creeps in by itself, as they no longer are able to hold their voices steady. If anyone would demand further evidence of the undesirability of the tremolo, let him listen to such an old man employing it while singing alone. Then he will be able to judge why the tremolo is not used by the most polished singers, except in ardire" [quoted by Greta Haenen in New Grove].

It's also clear that Johann Quantz hated vocal trembling of any kind: "The chief requirements of a good singer are that he have a good, clear, and pure voice, of uniform quality from top to bottom, a voice which has none of those defects originating in the nose and throat, and which is neither hoarse nor muffled. Only the voice itself and the use of words give singers preference over instrumentalists. In addition, the singer must know how to join the falsetto to the chest voice in such a way that one does not perceive where the latter ends and the former begins; he must have a good ear and true intonation, so that he can produce all the notes in their correct proportions; he must know how to produce the portamento (il portamento di voce) and the holds upon a long note (le messe di voce) in an agreeable manner; hence he must have firmness and sureness of voice, so that he does not begin to tremble in a moderately long hold, or transform the agreeable sound of the human voice into the disagreeable shriek of a reed pipe when he wishes to strengthen his tone, as not infrequently happens, particularly among certain singers who are disposed to hastiness. The singer must be able to execute a good shake that does not bleat ... He must not express the high notes with a harsh attack or with a vehement exhalation of air from his chest; still less should he scream them out, coarsening the amenity of the voice."

If you are a NEMA member, you can download my article setting out the full case for default straight toning, with ornamental tremolo. 12 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell I agree with you about Bernhard although he does say that there are some situations when the tremolo is acceptable such as the ardire and also some occasions for basses (if I remember correctly.) I'm more interested in his description of it being something that can result from old age, as it seems to me to be fairly clear that this means that the tremolo cannot be a distinctly articulated sound but a wavering fluctuation. Of course, one could also argue that his strong reaction against it could be a good indication of how common a practice was, especially considering how many other favorable contemporary descriptions there are.

I agree also about Quantz, although I simply mentioned him to say that I like the continued use of ideas of the essentialness of these graces. However, if the tremolo of the Renaissance might not have much in common with modern ideas of vibrato, I would suggest that a roughly equivalent ornament in the baroque could be there various types of shake/trill that we can find mentioned by almost everyone from Monteclaire to Tosi to Hiller. Geminiani also talks about a rocking of the fingers in order to imitate the voice. I have no doubt that these sounds were considered graces or ornamental, afar I would question is whether that word meant the same for them as it does us. Yes, later forms of tremolo or schleiffers are described as ornaments, but I think that this doesn't detract from their importance as an essential (there's the word again) and inseparable part of vocal technique. 12 May

Richard Bethell While “Essential” and “Inseparable” could be overstating the case, there are certainly references (quite rare actually) to both pitch and intensity tremoli, during the
baroque and early classical periods. Burney’s unnamed falsettist [1772] in an Amsterdam synagogue obviously sported a pitch tremolo: “One of these voices was a falset, more like the upper part of a bad vox humana stop in an organ, than a natural voice. I remember seeing an advertisement in an English newspaper, of a barber, who undertook to dress hair in such a manner as exactly to resemble a peruke; and this singer might equally boast of having the art, not of singing like a human creature, but of making his voice like a very bad imitation of one.” By contrast, Johann Hiller praised castrato Giovanni Carestini for his expressive Bebung [1747], which was clearly of the intensity variety: “Now a word about vibrato (Bebung), which arises when one does not permit a long sustained tone to sound firmly, but rather allows it to fluctuate without changing the pitch. On string instruments it is done most easily by the rocking back and forth of the finger which is placed on the string. It is more difficult for the singer if he simply wants to bring it out with his throat; some make this easier for themselves by moving their lower jaw. Carestini did this often and always with success.” Other quotes are ambiguous on tremolo type, such as Roger North’s praise of castrato Nicolini [c. 1708]: “And the swelling and dying of musical notes, with tremolo not imp\eaching the tone, wonderfully represents the waiving of air, and pleasing gales moving, and sinking away.”

Bruce Dickey I was making my remarks above while in a rehearsal, so wasn’t able to comment fully. I have a specific comment and a general one. In the above citation of Hiller, clearly he has it wrong as regards the tremolo on string instruments. Rocking the finger back and forth on the string will clearly produce a pitch fluctuation. This is also described by Rognoni in 1620, although he say the true tremolo is done by touching a second finger close to the one stopping the string. Both of these devices, of course, produce pitch fluctuations. What Rognoni didn’t like about the single finger vibrato was that it went both above and below the pitch. He felt it should go only above. 12 May

Bruce Dickey Now to the general comment going back to the early period - 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. If you look at the totality of sources describing tremoli for instruments, keyboard, wind, and strings, you find an extremely rich palette of devices producing both pitch and intensity fluctuations, though more often, it must be said, of pitch. From Agricola’s Schweizerpfeiffen, to the finger tremoli of Ganassi and Cardano, to the finger and bow tremoli of Rognoni, and others on the violin, and the keyboard tremoli (which are semitone and whole tone pitch alterations as described by Diruta, Praetorius and others, and the tremolo stops on Italian organs, not to speak of voce humana. Since all instrumentalists had as their primary goal the imitation of the human voice, I find it impossible to let go of these instrumental techniques when trying to understand the tremoli described for the voice by Zenobi, Zacconi, Bovicelli, Rognoni and others. Why would singers exclude one of the main types of note fluctuation in producing their tremoli, and if they did, why would all these instrumentalists, in trying to imitate the voice, produce so many types of pitch fluctuation. It seems to me that the exclusion of pitch fluctuation in the interpretation of the vocal tremolo is the projection backwards of a prejudice determined by excesses in an entirely different period. 12 May

Richard Bethell True, Hiller got it wrong about violin vibrato. But in a previous discussion, Nicholas Clapton correctly noted that Carestini’s lower jaw movement could not have produced a pitch vibrato. 12 May

Tim Braithwaite I think we’re now beginning to talk about 2 different things, Tremolo and modern ideas of vibrato. As Bruce says, it’s clear that vibrating, fluctuating sounds were much more diverse, and often much wider, than modern vibrato and I think that it’s dangerous to think of the two as the same. As such, descriptions of singers singing without
Tremolo doesn't necessarily mean the straight tone which we associate with some modern HIP performances. If anything, Hiller's description of violin Bebung not being a pitch fluctuation could say a great deal about how much other sorts of pitch fluctuations varied the pitch. Tosi also talks about tone and semitone pitch fluctuations under the heading of the shake (also calling it essential) but his descriptions seem very far from modern vibrato. As for Carestini's jaw and pitch fluctuation, Hiller clearly doesn't say that the pitch fluctuations are caused by the moving of the jaw but that moving the jaw makes it easier, and I think a lot of singers would agree that having a looser jaw makes most technical elements easier!

What I do agree with you on is that the modern operatic tone, and approach to vibrato, is very different to historical ideals. I think the general description of horizontal mouth shapes and higher larynxes suggests a tone much more similar to pop or musical theatre singing which almost always has the result of reducing vibrato width/noticeability. I'd love to hear more modern hip singers combine this approach with ideals of rhetorical delivery and falsetto high notes, as well as the various unwritten practices (such as tremolo, accenti/port de voix etc.) applied as judiciously as we find in historical examples.

Richard Bethell I agree with most of what you say, Tim, especially in your second paragraph. But, on Tosi, there is only the briefest possible reference to the Mezzotrillo [half trill]. This and all other varieties of trill are indeed essential as you say, although it is clear they are only to be used for occasional effect. But he is utterly scathing on mostly unintended effects, such as the defect of fluttering [svolazzar], the Trillo lento [characterised as an affected tremolo], trembling [Opressa dalla difficoltà del respiro gli trema sempre la voce], the invented emetic style of him who sings like the waves of the ocean [l'inventato stile emetico di chi canta a onda di Mare] defined as a disgusting defect, and other horrors. And Tosi rightly emphasises the primacy of other aspects of singing, such as the messa di voce, the need for limpid and clear tone [laryngeal development is out of the question for him], exploitation of the falsetto extension, the need to sing high notes sweetly without screaming, the portamento di voce, and other things. By the way, every vocal scholar should have in their possession Edward Foreman's translation of Tosi, with the Italian original on each facing page, if they can get hold of it (currently unavailable on Amazon).

Greta Haenen Bruce Dickey This definition by Bovicelli or what they understood when reading it is found in German school books for kids, look e.g. at Praetorus Syntagma III, don't know the page by heart, goes well into the later 17th century, it implies 2 pitches.

Oliver Webber Do you mean “il tremolo nondimeno, che non è altro, che un tremar di voce sopra ad una stessa nota...”? If so, it is clearly on *one* pitch, not two.

Greta Haenen Anyway, there is a lot also about violin vibrato in early times, sometimes together with the long sustained equal stroke (stet and ausgedehnt are words Germans use, but look at Rognoni), tells something about sound conception. It appears from the later 16th C on and in the early 17th C it is often used to warn against too much of diminution love, i think even Schütz has it in one of his prefaces (about violin playing), definitely Crüger 1654 or Ban 1642, lieffelijke vinger-bevinghe (if I get the ortography right). Actually a lot of movement in the voice in different ways, with and without pitch changes. If you want to have something like a coup de glotte, you would have a trillo, but Printz's trilletto is a kind of vibrato if I may use the word here. There are tremoli (left-hand vibrati) in Walther's violin music, there is maybe one by Biber too, they use a "m", to come close
to a wavy line (cf French viol players), there is the bow vibrato which is mainly intensity; but in both cases (the left hand pitch and the right hand intensity) the organ tremolo is used to explain the effect. They don't have an acoustical model in our sense, so it goes like "a bit like this or that". Well, the voce humana is something which makes you think about mid-16th-century Italian singing...

Greta Haenen Oliver Webber Yes, actually: "Tremulo: Ist nichts anders/ all ein Zittern der Stimme vber einer Noten: die Organisten nennen es Mordanten oder Moderanten." you have it ascendens and descendens, ascendens is "better", music example: long g and than semiquavers g/a/g/a/g/a G; last note is a 1/2 Note; descendens g/fsharp/g/fsharp/ g/fsharp/ g/fsharp/ long g. After this Trmoletti and bottom page: Und dieses ist mehr vff Orgeln und Instrumenta pennata gerichtet/ all vf Menschen Stimmen." The "zittern... über einer Note" with similar examples in many schoolbooks of the 17th Century. One copies the other one. Praetorius III p 235, by the way. 23 May

Greta Haenen Tim Braithwaite To complicate things: Denis Dodart writes (in 1706) more or less that the difference between speaking and singing voice is (I exaggerate a little bit) Vibrato, he compares it to the Viol players who shift their fingers back and forth between two frets (now one sees what innocent audience thinks when the player is making a wrist-shake) 23 May

Martin Davids Greta Haenen The “m” in Biber, (1681 sonatas #2, he uses it twice in the finale on longish notes) what is your source for this interpretation of it, as opposed to maybe a mordant? 23 May

Richard Bethell Thanks for engaging with this group, Greta Haenen. We are very much looking forward to your presentation at our conference with BREMF this autumn, followed by an interesting discussion afterwards. 24 May

Greta Haenen Martin Davids Martin Davids Richard Bethell My pleasure! 24 May

Greta Haenen Martin Davids First of all Daniel Mercks String tutor 1695, he mentions this "m" kind of wavy line and explains the left-hand vibrato (m. wo dises stehet/ muß fest zugedruckt werden mit dem Finger/ aber die ganze Hand beweget werden (D.Merck, Compendium musicae instrumentalis chelicae, Augsburg 1695, no page nrs, Cap. VII) ; a very late source: J. Schweigl, Verbesserte Grundlehre der Violin, Wien 1786, m also: mmm and second "musical evidence": these are the moments one would want a "wavee", as can be seen in other works where vibrati are marked as such. Longish notes would do very well, a good idea also: emphasis (e.g. the first piece in Walthers Hortulus chelicus). A weak sort of reminiscence as to emphased notes with vibrato in the recorder tutors for beginners "all ascending long notes should be sweeten'd" (don't ask me which ones, they all have more or less the same texts, and a finger vibrato on wind instruments is something a simple amateur can kind of understand. (But I would have to look in my dissertation on the topic again) 24 May

Greta Haenen Martin Davids forgot: a mordant would rather be on the first note, actually. 24 May

Richard Bethell We’ve agreed that there is a place for the tremolo, whether on one pitch or on two. But one question remains. Where should this ornament be used in music from Orlande de Lassus, Giaches de Vert, Luca Marenzio, Carlo Gesualdo, Claudio Monteverdi, Michael Praetorius, and other big names, which has come down to us? Looking at the first four, I may be wrong but I do struggle to see how tremoli of any type are relevant in their polyphonic music. Lodovico Zacconi does not specifically cover the tremolo in his Practica Musica, although he recommends the trillo [used by Monteverdi]
and what became known as the messa di voce. Praetorius was certainly in favour of it, but there are questions: What type of tremolo [gentle trembling perhaps]? Who by, choirboys or any singer? And in what sort of music? 24 May

Greta Haenen Oliver Webber think of the French chevrottement and the warnings against it. Could explain this and that. 24 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell As far as I know, not many renaissance composers indicate tremoli, but Rognoni sometimes writes them out in his vocal diminutions of Palestrina, as groups of repeated semiquavers or demisemiquavers. I suppose those would have been the more obvious places also in earlier periods and also in (otherwise less embellished) ensemble singing as a kind of ‘essential ornaments’. I can post a few examples. They agree with Oliver's summary of Rognoni’s description of tremoli above. ... Do you know Gesualdo's Canzon del Principe the embellished keyboard version of which contains some very elaborate chromatic trills?

I know such tremoli are very much at variance with the present practice of singing renaissance polyphony, the ‘straightness’ of which I have already been complaining about as you might remember. As an analogy, one also wouldn't really expect sliding portamenti in early 20th-century performances of renaissance choral music, but they are very prominent on recordings by Sir Richard Terry and others. 24 May

Domen Marincic By the way, here is Printz (1678) on how tremoli (on two different pitches) should be articulated, apparently in singing since he mentions 'ein scharffes Zittern der Stimme'.

Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic thoroughly agree with your assessment about the various different types of tremoli being at odds with the modern aesthetic of HIP choral singing. Now to start using some other graces like accenti etc. and we can finally begin to seriously approximate some sort of Renaissance style. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite As opposed to continuing impressions of Arvo Pärt. 24 May

Richard Bethell Domen Marincic and Tim Braithwaite. I would have thought that an emphasis tremolo in an individual part was undesirable as it would call attention to itself, unbalancing contrapuntal texture. Likewise a pitch tremolo [the dreaded “V” word] would be even worse as it would jeopardise tuning. So I don’t understand why you complained about straight singing of renaissance polyphony, if you did. I quickly checked through your comments in “Vibrato Wars Threads 20 to 35”. All I could find was a response on 10th May to Bruce Dickey’s question “can you give a reference for Zacconi’s comment about dividing the tactus into many tremoli. Seems very strange to me”. You replied: “I think that I indeed misread this. One page earlier, Zacconi seems to be saying that those who beat time sometimes erroneously fill the tactus with ‘tremoli’, i.e. they tremble and shake the hand”. 24 May
Domen Marincic Richard Bethell It was in some other thread. You wondered what I meant by 'straight singing' which you wrote was something almost unheard of and I tried to explain what I meant by saying that straight singing was the predominant style today.

Otherwise, 'undesirable as it would call attention to itself, unbalancing contrapuntal texture' and 'it would jeopardise tuning' are your own aesthetic predilections based on your experience of this music. This is very subjective. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell I would second Domen Marincic's questioning as to the motives behind your assumption that the voices should be smooth and balanced in a contrapuntal texture, when nearly all historical reports of church singing suggest otherwise. My favourite is the following complaint by Erasmus: 'today things have come to the point where churches reverberate with cornetts, shawms and trumpets and sometimes even bombardes, and scarcely anything is audible but the babbling of disparate voices.'
I think it most likely that 16th century church singing (and later and earlier) was much more raucous than is commonly assumed amongst HIP performances today.

As for how to perform a pitch tremolo of some sorts without disturbing the tuning, what do you (plural) make of this?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70YDpSo2MRI...

24 May

Oliver Webber Any assessment of historical evidence that begins "I would have thought" should be questioned! Sorry to be so blunt, Richard. 24 May

Richard Bethell Bad drafting, certainly, Oliver. I should have said: "I think"!

Surely clarity in polyphonic music is an absolute must; anything which disturbs this is undesirable. Please say more on your rationale, Domen. And include your Erasmus quotation, Tim. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell I would simply ask why clarity in polyphonic music is an absolute must? I love Elizabeth Kenny's comment on this: The notion that too many trills break up a pure line forces us to confront why the line should be pure in the first place. It seems to me that it's not particularly based on historical reports of performances of sacred choral music, in fact, most writers on vocal practices at the time seem to discuss church singing with a sense of contempt dismissing it, generally, as loud and bad.

Here are a few brief quotes from my collection about loud and "bad" church singers, many of which you've seen before I'm sure:

'he who says that one makes a voice by crying out loud is deceived ... because many learn to sing softly and in camere (where loud singing is abhorred) and are not constrained by necessity to sing in churches and in cappelle where paid singers sing.'
'there in cappelle one sings in full voice ... and in camere one sings with a more submissive and suave voice, and without yelling.'

'[Good playing] does not occur in bandstands and in chapels and wherever one plays as loud as one can because people there have little understanding and experience of anything.'

'Yet even so I have heard in a notable college that singers who have trumpet-like voices with powerful voices were singing with all their might on the acute or higher [notes] just like they wanted to break or at least move the windows of the sanctuary, so that I wondered greatly at their ignorance and so was moved to making this aphorism “As cows in a pasture, so you in the choir bellow.’ 24 May

Oliver Webber Sorry to be so stubborn, but “surely” is right up there with “I would have thought”: it is an adverb of presupposition. By starting with a certain point of view, you risk closing the door to evidence that may contradict it.

Richard Bethell Oliver Webber, I've produced evidence from Gaffurius and Finck that straight, pure, well-balanced singing of polyphonic music is required. Do you agree or not? That's the important question. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell I'm not sure that's accurate, you produced evidence from Finck and Gaffurius that they wanted straight, pure, well-balanced singing. I've produced an example from the same treatise by Finck of him stating clearly that this is not the present state of things in music. As for Gaffurius, I don't have a copy with me now but there are ample other examples of people stating that church singing is none of those things (often to the author's distress.) 24 May

Oliver Webber Richard, if that is your claim, then it's better to say "Gaffurius and Finck suggest that straight singing is required in polyphony" - though as Tim notes even this may not be the whole story. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite It's also worth mentioning of course that the ubiquitous modern chamber organ is a much more recent invention and that the sound of the most glorious church music may well have been in line with the most common instrument with which it was associated.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKn3XGK4eHo

This sound ringing in my ears makes me want to sing in a way very different than that encouraged by most modern HIP performances 24 May

Richard Bethell But I still don’t know what YOU think on the question Oliver. As Tim says, there may be another side to the story, but I would like to hear more on what it is, from Domen as well as Tim. Nor is it just a matter of personal preference; the whole point of this group is to substantiate arguments from the historical record. Of course, treatise writers are fond of putting up straw men saying how dreadful things are. It’s very difficult, today, distinguishing rhetoric from actuality. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell If it were one or two writers making the same statements then I would agree, but it's such a common complaint crossing centuries and countries that it seem to me to be too frequent to be simply a rhetorical figure. Coupled with the instruments most often found doubling the church music of the time (shawms, sackbutts, cornets, and the great organ) it seems that we can glean rather a lot about the historical
aesthetics. Not to mention the numerous positive descriptions of church music being 'a great and merry noise.' I actually can't think of one description (not normative) of church music being quiet from this time, although I'm sure there are some. 24 May

Richard Bethell I agree with some of your instrumental analogies, although I'm not sure that shawms [apart from the great bass shawm I play] were widely used in sacred music. But Finck's comments on vocal balance make sense, given that choral music is often soprano heavy today. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite ‘the Lord Cardinali began Te Deum the which was solemnlie songen with the King’s trumpettets and shalmes as well Inglishe men as Venetians.’

‘we have introduced a kind of artificial and theatrical music into churches…Everything resounds with trumpets, cornetts, shawms and sackbuts, and the human voices must compete with them.

today things have come to the point where churches reverberate with cornetts, shawms and trumpets and sometimes even bombardes, and scarcely anything is audible but the babbling of disparate voices.

Granted it seems like they were replaced on the top voice by Cornetti by the middle/end of the 16th century but they still pop up occasionally as late as Praetorius. 24 May

Richard Bethell Interesting quotes. Written by whom? Where? And when? 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Oh there's also a lovely anecdote about a group of Spanish minstrels playing mass in Winchester Cathedral on Shawms and Sackbutts, I think it's in the article 'Churching the Shawm' but I can't seem to find it right now! 24 May

Greta Haenen Oliver Webber exact the same with Praetorius and then he has a musical example with 2 pitches 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell oh yes, sorry - I can't find a name for the first one, It's describing Cardinal Wolsey in 1527.

The second and third are by Erasmus talking about the present state of church music.

And the description of Spanish Minstrels is from 1554 when they accompanied Charles V on his travels to England

Sorry not to have more precise references! 24 May

Greta Haenen Domen Marincic speaking about Printz: did you see what he says about trillo and trilletto? "Triletto ist nur eine Bebung der Stimme/ so viel linder als Trillo, und fast gar nicht angeschlagen wird. He goes on to compare it with sort of a left hand violin vibrato. Printz' triletto is called tremoletto by Martin Heinrich Fuhrmann (1706), "eine Bebung der Stimme/ so gar nicht angeschlagen wird.... wie auf der Geige am besten zu zeigen/ wenn man den Finger auf der Seite stehen läst/ und solchen doch mit Schütteln etwas beweget und den Thon schwebend macht" He then provides an example in which I think the slurring is forgotten, a semiquaver tone repetition with dots. Germans seem to be inventive, they have trillo, trilletto, tremolo, tremolante and a lot of other names. 24 May

Oliver Webber Greta Haenen "exact the same with Praetorius and then he has a musical example with 2 pitches" - Praetorius was using the example for a keyboard, though, no?
So the application must be different. By all means let’s take assume Praetorius meant what he wrote - but can we please also assume Bovicelli meant what *he* wrote? 24 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell I want to write more, but for the moment I will just add something which is often overlooked. There are a few renaissance sources stressing the difference between written music and performance, just as Castiglione points out that very different criteria apply to a delivered speech than to a written text. Sorry for not giving the exact quotes, but there are a few sources including Cerone and Zarlino saying something like this: Sometimes when a singer ornaments his line parallels occur, but they do not matter since they pass quickly. However, a composer has to write everything down according to the rules. Beside diminution, early continuo playing is such an improvised practice where some blatant parallels are perfectly acceptable as attested by many sources. Such a distinction is eliminated today, also because performances have attained the status of documents with the advent of sound recording. We will never be able to understand past practices in the same way. When renaissance authors praise clarity and criticise confusion we can never know what they heard and what they wanted to hear. After all, they were not addressing us. Their practices don’t have to work for us and we don’t have to like the results, but we will never know what the results were like anyway since there are too many variables.

I mentioned early choral recordings because they give such a different picture from what is today considered standard. What reason is there to suppose that ensemble singing 450 years ago would have been more to ‘our’ taste?

Here is a favourite ‘confusion’ quote from me, but it’s from a much later period. Mylius (1685) writes that well-practised singers introduce passages with much licence and freedom, so that the organist must determine by ear when to play. If other singers are involved they must make trills (!) on their held notes until the virtuoso comes to a close; each should have his turn to show off his art: “wenn einer aus denen Sängern sich sonderlich vornimt in einem völligen Stücke in einer Schluß-Cadentz zu passaggiren / die andern Sänger so lange ihr trillo machen sollen / biß er zum Schluß komme / und ein ieder Raum und Platz habe / in einem guten Stücke seine Kunst horen zu lassen.” 24 May

Oliver Webber That brings to mind Pietro della Valle, Della musica dell’età nostra, 1640

…non stimo io per buon cantante quello, per esempio, che avendo un’ottima disposizione di voce, vuol fare sempre egli solo tutti i passaggi, senza dar tempo agli altri che ne facciano: o se pure gli altri ne fanno, gli confonde co’i suoi soverchi. Quei che cantano e sonano bene, incompagnia si hanno da dar tempo l’uno all’altro, e piuttosto che con artizii troppo sottili di contrappunti, hanno da scherzar con leggiadria d’imitazioni. Mostreranno l’arte loro in saper rifar bene e prontamente quel che un altro ha fatto innanzi; in dar poi luogo agli altri e opportuna occasione che rifaccian quello che essi hanno fatto; e così con diversa e non meno artiziosa maniera, bencè non tanto difficile, né tanto profondo sapere, faranno conoscere fra gli altri il valor loro. Questo, oggidi, non solo i più eccellenti, ma anche gli ordinary sonatori lo fanno, e sanno far tanto bene, che io non so come meglio potessero farlo quei del tempo passato che io non ho sentiti. 24 May

Oliver Webber "I don’t consider a good singer one who, for example, having an excellent vocal facility, insists on making all the diminutions himself, without giving time for others to do so: or if others do, theirs are lost amongst his excessive ornaments. Those who sing and play well must give time to one another, and rather than using very clever artifice of counterpoint, they should use playful and beautiful imitation. They will show their art by
knowing how to repeat well and promptly that which another has just done, and in then giving place and opportunity for others to repeat what they have done; and so with diverse and no less artful manner, even if not so difficult or profound, they let others see their own skill. This, today, not only the very best players, but even the ordinary ones, manage it so well that I don’t know how those of previous generations (whom I haven’t heard) could ever have done better.” 24 May

Oliver Webber  Again, we are somewhat later, well into the 17th century. Nonetheless, here we have a clear description of ideal ornamentation practice by singers in ensembles. Even if we take the view - wisely noted elsewhere in the thread - that criticism of a practice demonstrates the existence of said practice, the two alternatives here (bad and good) both involve considerable ornamentation of a vocal (or instrumental) line in ensemble singing (or playing) - either by one singer (not recommended by the author, but evidently in existence) or by all of them, taking turns. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Oliver Webber  Lovely quotes, on the theme of cacophony, here is a great quote by Banchieri on improvising counterpoint in 1614:

‘what produces the wonderful effect, the particular charm, and the sweet sound of [improvised counterpoint] are the unexpected consecutive fifths and octaves, the sudden dissonant clashes among the voices, and other unusual liberties.’

Compare this to Thomas Morley's description of mass improvised counterpoint and we can see how one man's musical trash is another man's treasure:

‘indeed causeth me to maruel how men acquainted with musicke, can delight to heare such confusion as of force must bee amongste so many singing extempore. But some haue stood in an opinion which to me seemeth not very probable, that is, that men accustomed to descanting will sing together vpon a plainsong, without singing eyther false chords or forbidden descant one to another, which til I see I will euer think vnpossible. For though they should all be moste excellent men, and euer one of their lessons by it selfe neuer so well framed for the ground, yet is it vnpossible for them to be true one to another’ 24 May

Domen Marincic Tim Braithwaite  Thank you so much for Banchieri! Do you perhaps know of a useful collection of quotes on consecutives in improvised counterpoint or diminution? I have a few recent books on improvised counterpoint and haven't yet looked at everything, but it doesn't look too good. I know I read something really interesting in Cerone, but this was more than 20 years ago and I can't find it. 24 May

Domen Marincic  How often should the other singers use the trillo while one of them is ornamenting his line as described by Mylius? I am sure there must be some written-out examples. The only ones I can think of are from keyboard music, perhaps in imitation of such a practice. 24 May

Domen Marincic  To continue my point about the difficulties in understanding past practices, my experience with historical improvisation at the highest level of education today is that people want to improve on the original sources. I have so often heard in lessons and conferences that examples in this or that original source are not up to a desired (but otherwise unspecified) standard. For example, speakers at the recent conference on improvisation around Adlung in Basle managed to criticise Adlung, Niedt, Buttstedt and Kirchhoff openly and without any noticeable self-reflexion. Bach was the only one who got away unharmed. I think we can learn something from observing that. 24 May
Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic consecutives of what sort? Do you mean parallel imperfect consonances like in faburden practices? Lusitano is the classic source on that sort of things, Thomas Morley has some stuff on parallel movement, there's a Scottish anonymous source with some great 16th century examples! There's a great source by Mateus de Aranda😊 Those are my main sources at the moment😊 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic I also love the idea of looking at keyboard and Lute sources for the placement and performance of various graces, there are some ridiculously heavily ornamented Lute sources which suggest a very florid practice, as well as the constant reminder that musicians can only try to imitate singers in their practice. 24 May

Domen Marincic Tim Braithwaite Concerning ornaments, I would specifically like to find examples for trills on long notes while some other voice has a passaggio (in my quote above, Mylius probably meant repeated pitches, but he uses 'trillo' also for alternating pitches). This is common in keyboard repertoire and must have been practised in ensemble music, but strangely, I can't think of any written-out examples. Luzzaschi, Fontana, Monteverdi's smaller-scale concertos, the Carlo Gra... ms. etc. would seem to be likely candidates, but only show very short moments of something approaching this, perhaps a single minim and only rarely. Monteverdi has it in the harp solo in L'Orfeo, but not in vocal music as far as I am aware.

By parallels I meant consecutive fifths and octaves, just like in your Banchieri quote. Somebody must have already tried to collect such texts, I suppose. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic I know that Monarchus sanctions parallel 5/3 chords as a type of falsobordone, is that helpful? 24 May

Domen Marincic Monarchus is perhaps too early, still interesting, I have looked at this, but different rules apply. Many later authors allow parallels in performance, but not on paper. There is a lot of this in continuo treatises, but I would like to know more from sources discussing counterpoint or diminution. 24 May

Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic the Scottish anonymous 16th century source advocates parallel 4ths in inner voices but apart from that I'm stumped, sorry not to be more help! 24 May

Richard Bethell "Nearly all historical reports suggest otherwise". Really, Tim? Here are a couple of quotes:
First from Francinus Gaffurius in 1496. "‘Singers should not produce musical tones with a voice gaping wide in a distorted fashion or with an absurdly powerful bellowing, especially when singing at the divine mysteries; moreover they should avoid tones having a wide and ringing vibrato, since these tones do not maintain a true pitch and because of their continuous wobble cannot form a balanced concord with other voices."
Second, Herman Finck, 1556: “The treble should be sung with a delicate and sonorous tone, the bass, however, with a harder and heavier tone; the middle voices should move with uniformity and try to match themselves to the outer parts sweetly and harmoniously"
.....Finck then states that a constant dynamic level should be maintained throughout a composition "so that there is no discrepancy in sound between the beginning and the end: the tone should not be too soft or too loud, but rather like a properly built organ, the ensemble should remain unaltered and constant." 24 May

Tim Braithwaite The quotes you provided are excellent as they provide some great examples of the regular complaints of choirmasters and church officials. Finck himself goes on to describe the present state of things later in the same treatise you describe stating
the following:

'I have not seldom seen excellent songs corrupted and deformed by a distorted and gaping mouth, head held back and shaking, with barbaric shouting from those who judge (bewitched by false conviction) that it is the same thing to bellow and to sing, which must be deplored.'

Another great example is Zenobi's description of how sackbutt players should play ever so softly in order to best imitate the human voice. He then goes on in the next sentence to say the following:

'[Good playing] does not occur in bandstands and in chapels and wherever one plays as loud as one can because people there have little understanding and experience of anything.'

My favourite is the oft quoted Thomas Morley who states that singers ' ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things,' which was recently used in the latest fretwork CD to justify the singing style. What is interesting is that that full quote is as follows, clearly bewailing that this is NOT what church singers of the day did:

'But of this enough; and to return to the expressing of the ditty, the matter is now come to that state that though a song be never so well made and never so aptly applied to the words yet shall you hardly find singers to express it as it ought to be, for most of our churchmen, so they can cry louder in their choir than their fellows, care for no more, whereas by the contrary they ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things. But this for the most part you shall find amongst them; that let them continue never so long in the church, yea though it were twenty years, they will never study to sing better than they did the first day of their preferment to that place, so that it should seem that having obtained the living which they sought for they have little or no care at all, either of their own credit or well discharging of that duty whereby they have their maintenance.' 24 May

**Tim Braithwaite** As a one off this could be ignored, but the regularity of the complaints levelled against church singers is frankly staggering. In a HUGE amount of cases, after a writer has stated how 'good' singing should be, they continue to blandly state that this is NOT how church singers sing, merely how they would wish them to sing.

The question then comes down to what we aim to achieve with HIP practices, whether we want to better understand what constituted a culture of historical performance practices, or whether we want to recreate a polished version of what historical writers wished the past sounded like. 24 May

**Tim Braithwaite** I find it interesting that both of the quotes you provide start with the word 'should' 24 May

**Richard Bethell** Do we do what they are said to have actually done [often bad], or what they "should" do? I think you are making the case for straight, pure well-balanced singing of polyphonic music for me. 24 May
Sure, and that's perfectly fine to have an aesthetic preference 😊 I personally have been involved in a (fairly short) lifetime of singing straight tone polyphony and my recent experiences involving a more ecstatic, cacophonous aesthetic ideal have been some of the most musically exciting, thrilling and satisfying of my life. I think what this conversation proves is that past writers, like today, had differing ideals when it came to sound.

I'll read it with interest, if it's not priced out of my reach. But beware of one thing. As I noted yesterday elsewhere in this thread, treatise writers were prone to rhetorical attacks on performance standards, in effect setting up straw men to illustrate how dreadful things were. Tosi did this a lot. I'm writing on the vocal soundscape as well, covering his period and later, pointing out that the best singers matched up to his precepts, and not down to his bad examples.

Sorry for the digressions. It's certainly good to try to distinguish rhetoric from actuality as you say. I am sure that practices varied a lot, but there were also some strong traditions and the 'truth' must lie somewhere in the middle. Perhaps this is useful: People have compared practices on early recordings with the advice those same performers give in their pedagogical writing. It proves that we would have never been able to reconstruct anything approaching their performing style from texts alone. For example, in 1922, Mark Hambourg calls dislocation in piano playing 'another blunder' and likens it to drawling in speech or stuttering, but on many of his recordings he uses it to a degree nobody would have expected considering his comments.

The main point I have been trying to make is that we can't really know how much clarity as we know it was desirable in 16th-century polyphony nor how clear we would have found actual performances if we could hear them. What we can say is that singers did use their voices in a way that people today would not necessarily describe as straight. A singer would rarely have begun a phrase exactly at the written pitch and would have connected the pitches in various ways. A 'straight' tone of unvarying pitch (I am thinking of all the various kinds of ornaments and diminutions) and dynamic would have been largely avoided. Think of Zenobi's definition of 'canto schietto'.

I quoted Mylius, but Falck (1688) is even more informative: Singers should alternate in singing passaggi while the others should (I know, I know) hold their notes according to their written value "mit einem reinen Tremulo oder Mordanten".

I absolutely agree that it's important to be aware of the rhetorical nature of these writings, which is why I think it's important to also take these prescriptions with a pinch of salt also. It's why I think it's important to use as wide a range of descriptions as possible rather than just relying on what treatises instruct. Are these eminent church musicians really saying that all church music is bad or perhaps hinting at a tradition outside of "educated" singing? I would say that the constant distinction between chamber singing (for noblemen and often by upper classes) and church singing (often by
lower classes and frowned on "professional" musicians) is important in this question.

Hints at this possible class distinction can perhaps be seen by people such as Zacconi who says "he who says that one makes a voice by crying out loud is deceived...because many learn to sing softly in camere (where loud singing is abhorred) and are not constrained by necessity to sing in churches and in capelle where PAID singers sing" I think the idea of being constrained by the necessity to be a paid singer says a lot about this dynamic, and could suggest why so many writers damn church singers in their rhetorical language, especially when considering who they were mostly writing for, a wealthy upper middle class. While it clearly is a rhetorical figure in writing, I would say that it's a figure designed to reinforce a social hierarchy associated with different performance ideals and spaces. These criticisms simply occur too regularly to be based on nothing.

Richard Bethell "A 'straight' tone of unvarying pitch and dynamic was largely avoided." You [and Tim] may possibly be right, but we will never know, given the dearth of performance descriptions for the Renaissance period. But do re-read my quotation from Finck above. I know this was about "should" and "ought to" performance, but his prescription does have a ring of truth, suggesting that you could at that time actually hear well-balanced singing by the best establishments which was unaltered and constant, like a properly built organ, not too loud or too soft.

Tim Braithwaite But actually, to go back to the point about vibrato, I do think that there was a general lesser use of vibrato, but I think it must likely that the vocal aesthetic was closer to this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4EZ7PnnK4A
or this:
https://youtu.be/locW-9S00VU?t=75
or this:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M7YAfC1-BU
or this:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAzpcjFCWuI

All of which have a general preference for less vibrato, and even sound a bit like Finck's organ analogy, but a completely different aesthetic to the pure, anaemic sound which we often hear today which is essentially modern classical technique minus vibrato. youtube.com

Richard Bethell I love this Georgian and Corsican singing. Michael Morrow would have gone for them as well. I think that the style you select depends on the repertoire.

Tim Braithwaite Richard Bethell definitely, I think that the reason so many people reject singing with a lesser vibrato is because it's reasonably incompatible with the other demands of modern classical singing. Many pop singers, musical theatre singers, and, as heard above, traditional styles of singing, use a much straighter tone but never in combination with a low larynx, layers of resonance and the emphasis on singers formants and rounded vowels which modern classical singers are encouraged to use. As long as vibrato feels like something being taken away I think we'll always have it in HIP performances. As soon as HIP singers start treating text declamation in styles more similar to my above suggestions then we'll have a very different approach to vibrato singing. It doesn't automatically mean pure and ethereal, it can be dramatic and earthy, but as long as
we keep all the other hallmarks of classical singing straight tone will have no choice but to be seen as dramatically lesser by the majority of the singing community. 25 May

Richard Bethell I agree we need both pure & ethereal and dramatic & earthy. In the former category, did you hear 'Dos Estrellas Le Siguen' here, by the group Sete Lágrimas? Beautiful music sung beautifully by Filipe Faria and Sérgio Peixoto. https://soundcloud.com/.../cd-en-tus-brazos-una-noche-01...

Domen Marincic But asking what we want and what we need is a completely different thing. I would try to separate researching past practices from thinking about what I want to do myself, what works for me as a musician and as a listener, and how something should be done today. I know there is a strong tradition to the contrary, think of all the books on so-called performance practice telling people what to do, but it has led to so much confusion and misunderstanding. This is a long story and I know not many agree with me. 25 May

Domen Marincic Just to illustrate the problem, and I'll exaggerate, apologies for digressing further: In my experience, if I post a historical quote without any comment, a few will think I am saying that this *has* to be put into practice and will possibly label me as a fundamentalist. Some will dislike the quote and will try to diminish its importance because it won't agree with their aesthetic experience. Others will like it because it will agree with some currently fashionable element of performance practice. Or because it will counter modern orthodoxy and discover previously unimagined habits of performance style (such expressions are found a lot in recent writing on performance practice). How often do I see people explicitly asking for historical material on a certain topic, but all they get is some historically-and-otherwise-questionable commonplace advice on how they should approach it in performance. I remember asking if there was "any historical evidence, including controversial and ambiguous sources" for a certain hypothetical practice, and so many otherwise knowledgeable people replied by basically saying "This is wrong, don't do it, you'll hurt yourself". Needless to say, we did find such sources after a while. 25 May

Tim Braithwaite Domen Marincic I know what you mean and I think I agree with you. My only aim in approaching historical repertoire is to attempt to understand the surrounding musical and cultural contexts and practices as best as possible, with no claims to orthodoxy or correctness. 25 May

Tim Braithwaite similar to the approach which ethnomusicologists have in approaching a culture's relationship with music from a more anthropological viewpoint. 25 May

Richard Bethell Domen Marincic, I do accept that you should do what you want musically, without feeling bound by hegemonic orthodoxies, either dominant at present or researched from the past. In my case, I feel strongly that singers have a lot to learn from the historic record, unlike instrumentalists who have taken their HIP lessons on board. Singers Filipe Faria and Sérgio Peixoto balance well with instruments, exploit the falsetto register, sport no vibrato or laryngeal development, and do not force high notes. I think composer Manuel Machado would have approved, as would Tosi writing a hundred years later. It is difficult to imagine singers of this quality graduating from a British or North American institution. Does anyone living in Portugal, such as Andrew Woolley [editor of
NEMA’s Early Music Performer], know if Sete Lágrimas have ruffled any feathers there? 25 May

Tim Braithwaite I think also, to take my ethnomusicological comparison a step further, we would generally consider an understanding of a foreign musical culture to be extremely shallow if we only experienced it through modern western classical instruments, singers, notation and performance conventions. I think it gives no less shallow understanding to only view the past through the same lens. The only difference is we'll never achieve an accurate lens to the past, but I don't think that makes it any less worthwhile an exercise to try! 25 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell Not sure if I can explain this properly, it's much more than that. I am convinced that proper research into historical performance is hindered by people thinking that the results should somehow automatically pertain to today's performances. We should never suppose that some practice from the past has to work out for us aesthetically or technically or even that anything worked out perfectly back then (no idea about the criteria for that). Constant appropriation of elements from historical practices in our own music making so often results in misrepresentation, obscuring the actual historical information. By following our own priorities, we only see what we want. I am not at all saying that we shouldn't use such information as musicians, but in my opinion, historical performance research should be rewarding in itself, its primary goal should not be influencing modern performances. Proper research often opens more questions than it provides clear-cut answers. Just recently I commented in another well-informed group advising caution in interpreting some evidence and somebody who is historically most interested complained by saying "But we are obliged to play something!" Do you see the problem? 25 May

Richard Bethell I see what you're getting at. And I accept that historical data can be misinterpreted. But I can't really agree with your position. Ultimately, if we don't utilise the historic record to inform our own performances, what's the point in doing the research in the first place? For example, if singers continue to ignore Pierfrancesco Tosi, Johann Quantz, Charles Burney et al, and actually perpetrate things they disapproved of, baroque and early classical opera will continue to be vandalised. Contrariwise, the fact that we can now hear classical string quartets beautifully played on historically informed artefacts is largely attributable to good research. 25 May

Oliver Webber The thing is, we performers *are* obliged to play *something*! That does not mean that research cannot continue independently of performance, nor that research must come up with "answers" for the modern performer. But it is not unreasonable for the fields of research and performance, while overlapping and informing each other where reasonable, to operate with different agendas, priorities and criteria for success. 25 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell What about trying to understand as much as possible about the past? We don't have to like what we find. To accept different agendas, priorities and criteria for success is exactly what I have been trying to suggest, many thanks, Oliver. Richard, you mention string quartets 'beautifully played'. How do you know that such performances are successful because of relying on good research? If we actually came close to 18th-century performances we wouldn't even have the means to know. I think research into early recordings has shown this. I gave an example somewhere in this thread. 25 May

Richard Bethell "How do you know that such performances are successful because of relying on good research?" A fair question, certainly. And I'm really the wrong person to
answer it, as string quartet playing is not something I do or have researched. But I did post in March 2016 [really just personal impressions comparing the beautiful playing of Chiaroscuro with the appalling Amadeus String Quartet], as follows:

"Richard Bethell Playing by string soloists and ensembles tends to be more informed, certainly since the millennium. For example, Alina Ibragimova performed Bach's solo violin sonatas and partitas expressively, without any vibrato at all. The Chiaroscuro Quartet has recorded early classical string quartets with occasional expressive vibrato, a major step forward from the Amadeus String Quartet's renderings, which to my ear are ugly, strenuous, stentorian (concert hall sized), with continuous wobbling on all long notes. Other more historically aware quartets include Armida, Eroica, Emergence, London Haydn, and Quatuor Mosaïques. A few even seem to use authentic instruments and dispense with chin rests. I found some of these groups on YouTube's Historically Informed Videos.

Like · · 13 March at 16:48 · Edited” 25 May

Oliver Webber Richard Bethell: is there not a danger - I realise this may seem a little provocative - of making too many judgments about performances according to just one criterion (i.e. vibrato)? Interesting as it may be, are there not other aspects of the performance worth considering? What was Ibragimova's awareness of dance forms like? How was the Chiaroscuro's approach to phrasing? Did the Amadeus' interpretations show a sense of rhetorical structure? 26 May

Richard Bethell Yes Oliver Webber, you are, once again, putting me on the defensive! My response: [1] The vibrato differences were mentioned by way of example, [2] My comments were from the heart, [3] I’m not the right person to deliver a balanced review (as I noted), and [4] I would look to a professional violinist like yourself for an assessment of Chiaroscuro’s phrasing and the other performance aspects you mention. 26 May

Greta Haenen Domen Marincic Still, both Mylius and Falck are actually writing for schoolboys having to perform Figuralmusik in church. So there is a lot of tradition in their books, it is interesting though, where Falck digresses from Praetorius and how Mylius reflected Bernhard Singe-Kunst. 27 May

Greta Haenen Domen Marincic Good news for the musicologist! I don't prescribe anything, I can just sort of try to understand. Yes, it needs a lot of learning about the past. Keep telling that to my students: never believe what I tell you, always look it up, make up your own mind -- but with as much knowledge as possible. <sort of, to put it in very simple words. 27 May

Greta Haenen Gosh! The enter function again, sigh! I am too old for this...It also needs historical method. Reading sources is a science of its own. 27 May

Greta Haenen Oliver Webber Yes, it doesn't have those answers. Actually, I do not perform (you wouldn't like to hear me playing or singing... 27 May

Greta Haenen Richard Bethell what is "good research”? We can learn a lot from a good historian. Still happy to have included that in my studies. 27 May

Richard Bethell I’ll try to answer your question, Greta Haenen. When I look back at the different phases of my life, I attribute whatever success I’ve had to good research. In my case, the common factors were “1. Always Get the Facts” [whether as time study engineer or management consultant, or producing “International Tax Comparisons of Individuals’ Equity Investments” for the London Stock Exchange, or establishing the best competitor benchmarking criteria for ComPeer Ltd, or surveying local residents’ views on a 2nd
runway for Gatwick Airport, or currently, researching the vocal soundscape in the 18th/19th centuries] and "2. Apply/Use Research Data Properly." As we’ve discovered in this thread, researching the period c. 1600 has particular difficulties, partly due to the dearth of descriptions of actual vocal performances, resulting in interpretative disagreements. I find it hard to contribute due to skill deficiencies, both linguistic and musicological. Greta, you have of course demonstrated that you are a good researcher with your ‘Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock’. 27 May

Greta Haenen Why yes, I had a rather Pilatus-sounding question, didn’t I? Yes, one has to go back to the facts, in this case there are a few difficulties, reading earlier texts means more than just grammatical reading or syntax, one needs a whole historical background. I am really happy that during my university studies I got the tools historians use. In some respect musicology itself wasn't the best bit of what they offered at university, but the history classes compensated well. I always see my research on performance practices apart from anything like practical music making: I treat it as part of history or philology, which gives me a lot of freedom researching. I mean, I never know the practical outcome before I finished my research - if it is ever finished. I don’t have to judge and I don’t have to play (singing doesn’t work with me due to thyroid operation). Difficult to explain at night. Anyway I like being surrounded by music students and musicians, one needs to be in contact with practice. By the way, vibrato is my reworked 1983 dissertation. And at the moment I am working on the personal library of Leopold I. The Hapsburg emperor. Gets one back to philology -- still thinking of writing a book on sound conceptions in late 16th and 17th century music. I have this and that, by the way also on accent. Could explain that to you end of October. And finally: a lot of good musicological research has been done by "querestringer" [newcomer or “lateral entrant”] like you! 28 May

Domen Marincic Great, I find a clear separation between history and today's practice very important, and am surprised how rarely it is recognized that it enables more openness and freedom, both in research and in performance. 'Historical performance' and HIP should be understood as two very different ideas, otherwise we have no term for describing (and researching) actual performances of the past. I always thought that 'practice' in HPP or in 'Aufführungspraxis' should refer to past practices and not to construction of premises for today's musicians. 28 May

Greta Haenen There you are! I research the past (as far as it is possible of course) without having to refer to nowadays practices. There must be ONE advantage on not being a musician... 28 May

Richard Bethell "People were aware that they are being recorded so they changed their performances in various ways just as pianists edited their rolls." What evidence do you have that singers changed their performances when being recorded? And if so, how? 28 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell Sorry, I deleted my comment a second after posting it. Here it is:

"How things actually sounded will remain open to imagination and much speculation, despite all the evidence, since there are too many variables. Even documents which seem at first to give a fairly reliable picture such as early recordings have their problems and limitations, however fascinating and informative they may be. We have very few recordings of live performances from the very early stage of recordings (even if the performances might seem very ‘live’ by today's standards). People were aware that they are being recorded so they changed their performances in various ways just as pianists edited
their rolls. I have here an interview with Harold Bauer in which he stresses three times that "this is an entirely new way of music making" enabling him to attain higher artistic levels. This is in a way comparable to the problem, referred to above, of written documents saying that one 'should' do this or that."

This was a general statement and I will be happy to find a few early examples that involve singers. I could suggest modern literature tracing such changes, but it would be better to have a collection of comments from the period. Harold Bauer, both in the aforementioned interview and in his autobiography, describes changing various interpretative parameters under the influence of his recording experience (rolls and acoustic recordings), such as tempo, arpeggiation, and the length of certain notes. This explains at least in part why performing styles changed so quickly with the advent of recordings. Performances became documents and began to be regarded as models. It was clear from the very beginning that recordings give a different perspective on performing, think of Arthur Sullivan's recorded statement of 1888 about how "so much hideous and bad music may be put on record forever".

The first thing that springs to mind is Alessandro Moreschi's panic fear of recording. I'll check the sources for that in his biography when I am home. Anton Rubinstein, Brahms and others didn't want to record for fear of their mistakes being preserved forever, but they are again pianists.

The phonograph favored brassy singing and this partly explains the fame (and influence) of certain recording artists such as Caruso or Louis Armstrong. Martin Katz, in his book Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music, suggests that one of the reasons for an increase of vibrato in the 20th century was the fact that the phonograph was able to pick such acoustically 'wider' sounds up more easily. It also enabled players to cover up inaccuracies of intonation; the phonograph made them self-conscious about such problems in new ways.

Richard Bethell I would certainly be interested in any examples you can find of singers changing their performances in the recording studio. I couldn't find any, but then I wasn't looking for them. On the contrary, I do find remarkable consistency between reviews of singers c. 1905-20 and the recordings which have come down to us, taking Emma Albani as an example. 28 May

Domen Marincic The changes which I already know are documented for singers at the beginning of the 20th century are the following:
- fear of recording despite extensive performing experience,
- greater avoidance of errors than in live performances,
- shortening pieces because of technical limitations, including speeding up the tempo, or choosing shorter pieces in the first place,
- straightening out dynamics, for example by stepping away from the recording device at certain notes,
- favouring certain voice types at the expense of others,
- different and often cramped positioning of singers and instruments compared to concert performances,
- self-education by hearing one's own recording
...

You will probably know Edison's views on the 'tremolo', this is from a PhD thesis found online and could actually speak against what I wrote earlier today. But it implies a change
effected by the recording itself, I wonder who the 'noted vocalist' was:

Edison heard many vocalists and formed some strong opinions about the voice: "The worst defect a voice can have is, in my mind, the tremolo." He thought it to be "... a defect which singers themselves do not seem to be able to recognize." Edison told the story of how listening to a recording persuaded a noted vocalist of the shortcoming. "The tremolo came out very distinctly in the record and the singer insisted that it was due to the mechanism," he remarked. Knowing the truth of the matter, Edison used a different mechanism that "... revealed the tremolo so clearly that the singer was convinced where the fault lay and proceeded to correct it."

http://www.mainspringpress.com/edison_opera.html

Rosa Ponselle declared she would have taken more liberties to express emotion in her performance without the cuts necessary to stay within the time restriction. [Sorry, can't find a proper reference at the moment, this is from Susan Schmidt Horning, Chasing Sound: Technology, Culture, and the Art of Studio Recording.] 28 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell I think I could find as many such quotes as I wanted:

"Now don't sing as you do on the stage," said Mr. Clarance. "Don't let one note drop to the footlights and then throw the next one to the gallery. Sing with little feeling—almost none. All the notes should be equally loud."
Singing to the Cylinders, New York Sun, in an unbound clippings file for 1893

"On the concert platform one can easily counteract the impression created by one’s errors, calling in the assistance, if need be, of facial expression, or pose, or, on occasions, even of gesture. Not so when you are singing for the remorseless recording machine."
Alma Gluck, from Vanity Fair, October 1916

"On the vaudeville stage a false note or a slight slip in your pronunciation makes no difference. On the phonograph stage the slightest error is not admissable. To make one means that you must make the record over again."
Ada Jones, Singing to the World, Edison Amberola Monthly, February 1917

The text below is from The Phonogram, November 1900.
Domen Marincic This is from James Lastra, Sound Technology and the American Cinema: "Edison detested tremolo most of all, preferring absolutely unornamented voices, and ones that were "attuned" not to large concert halls but specifically to the medium of recorded sound. His sense of artistry was determined by the quality of the phonogram and not at all by the performance that produced it. When finally convinced to hire top-notch singers for his Diamond Disc series, Edison made himself a reputation as a difficult, tin-eared, and harsh taskmaster. He infamously criticized Dame Maggie Trete (as he had Caruso), for the "quality of her top notes." At first, she understandably regarded his opinion as ignorant or uninformed, but later came to take his insistence on vibrato-less singing as an attempt to get her to "adjust to the recording characteristics of the day," and thereby register with greater clarity on the disc. In a similar vein, an Edison staff pianist remembered that the inventor also refused to record music with complex harmonic structures, preferring simple thirds and sixths over extended harmonies, which tended to muddy the resulting record. Indeed, even Edison rival Fred Gaisberg, who first recorded Caruso for the Berliner Gramophone Company and subsequently made him the most famous singer in the world, recognized that not all singers could record equally well. He went so far as to credit Caruso's extraordinary success to his performance technique and singing style, which together produced "the one perfect voice for recording." 29 May

Domen Marincic Here are some more technical instructions for singers from 'The Phonograph and how to use it' (1900). They include "Avoid singing with too much expression." and "They must realize every moment that they are making records for the Phonograph, and not singing for an audience. Evenness of tone is what tells." 28 May
Richard Bethell Thanks for this Domen Marincic. Thomas Edison is interesting. I'm not so sure that he detested tremolo, though. The following [edited] report of an interview with Edison might suggest otherwise. "Now you shall hear the finest voice in the world", said Thomas A. Edison. ... From the phonograph poured forth the strains of a well known classic, sung by a voice of superlative purity, clear as a flute. / "She does not know how to sing", said Mr. Edison. That was quite evident. The singing was utterly mechanical, without the slightest attempt at expression. It is certain the singer had not even a remote idea of the meaning of the words she was uttering. . . . . / "Whose voice is it?" I asked, as the song ceased. / "Her name would mean nothing to you if I were to tell you", said Mr. Edison. "You have never heard it. Probably you never will. The owner of that voice has never been on the stage. She has not yet learned how to make use of her voice. She sings mechanically. She has never been taught how to sing. But the organ is there, and it is perfectly beautiful. She sings to pitch; there is no break between the registers, and there is not a sign of a tremolo, which is remarkable, for the tremolo is the natural voice. The critics usually think a tremolo is an affectation, the result of poor teaching. I have proved that it is not an affectation. It is natural to sing with a tremolo and it takes a good deal of practice to get rid of it. But this woman, you notice, has no tremolo at all. Hers is what I call a perfectly natural voice. What it may become when trained I would not predict. All depends on the trainer." [Interview of Thomas Edison, Plain Dealer, 3 Aug 1913]
Richard Bethell George Reneau’s out-of-tune harmonica playing is unfortunate though. 29 May

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell Thanks for this! I have seen more on Edison and the tremolo and think it might have been different kinds of tremoli. Some he liked and others he didn’t. I found more texts describing how he criticised people singing with some kind of a tremolo. He is certainly said to have preferred untrained voices. Anyhow, the texts I posted above strongly suggest that early recordings do not give a 1:1 picture of the singing at the time, including the tremolo element. This was my point. 29 May

David Badagnani Straight vocal tone is standard for early country music and the YouTube playlist I created is just for European early music. 30 May

David Badagnani The aforementioned combination of straight, unwavering tone and raucous vocal quality characterizes the Sacred Harp (shape note) singing tradition originating in the late 18th-early 19th century U.S. Listen to how incredible the perfectly tuned, resounding open-fifth harmonies sound here and you'll never want to go back to the anachronistic and inappropriate use of the wavering tone in a Medieval polyphonic context. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMi1djci4os

Richard Bethell What a wonderful sound, David Badagnani! Deborah Roberts, why not include a Sacred Harp piece in your workshop at NEMA's conference with BREMF on 20/21 October next? After all, Sacred Harp music has Renaissance roots. 25 May

David Badagnani Here’s what the Sacred Harp (shape note) hymn singing sounds like in its natural habitat--in this case, grand old man Hugh McGraw's Primitive Baptist church in Bremen, Georgia, right near the Alabama state line. Bellowing is a part of this tradition, but nobody has to remind the singers not to waver their voices, because they never thought of doing such a thing. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m34OaYzG9NE

David Badagnani Interestingly, the proponents of shape note music themselves criticized practitioners of the older tradition of Protestant congregational monophonic/heterophonic lined-out psalmody/hymnody (who also use no vibrato), which they intended their polyphonic shape note music to replace, as "bellowers"....this particular recording was made in an Old Regular Baptist church in the coalfields of East Kentucky. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TRJ5_TuvJIM
Tim Braithwaite  Love this recording of some good old Lining Out, there are references to this practice in 17th century English metrical psalms which I think is a fascinating aural image which we don't associate with that time enough! 26 May

Domen Marincic  But where are all the tremoli and trilli, the actual topic of this thread? The Corsican and Georgian singers do them. William Billings (1774) in his glossary describes 'vibration' as 'A shaking, or trembling'. John Adams (1774) wrote that singing in a church in New York City was "in the Old Way, as we call it—all the drawling, quaverling, Discord in the World." Here is something by Rev. Thomas Walter (Boston, 1721).

And then the even, unaffected, and smooth sounding the Notes, and the Omission of those unnatural Quaverings and Turnings, will serve to prevent all that Dilvord and length by Tedi-ouletts which is so much a Fault in our Singing of Psalms. For much time is taken up in shaking out these Tums and Quavers: and besides, no two Men in the Congregation quaver alike, or together; which sounds in the Ears of a good Judge, like Free Hundred different Tunes roared out at the same time, whose perpetual interferings with one another, perplexed Jars, and unmeasured Periods, would make a Man wonder at the false Pleasure which they conceive in that which good Judges of Music and Sounds, cannot bear to hear.

Tim Braithwaite  You're right, I got carried away just sharing fun videos, how's this for some nice ornamental tremoli?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70YDpSo2MRI

Domen Marincic  Oh, I am still a fan. Even after hearing some really disastrous concerts in the last six years. 26 May

Domen Marincic  Tim Braithwaite https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZVq5bqQ5bU

Tim Braithwaite  Domen Marincic  great stuff! From experience this sort of stuff is frowned upon at conservatories... 26 May

Richard Bethell  Tim Braithwaite  Your clip features some really deep bass singing. How do they do that? 26 May


Richard Bethell  As I mentioned in my article "Straight Tone Singing through the Long 18th Century", published in the last issue of NEMA's newsletter, under the heading "Some Red
Meat for the Vibrato Defenders", William Tans'ur strongly defended wavering or quavering in various publications from 1746 to 1772.

Richard Bethell Here is page 2. As I note in my article: "There can be no question that composers and singers of opera, oratorio and concert music, plus their audiences and critics, would, besides excoriating virtually continuous vibrato, have rejected (1) metrically generated approaches to expressive tremolo and (2) any idea that accented parts of the bar should be "void of discords", especially as suspensions generally coincide with accented notes. Tans'ur was a marginal figure, ignored by both Charles Burney and Richard Edgcumbe. He was mainly concerned with psalm singing, outside the sacred music mainstream." But Tans'ur did have a few followers.

Domen Marincic Richard Bethell But why do you mention 'excoriating virtually continuous vibrato'? In your first excerpt, Tans'ur writes 'on certain notes' and describes touching the emotions, rendering the music so agreeable to the ear etc. I don't think that his second definition of Accent (as in accented parts of the measure) has anything to do with the first which describes the ornamental 'wavering and Shaking'. And he clearly means dissonant passing notes (mostly on unaccented parts of the bar as opposed to suspensions). 26 May

Domen Marincic 'Accent' could be 'beat' in English. Holyoke, Jocelyn and Doolittle describe the 'beat' as essentially synonymous with 'shake'. I really don't see why Tans'ur would be problematic.

Apologies for concentrating on American authors, it's David Badagnani's clips. Jocelyn and Doolittle actually include music by Tans'ur. 26 May
Richard Bethell For 'Excoriating virtually continuous vibrato', see my article. He's specific that "certain notes" [the ones to be wavered on] are the 1st and 3rd beat of a 4/4 bar or the 1st note of a 3/4 bar, which are obviously accented. This is clearly a "metrically generated approach". 26 May

Domen Marincic Where? But not in this excerpt. I see two separate definitions, first of 'Accent' as shaking and then, after the horizontal bar, he goes on to explain the basic concept of 'Accented and Unaccented Parts of the Measure'. 26 May

Richard Bethell I agree that the complete section 'Of the Accents in Musick' is ambiguous. I think they are linked by the passage: "An Accent, is a Sort of wavering or Shaking of the Voice . . . by reason it touches and causes Emotions in the Mind, either of Love, Sorrow, Pity, or any other Passion whatsoever, &c.—This is what is called the Accented, and Unaccented parts of the Measure; which the Italians call Tempo Buono, or Time-Good; and Tempo-Cattivo, or Time, or Measure-bad; that is to say, the good, and part, Parts of the Measure, &c." 26 May

Domen Marincic I don't think this is ambiguous and I wonder if anybody agrees with your interpretation. I see "This is what is called ..." as announcing the definition which follows after this sentence. Oliver Webber? Tim Braithwaite? 26 May

Domen Marincic But it seems it was indeed also possible to hear something like 'excoriating virtually continuous' trilling if we believe Billings (1778): "Many ignorant singers take great license from these trills and without confining themselves to any rule *they shake all notes promiscuously* and they are as apt to tear a note in pieces which should be struck fair and plump as any other. Let such persons be informed that it is impossible to shake a note without going off it, which occasions horrible discords; to remedy which evil they must not shake any note but what is marked with a Trill, and that according to rule, which may be easily learned under a good master." 26 May

Richard Bethell And also Thomas Billington: ""The performer should also come immediately upon the Note with Firmness, and, as I may say, a kind of Confidence; and not to introduce Trills and Beats, and a kind of Tremulus on every note, which is the bane of all singing, so that before the note in question is well ascertained, he is, through necessity, carried to the next note, which shares the same fate as the former, and so on to the end of the piece.” [Te deum, etc., with Instructions to the Performers, 1784] 26 May

Domen Marincic I just quoted Billings myself! 26 May

Richard Bethell Sorry, I meant Thomas Billington!. Have edited 26 May

Domen Marincic Look how Tans'ur uses the long dash before, the one at the end of the first paragraph on the same page. It's the beginning of a new paragraph. He actually gives three very different definitions of accents, both times separated by a dash. Richard Bethell What do you think?

I applied and paid for NEMA membership so I'll soon be able to read the complete article. 26 May

Domen Marincic It's amazing how Tans'ur's (1772) very basic ornamentation examples could be seen as a simplified version of Rognoni's (1620) ornamented Palestrina: trills, thirds connected by dotted figures, approaching the second of two descending minims from below complete with a trill. Tans'ur doesn't show the 'accento', however, and doesn't dot pairs of quavers. I am sorry to see that even the New Grove article on this man is impossibly patronising.
Oliver Webber Domen Marincic there seem to be 3 definitions: firstly, "common use in speech", secondly, the wavering ornament, thirdly, the metrical hierarchy. It is perhaps a little clumsy in its organisation, but I can't see a genuine ambiguity. 26 May

Richard Bethell I take your points, Domen Marincic on the long dash, and Oliver Webber's 3 definitions. I'll reword this section in the book I'm working on, which illustrates how useful this group can be. 27 May

Richard Bethell Domen Marincic, welcome to NEMA. It's good to have you on board. I'd also welcome your further comments on my article. 27 May

David Badagnani Rev. Thomas Walter in his quote presented above was criticizing the twists and turns of individual heterophonic variation in terms of the ornamentation allowed in the unmetered lined-out congregational psalmody which can still be heard in parts of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland--the ornaments can be so frequent they sound like shakes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k4etJC5vQaw youtube.com 26 May

Gaelic Psalm Singing - Donald Macleod (Portree…