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Singing and String Playing in Comparison: Instructions for the Technical and Artistic Employment of Portamento and Vibrato in Charles de Bériot's *Méthode de violon*

Until well into the nineteenth century few would have challenged the idea that the human voice was the most perfect of instruments and that vocal music was the highest form of musical expression. It is not surprising, therefore, that many writers of instrumental treatises alluded to the vocal qualities of their instruments and emphasised the successful emulation of beautiful singing as a mark of the most tasteful performance. Even pianists, despite the piano's essentially percussive nature, could regard fine singing as the pre-eminent model for fine playing. Hummel observed: »What relates to beauty and taste in performance, will be best cultivated, and perhaps ultimately most easily obtained, by hearing music finely performed, and by listening to highly distinguished musicians, particularly Singers gifted with great powers of expression.«¹ Chopin was celebrated for his ability to make the piano sing and Sigismond Thalberg entitled his piano method *L'art du chant appliqué au piano*.

It was, however, bowed string instruments, especially the violin, that were seen as most capable of imitating not only the expressive qualities of singing, but also many of the tonal characteristics and embellishments of the human voice. Spohr had no doubt that, as he observed at the beginning of his *Violinschule*, »among all the instruments which have hitherto been invented, the pre-eminence is justly due to the Violin.« He attributed this partly to »the beauty and equality of its tone,« its ability to produce »numerous shades of forte and piano« and »the purity of its intonation, which [...] is unattainable on any wind instrument,« but principally to »its suitability to express the deepest emotions of the heart, wherein, of all instruments, it most nearly approaches the human voice.«² Spohr's own playing was frequently praised for its vocal qualities and it seems clear that in executing a melody he sought to employ the stylistic resources that would have been heard in the singing of the great sopranos of his day. His performance of his Eighth Violin Concerto »in Form einer Gesangsszene« (written to suit the taste of the Italian public in 1816) elicited the following comment from a critic in Naples: »He knows the true beauties

- 1 Johann Nepomuk Hummel: *Ausführliche theoretisch-praktische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel*, Vienna 1828, trans. as: *A Complete Theoretical and Practical Course of Instructions, on the Art of Playing the Piano Forte*, 3 vols., London 1829, vol. 3, p. 39.
- 2 Louis Spohr: *Violinschule*, Vienna [1833], trans. by John Bishop as: *Louis Spohr's Celebrated Violin School*, London [1843], p. 1.

of art, which consist not in overcoming technical difficulties but in rendering instrumental music like vocal music.«³ In his *Violinschule* Spohr repeatedly emphasised parallels between violin playing and singing.

Among Spohr's younger contemporaries, the Belgian violinist Charles de Bériot, though in many respects representing a quite different artistic tendency, was renowned for the vocal quality of his playing. Spohr, who heard him in Karlsbad in 1838, expressed his admiration for Bériot's performances, though he disliked his compositions.⁴ Bériot had enjoyed a seven-year liaison with the great singer Maria Malibran, who died shortly after their marriage in 1836, and it seems probable that his style of performance was strongly influenced by her superb artistry, admired by musicians as diverse as Rossini, Mendelssohn and Verdi. The poet Heinrich Heine, captivated by Bériot's playing, was later to remark: »I cannot but entertain the thought that the soul of his departed wife sang in the sweet tones of his violin.«⁵ Bériot's *Méthode de violon*, written in the 1850s, focussed more extensively and explicitly on the relationship between violin playing and singing than any other nineteenth-century violin method known to me. It exhibits many correspondences of performance style with the *Traité complet de l'art du chant*, written by his brother-in-law Manuel García (Malibran's brother) during the previous decade. Bériot made his intentions clear in the preface to part 1 of the *Méthode*, stating: »It is our intention not so much to develop the mechanical features, as to preserve the true character of the Violin: that of reproducing and expressing all the feelings of the soul. We have therefore taken the music of song as our starting point, both as a guide and a model. Music is the soul of the text and by its expansion it gives expression to sentiment, in the same manner that text helps to give signification to music. It is this observation that has led us to choose dramatic music for the majority of our examples in Part Three. Music is above all the language of sentiment, its melodies always have in them a certain poetic meaning, a real or imaginary text, which the violinist must always keep prominently in his mind, in order that his bow may reproduce its accent, prosody, punctuation, in short, that he may make his instrument speak.«⁶

Much can be learned about nineteenth-century attitudes towards sound quality and expressiveness from the ways in which violin tutors deal with the relationship between style and technique, and this evidence may also help us better to appreciate some of the leading characteristics of early and mid nineteenth-century singing. The instructions in

- 3 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 19 (1817), p. 327.
- 4 Louis Spohr: *Selbstbiographie*, 2 vols., Kassel 1860–1861, reprint Kassel 1954–1955, vol. 2, p. 224.
- 5 Heinrich Heine, trans. Charles Godfrey Leyland: *The Salon: Lectures on Art, Music, Popular Life and Politics in Paris*, London 1905 (original edition 1834), p. 338.
- 6 Charles de Bériot: *Méthode de violon*, Paris [1858], vol. 1, p. 3.

string methods may supplement and clarify our understanding of equivalent aspects of vocal practice. Instructions for singers, or accounts of their performances are essentially subjective, since the mechanism of the voice cannot be seen or described in the way that a violinist's techniques can be seen and described. As Roger Freitas has written: »Communication of vocal style [...] is always forced to rely on verbal imagery, imagery that often suggests different things to different people.«⁷ Even García's pioneering observations of the operation of the larynx provide limited information for those trying to recreate the sound and style of nineteenth-century singing.⁸ Bowing and fingering, on the other hand, could be observed and explained in ways that provide a more reliable, though by no means unambiguous guide to reproducing the effects they would have elicited. Bériot's treatise, in combination with other nineteenth-century violin methods, provides a wealth of detail about such matters.

Curiously, although there has been a lively and growing interest in historically informed performance during the past few decades (extending increasingly during the last twenty years to nineteenth-century repertoire), there has been a notable reluctance among period performers to embrace all the implications of the evidence. It is ironic that, while performers of earlier music bemoan the paucity of evidence that has come down to us, performers of nineteenth-century music, for which practices are much more richly documented, have been remarkably selective about the aspects of nineteenth-century style they choose to adopt. I know of no commercially available modern »historically informed« performance of this repertoire that consequentially utilises the stylistic features of which we have such abundant evidence. Uncomfortable elements of that style are either passed over in silence, or argued away on questionable historical or logical grounds.⁹ Some string players have acknowledged the ornamental use of vibrato in nineteenth-century repertoire (though they have rarely applied it convincingly) and, by exploring a different range of bowstrokes, have begun to experiment with unfamiliar means of tone production. Singers, on the other hand, have almost without exception shied away from changing their approach to vibrato and tone production, and the absurd effects to which this gives rise can easily be heard in numerous performances where singers have been combined with period instruments.¹⁰ Neither string players nor singers have seriously

7 Roger Freitas: *Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing: Emancipation from Modern Orthodoxy*, in: *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127 (2002), p. 226–257: 227.

8 Freitas (*Verdian Ideal*, p. 233 f.), however, draws stimulating and persuasive conclusions about vocal timbre from García's observations.

9 A recording that comes much closer than most is the Orfeo Duo's performance of Schumann's *Violin Sonatas* (Unacorda 2002). But even here, important aspects of sound and style remain undeveloped.

10 This is particularly striking in such recordings as those of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* by the Academy of Ancient Music, London Classical Players, or *Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique*.

faced the challenge of incorporating historically-based portamento into their performances.

There is, of course, always scope for differing interpretations of written evidence about performance style and for the conscious or subconscious suppression of evidence that challenges cherished notions of good taste. This is nicely demonstrated by the heated debate of the 1970s and 1980s over whether string players ever really played without some form of continuous vibrato. Robert Donington, undoubtedly under the influence of the artistic preconceptions generated by his formative musical experiences, considered more or less continuous vibrato a natural component of beautiful tone in string playing, arguing that it must always have constituted an intrinsic feature of artistic performance.¹¹ Scholars now generally accept that a basically non-vibrato sound in string playing, enlivened by occasional ornamental vibrato (a term that may embrace a range of very different effects) was the norm in most pre twentieth-century repertoires and even in early twentieth-century orchestral playing, though performers have been slower to embrace these ideas in practice. In the case of portamento, even less interest has been shown by performers in understanding, or exploring in practice, the expressive functions of this embellishment as it was used in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the mid twentieth-century rejection of the practice as »tasteless« is too recent for musicians who were brought up with the new aesthetic of »cleaner« playing, that is more faithful to the literal meaning of the score, to feel comfortable about it.

The aim of this article is not to debate the pros and cons of historically informed performance, but rather to investigate the use of vibrato and portamento as expressive resources in the mid nineteenth-century. The central focus will be Bériot's *Méthode*, but his instructions will be considered in the context of mid nineteenth-century string playing and singing as a whole. In addition to the written evidence of treatises and editions, the investigation will draw upon the aural evidence of early recordings, particularly those of the oldest important singers and violinists who were already celebrated during Bériot's lifetime, especially Joseph Joachim (b. 1831) and Adelina Patti (b. 1843). Without the existence of such recordings, it would be very difficult indeed to attempt a credible demonstration of what the authors of nineteenth-century treatises may really have expected their musical examples to sound like. Of course there will have been as much variety between one performer and another then as there is now, and the finer nuances of style are inevitably lost to us; but it may nevertheless be possible to recapture some of

11 For example in: *String Playing in Baroque Music* 1, in: *Early Music* 5 (1977), p. 389–393: 391, and most perversely in a review of Greta Moens-Haenen's monumental: *Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock*, in: *Early Music* 16 (1988), p. 573.

the leading aspects of style and execution that would have seemed familiar to mid nineteenth-century musicians.

Recent research has demonstrated that, broadly speaking, portamento¹² as a component of expressive singing and playing, grew in importance during the early nineteenth century and remained a pervasive, though constantly evolving aspect of performance style well into the twentieth century.¹³ Vibrato,¹⁴ on the other hand, very sparingly used in the first half of the nineteenth century, began to be employed more frequently in the later decades of the century. For much of the second half of the century it seems still to have been seen as an occasional ornament, although there was increasing criticism of its excessive use. By the beginning of the twentieth century, recordings indicate that few players retained the older aesthetic, and during the next decades the increasingly frequent use of ornamental vibrato shaded into the continuous vibrato of the later twentieth century, employed by singers, string players and on some wind instruments as a fundamental element of a »beautiful« tone.¹⁵

There can be little doubt that portamento, as an adjunct of legato, had its origins in singing, where it is a typical consequence of changing pitches smoothly and connectedly, especially over larger intervals. Even within a completely legato context, however, it is possible, with adequate vocal training, to minimise an audible connection, especially over narrow intervals, to the extent that it is almost imperceptible. The ability to connect notes in this manner was required by García, who provided a nice graphic illustration of the difference between what he called slurred and smooth sounds; the former term indicates a deliberate audible slide between notes, while the latter is the theoretical equivalent of a violinist playing a passage smoothly in a single bow without a change of left-hand position, although on the violin there would not even be the slightest hint of a slide between pitches.



EXAMPLE 1 Manuel García: *A New Treatise on the Art of Singing*, London [1858], p. 31

- 12 The term is used here in the sense of an audible slide between notes of different pitches.
- 13 A number of reasons for the decline of violin and vocal portamento in the mid twentieth century have been postulated by Mark Katz: *Portamento and the Phonograph Effect*, and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson: *Portamento and Musical Meaning*, in: *The Journal of Musicological Research* 25 (2006), p. 211–232 and 233–261.
- 14 *Vibrato* and *tremolo* were the most commonly used terms in the nineteenth century for a variety of trembling effects; as with portamento there were numerous different ways in which these could be executed; many practices that would have been categorized as vibrato or tremolo in the nineteenth century would not now be readily recognised as vibrato.
- 15 For a more detailed discussion of the historical development of portamento and vibrato during this period see Clive Brown: *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900*, Oxford 1999, p. 517–587.

García instructed that, from the technical point of view, both types of vocalisation were produced by »equal and continuous pressure of air« from the lungs, but that the portamento¹⁶ required »gradual changes in the tension of the lips of the glottis«, while legato required »sudden changes in the tension of the lips of the glottis.«¹⁷ The result of the latter technique would be to make the slide so fast that it was scarcely measurable.

On string instruments portamento, in the sense of glissando, is an effect that requires the employment of specific left-hand techniques. In the nineteenth century, this type of portamento will have been regarded fundamentally as an embellishment, a deliberately introduced expressive gesture, and, in singing especially, it will frequently have involving the interpolation of grace notes.¹⁸ It seems likely that in singing, despite García's teaching, a rather less pronounced, but nevertheless clearly audible connection between pitches will also have occurred as an adjunct of the normal legato, particularly when this involved intervals of larger extent. To nineteenth-century musicians this was perhaps so integral to vocal technique that it went virtually unnoticed by performer or listener, in much the same way that the continuous vibrato of the twentieth/twenty-first century has become such an inseparable element of vocal sound that it no longer draws attention to itself unless it is grossly abused (as in the singing of some older sopranos). In string playing, too, not all audible sliding will have been intended as an expressive effect. The standard fingering practices of nineteenth-century violinists will often have given rise to portamento that had no aesthetic motivation, though the best artists will have tried to make musical sense coincide with position changing. Where it was not clumsily executed, portamento resulting primarily from the necessity of position changing (later designated »bus-portamento« by Carl Flesch¹⁹) is likely to have made little impression on the listener; it would have been such a familiar feature that it was no longer noticed. There is abundant evidence, however, that, like the over-wide twentieth-century vibrato, the »bus-portamento«, as well as excessive and inartistic ornamental portamento, was sometimes employed to an obtrusive degree. Both in singing and string playing, especially in the

- 16 It is important to note, that the terminology can be confusing: a distinction was sometimes made, both in singing and string playing, between the word portamento (or in French *port de voix*) meaning, on the one hand, an audible slide and, on the other, simply legato. See Nicola Vaccai: *Metodo pratico di canto italiano per camera*, London 1832, lesson 13; Pierre M. F. de S. Baillot: *L'art du violon*, Paris [1835], p. 75–76.
- 17 Manuel García: *A New Treatise on the Art of Singing*, London [1858], p. 11.
- 18 Profusely illustrated in the late 18th century in Domenico Corri's *A Select Collection*, Edinburgh [1783]. Similar interpolated grace notes indicating portamento can occasionally be found in nineteenth-century string methods, e. g. Bernhard Romberg: *Violoncellschule*, Berlin 1840, p. 85.
- 19 He referred to it as »the cheapest and most comfortable way, to move between positions by taking the »portamento-bus««, in: *The Art of Violin Playing*, first edition, New York 1924, p. 30.

performance of less cultivated artists, this »improper« use of portamento was often criticised in treatises and reviews.

Bériot deals in detail with the artistic use of portamento and vibrato in Part Three of his *Méthode*. Following the precedents set by Hummel and Spohr in their instrumental treatises, the first two sections of Bériot's *Méthode* focus on technical matters, while the third section deals with style of performance, and like Hummel and Spohr this part culminates in one of his own concertos, for which he provided detailed performance instructions. Part Three begins on page 190 with a short discussion of style, concluding with the observation:

»From the point of view of composition, order is harmony in all its simplicity; ornamentation, or the freedom of the imagination, is the melodic shape. Thus, in execution, order is symmetry and rhythm, while freedom, on the contrary, is a certain alteration of the note which the Italians call *tempo rubato*.

It is in the union of these two musical antitheses, employed with discernment, that the secret of pleasing and charming is to be found.

The elements that constitute the perfection of style are:

Order, Light and Shade, Pronunciation of the bow, its Punctuation, its Prosody, Portamento [Port de voix], Vibrato [Sons vibrés], Accent, and Gradation.«

The sections on the pronunciation, punctuation and prosody of the bow lead directly into Bériot's discussion of portamento. Bériot defines »prosody« as follows: »Prosody, in literature, is the art of pronouncing each word with its accent and quantity. It is this value, given to long and short syllables, which constitutes the harmony of speech. According to this principle, the prosody of the bow consists in the action of down- and up-bow in the places desired to impress the appropriate accent upon the playing.«²⁰ He explains that prosody can be achieved in violin music by providing »fictitious words« to accompany the musical text. At the end of this section he hints at the intimate connection between correct prosody and the appropriate use of portamento, observing: »the article on portamento that follows offers, through its examples, all that remains to be said about prosody.«²¹

The complete text of Bériot's treatment of portamento and vibrato on pp. 235–245 of his *Méthode* is reproduced below as indented text, interspersed with my commentary. Performances of some of the musical examples, together with one example from later in Part Three, are included on the accompanying CD.

20 Bériot: *Méthode*, p. 232.

21 Bériot: *Méthode*, p. 234.

On the Portamento [Du port-de-voix]

We apply the term portamento to a dragging of sound that fills the interval between two notes connected by the same syllable or the same bow stroke, either ascending or descending. The position of portamento in the phrase of the song is therefore always determined.

This general statement is not, however, comprehensive, as Bériot's further discussion of the ornament shows, for there are circumstances in which he envisaged the introduction of portamento between syllables or bow strokes.

Portamento, appropriately used, has an excellent effect: it is this that gives the performance connection, sweetness, smoothness; but the pitfall is the excessive abuse that is often made of it.

García remarked similarly that portamento »owing to its very effectiveness, should be employed rarely, and with extreme judgement [...] Some singers, either from negligence or want of taste, slur the voice endlessly, either before or after notes.«²²

It is the same with this element of expression as with all those to which we have already drawn attention; that is to say, it must always be in accord with the spirit of the music.

Portamento is appropriate above all to the language of drama, but it destroys all the serious and majestic simplicity of sacred music. Employed in the ingenuous, naïve, pastoral style it often takes on a ridiculous character. Lavishly used in the gracious style it makes its flavour insipid and destroys the naturalness in which its beauty resides. It is always better employed in the language of sorrow and mournfulness; but still it must be used with moderation. But in passion, in despair, the portamento may be more frequent, more plaintive, though always in agreement with the character of the prosody.

García regards portamento as »well placed, whenever, in passionate passages, the voice drags itself on under the influence of strong or tender sentiment. For instance, were the slur to be suppressed in that passage, ›Hai padre e sposo in me‹ (Don Giovanni, Mozart), the whole tenderness of its expression would disappear.«²³

The drawback with portamento comes not only from its successive and contradictory use, but also from the manner in which it is executed: in its duration a certain degree

²² García: *A New Treatise*, p. 53.

²³ García: *A New Treatise*, p. 53.

of speed must be observed, which is necessarily in direct accord with the genre of music and the place it occupies in the musical phrase.

García states likewise that »its rapidity will depend on the kind of expression required by any passage in which it occurs.« In addition he cautions that the portamento »must be made, also, to preserve an equable and progressive motion, whether in ascending or descending; for, if one part of the slur were executed slowly, and the other part rapidly, or if the voice sunk to rise again directly afterwards, the effect produced would be perfectly detestable.«²⁴

This slide, executed too slowly (and this is the general fault), degenerates into a wretched caterwauling, which completely destroys the charm of the melody.

The most usual and best manner of employing portamento is, as we said above, to place it between two notes connected by the same syllable in vocal music, or by the same stroke of the bow in violin music.²⁵



EXAMPLE 2

When the expression requires it, portamento may also be made between two distant notes even though separated by two syllables, because these two notes form an *appoggiatura*.²⁶ In this case, the portamento occurs on the first syllable, carrying the sound of the long note to a little additional note anticipating the short note.

The song being written in this manner.



is interpreted as follows:



EXAMPLE 3

(See Example 2, page 240 [here as Ex. 10b on p. 97])

The great purity of the style in a piece that is serious in tone, of an elevated character,

24 García: A New Treatise, p. 10.

25 All the following illustrations, if not otherwise stated, are taken from Bériot: *Méthode*.

26 Bériot's example does not illustrate what would now normally be described as an *appoggiatura*.

makes it inappropriate to introduce two portamentos in succession, especially ascending and descending. For example, when one goes from a particular note to a higher one and then returns to the point of departure, one abstains from making portamento in descending if one has made it in ascending, but if the expression requires that one makes it in descending, one must be careful not to use it also in ascending, for fear of falling into an objectionable affectation.

Portamento.
Port-de-voix.

Dou - leur a mè - re. O pei - ne ex - trê - me.

Abuse of the portamento. Affected expression. | Abus du port-de-voix. Expression affectée.

Ascending.
Port-de-voix en montant.

Descending.
Port-de-voix en descendant.

Hé - las pei - ne ex - trê - me.

EXAMPLE 4

But an even greater danger is to think that the fingering of the expressive gesture, which is the means by which the portamento is effected, should be arbitrary. This portamento, resulting from the displacement of the left hand, is itself subject to the laws of prosody. It is certain that two notes connected inappropriately by the bow stroke at the same time as a change of position, result in a useless, and thus affected portamento.

[p. 237]

Portamento and prosody are the two most intimately connected elements. It is only a false prosody that allows an excess of portamento; thus abuse of the portamento is impossible in all melody in which the prosody is good.

The examples we give in support of these observations will leave no doubt about the proper use of portamento in the mind of the pupil: for the sake of clarity we will contrast the same phrase of melody with a correct prosody and an incorrect one.

Neither in Part Three nor in the first two parts of his *Méthode*, does Bériot's consideration of portamento touch upon the left-hand technique required for its execution. Despite his detailed discussion of the correct places to introduce the ornament and the speed with which it should be made, he seems not to have regarded it as important to specify the role of fingering in producing different kinds of slide. He thus fails to acknowledge a fundamental difference between the singer's and the violinist's portamento. While the singer will always produce a slide that covers the whole distance between two notes at different pitches, the violinists can only do so when a single finger is used for the notes

at the beginning and end of the shift. For technical reasons, this is not always practicable on the violin, and the player is then required to »fake« a continuous slide. Spohr, whose opinion on this matter remained strong among German violinists, stressed that in order that the slide should »not degenerate into a disagreeable whining« the glissando should be caused by the movement of the finger that stops the initial note. In connection with large leaps, he gave the illustrations in Exx. 5a–b (CD 1, tracks 11–12),²⁷ commenting that »the finger with which the first note is stopped is so far moved forward, until that which has to stop the second note falls naturally on its place«, adding that the slide »must be done so quickly, that the chasm or interstice between the small note and the highest shall not be observed, and the ear cheated into the belief that the sliding finger has actually passed over the whole space from the lowest to highest note.« He admitted, however, that »many Violinists are accustomed in such skips to slide with the finger employed for stopping the upper note,« illustrating the effect in Ex. 5c (CD 1, track 13), with the comment that »as the unpleasant whining before alluded to cannot then be possibly avoided, this method must be rejected as faulty.«²⁸ He later illustrated a similar procedure for less extensive shifts, both ascending and descending (Exx. 5d–e, CD 1, tracks 14–15), noting that by this means the violinist could imitate the gliding of the human voice.²⁹

The image contains five musical examples labeled a) through e).
 a) A single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It shows a melodic line starting on a whole note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. A slur covers the first two notes. Below the staff is the text "5th Position."
 b) A single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It shows a melodic line starting on a whole note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. A slur covers the first two notes. Below the staff is the text "7th Position."
 c) A single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It shows a melodic line starting on a whole note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. A slur covers the first two notes. Below the staff is the text "2nd, 5th Pos: 3rd, 7th Pos:".
 d) A single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It shows a melodic line starting on a whole note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. A slur covers the first two notes.
 e) A single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp. It shows a melodic line starting on a whole note, followed by a half note, and then a quarter note. A slur covers the first two notes.

EXAMPLE 5A–E Louis Spohr: *Violin School*, London [1843], p. 114

The French violinist Baillot suggested, unlike Spohr, that in descending shifts the finger that is about to stop the second note should come down somewhat early and slide into position.³⁰ Baillot's instructions for other types of portamento execution are not entirely

27 Spohr: *Violin School*, p. 114. All sound examples are played by the author.

28 Spohr: *Violin School*, p. 108–109.

29 Spohr: *Violin School*, p. 114.

30 Baillot: *L'art du violon*, p. 77.

unambiguous and may perhaps encompass a wider use of the type disliked by Spohr. Baillot's colleague Habeneck, writing in 1840, certainly seems to have envisaged the type of shift that in Spohr's opinion gave rise to the »whining« portamento, providing the illustration in Ex. 6 (CD 1, track 16), though with the warning that the distinct tones and semitones should not be perceptible.³¹

EXAMPLE 6 François-Antoine Habeneck: *Méthode théorique et pratique de violon*, Paris [1840], p. 103



This type of portamento, perhaps as a result of Spohr's authority, continued to be condemned by German musicians, who associated it with a vitiated French taste; Hermann Schröder in 1887, for instance, commented that »in the French school, from which we have already acquired many good things in pleasant performance and in light handling of the bow, this perverted mannerism is often customary and beloved, but we ourselves absolutely cannot approve of it.«³² A passage in Bériot's annotated version of his Ninth Violin Concerto suggests that he may have envisaged the ›French‹ method of executing portamento, on some occasions at any rate.³³ It remains unclear, however, whether he regarded this as his preferred execution for portamento involving a change of finger. Bériot's lack of guidance in this matter makes it impossible in many instances to be sure what type of effect he expected, as can be heard in the alternative realisations of his notation in the sound examples.

Explanatory signs employed in the following pages for the various portamentos

Lively portamento [Port-de-voix vif]

Employed on notes thrown with grace or hurled with energy [CD 1, track 17]



EXAMPLE 7A

- 31 François-Antoine Habeneck: *Méthode théorique et pratique de violon*, Paris [1840], reprint Courlay 2001, p. 103, quoted in Robin Stowell: *Violin Technique and Performance Practice in the Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Cambridge 1985, p. 100–101.
- 32 Hermann Schröder: *Die Kunst des Violinspiels*, Köln 1887, p. 33. Henry Holmes, in his 1878 revision of Spohr's *Violin School*, however, omitted the condemnation of this type of portamento, which may indicate that it was gaining currency in England, as in France, during the later nineteenth century.
- 33 Brown: *Classical and Romantic*, p. 580; also see below Ex. 15, b. 4.

Soft portamento [Port-de-voix doux]

Employed in tender expression [CD 1, track 18]



EXAMPLE 7B

Drawn-out portamento [Port-de-voix trainé]

Plaintive or sorrowful expression [CD 1, track 19]

LA JUIVE
Halevy

 Musical notation for Example 7C, showing a drawn-out portamento. The notation is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. It features a series of notes connected by a long, curved line, indicating a slow, drawn-out transition. There are fingerings 5, 4, 3, and 3 indicated above the notes.

Et c'est moi qui te livre au bour-reau.

EXAMPLE 7C

The distinction between the three classes of portamento is evidently one of speed: the more curved the line the slower the portamento. The distinction between the »soft« and the »drawn-out« portamento is clear in the exercises on pages 239–241, because they are graded, but in later parts of the *Méthode*, where these signs are also used, the printing often leaves it unclear, which of them is intended.

[p. 238]

Noble, majestic, simple, ingenuous character. Good prosody of the bow, moderation in changing position. Portamento rare or almost unnoticeable.

EXAMPLE 8A–G

a) **CRÉATION**
Mozart
Maestoso.
Bril - laut de grâce et de beau-té on - ten - plant d'un œil en - chau-té etc.

b) **JOSEPH**
Mohul.
Andantino.
Champs pa - ter - nels Hé - brou dou - ce va - lé - e etc.

c) **MOINE**
Hossini
Maestoso.
Pis - ta dé fi - gi tuo - i del po - pol tuo pis - ta etc.

d) **ROBIN DE BOIS**
Weber.
Andantino.
Ma pri - è - re prends des ai - les vers les sphè-res é - ter - nel - les etc.

e) **JOSEPH**
Mohul.
Andantino.
Ahl lorsque la mort trop cru - el - le en - le - va son fils bien - si - mé etc.

f) **CONCERTO L.D.**
Vivaldi.
Allegro maestoso.

g) **SÉRÉNADE** *Schubert.* *Andantino.*

De ma voix les chants dans l'om - bra mon - tent jusqu'à toi

Mon a - mour sous le bois som - bre vien - des - cend vers moi.

Les grands ar - bres dans le vi - de font leur bruit sur nous, font leur bruit sur nous, etc.

In Exx. 8a–e and 8g Bériot supplies both the vocal text and the violinist's bowing, which does not always correspond with the singer's slurring. He does not indicate changes of left-hand position, and it would be perfectly possible to play all these examples in a single position, although his comment »moderation in changing position« suggests that he did not exclude the possibility of introducing position changes for aesthetic purposes. That he did not expect such changes of position necessarily to have been completely imperceptible is indicated by his reference to »almost unnoticeable« portamento. Curiously, the slurs, often connecting separate syllables, might be expected to have indicated some degree of portamento.

[p. 239]

Bad prosody, useless changes of position, abuse of portamento, contradiction of musical sense. [Ex. 9a on CD 1, track 20]

EXAMPLE 9A–G

a)

b)

c)

d)

e)

f) 

g) 

After the examples we have just given in melodies of which the severe style is least suited to the dragging of the sounds, we classify here in graduated order, the diverse genres of song in which the portamento is not merely permissible, but indispensable for rendering all the tender, plaintive or sorrowful feelings of the soul.

EXAMPLE 10A-E

a) **HUGUENOTS**
Meyerbeer. **Allegretto.** *Light and rapid. *Port-de-voix vif et léger.*
Ahl — si j'é - tais co - quet - te Dieu — pa - reil - le con - qué - té
Oui — se - rait bien - tôt fai - te mais non non non et — je dois

b) **PURITANI**
Battini. **Larghetto.** *Tender. *Espression affectuosa.*
A te o ca - ra — a - mor ta - lu - ra — a - mor ta -
- lu - ra mi - gi - do - tur - ti - vo in pin - - to or mi - gi - da - a te d'ac - can - to — u - la - dac -
can - to tra - la - gio - in - tra - la - gio - in - le - sul - tar tra - la - gio - in - le - sul - tar.

c) **PROPHÈTE**
Meyerbeer. **Andantino.** *Plaintive. *Espression plaintive.*
Don - nez, — don - nez — pour u - - ue pau - -
- vre é - - me ou - vrez — lui le pa - ra - dia le pa - ra - dis

d) **HUGUENOTS**
Meyerbeer.

Sorrowful. • Expression douloureuse.
Andante.

Le dan - ger pres - se et le temps vo - la
Lais - sez - moi / Lais - sez - moi / Lais - sez - rai par - tir

e) **LA JUIVE**
Hallévy.

Heart-Rending. • Accent déchirant.
Andantino.

J'a - vais à ton bon - heur vou - loir ma vie en - tiè - re et c'est
moi qui te livre au bour - reau, et c'est moi qui te li - vre au bour - reau.

Examples of violin music corresponding with those on the preceding page. [CD 1, tracks 21-25]

EXAMPLE 11A-E

a) **RONDO RUSSE**
Bérol.

Light and rapid. • Part-de-soix six et léger.
Allegro.

b) **9^{ME} AIR VARIÉ**
Bériot.

Tender. • Expression affectueuse.
Andante.

c) **7^{ME} CONCERTO**
Bériot.

Plaintive. • Expression plaintive.
Adagio

d) **QUINTETTO**
Mozart.

Sorrowful. • Accent douloureux.
Animato.

etc.



Bériot's portamento signs are evidently intended to show the various degrees of portamento he describes on p. 237; it remains unclear to what extent an audible slide might also have been expected to be heard in Ex. 10 in places where there are slurs but the sign is not marked, or in the curious place at bar 9 of Ex. 10b, where a slur is marked between syllables (for García such a marking would certainly have indicated portamento, facilitated by means of an inserted grace note). In Ex. 11 Bériot indicates portamento in almost all places where a position change is marked or implied; in Ex. 11c bars 2, 10, 12, 14, 16, and 17, however, where fingerings imply portamento, none is marked. It is possible that the portamento sign may have been erroneously omitted in some of these places; this seems particularly likely in bar 12 of Ex. 11c, which corresponds closely with bar 4, where portamento is marked. Where the omission of a portamento sign did not result from oversight, a very rapid slide of the finger, perhaps combined with a momentary release of bow pressure (as generally happens in modern violin playing), may have been envisaged, thus minimising any audible effect of the position change. The evidence of early recordings, however, would suggest that these position changes were executed without such a relaxation of bow pressure and would have been distinctly audible. There may be a correspondence here with García's »smooth or legato vocalization«, in which there is a »sudden change in the tension of the lips of the glottis.«

Other features, not discussed in Bériot's text, occur in these examples. Portamento from an open string, as also illustrated in Ex. 7a, occurs in Ex. 11b bars 2 and 4, and Ex. 11d bars 0, 1, 2, 4, and 5. In the German school this effect would have required the first finger to be dragged from the end of the fingerboard to the new position in which the following note is to be played;³⁴ it is unclear whether Bériot, in contrast, expected the portamento to be accomplished by the method that later became known as the »French« portamento (strongly condemned by German musicians from Spohr to Joachim), in which the finger that stops the second note comes down early, and slides into position.³⁵ It is curious that neither here nor in the first two volumes of his *Méthode* did Bériot explain the technical

34 As described, for instance, in a footnote on p. 33 of Ferdinand David's *Violinschule*, Leipzig 1863.

35 This type of portamento in descending was described by Baillot in *L'art du violon*, trans. Goldberg, Paris [1835], p. 128–129, and the ascending type was illustrated in Habeneck's *Méthode*, p. 103.

means by which he expected portamento involving a change of finger to be executed, leaving it uncertain whether he exclusively envisaged the use of the »German« type, where the slide is accomplished with the finger that stops the note in the initial position, or sometimes expected the »French« type.

In two instances, portamento is also indicated between bow strokes (Ex. 11c bar 11 and Ex. 11e bars 16–17); in the second of these the positioning of the sign might suggest that the portamento was intended to start an octave below the note with the fermata, thus effectively introducing a grace note, although it is equally likely that this is merely a vagary of engraving. Bériot's only reference to this method of producing portamento occurs in connection with Ex. 3, but this is in vocal practice; he does not directly address its execution on the violin.

Whether aspects of Bériot's execution of portamento would have been regarded by string players in the German tradition as »incorrect« remains unclear, but if his examples are a true guide to his own practice, it is evident that he employed portamento much less lavishly than many of his successors.

On Vibrato [Des sons vibrés]

We understand by vibrato a certain undulation or trembling of sustained notes which, in singing, indicate the emotion of the soul transmitted by the voice.

The vibrato is an accomplishment in the hands of the artist who knows how to use the effect sparingly and to abstain from it when appropriate, but it becomes a fault when one uses it too frequently.

This habit, involuntarily acquired, degenerates into a goat-like noise [chevrottement] or nervous trembling, which one can no longer master, which produces a fatiguing monotony.

The voice of the singer, like the fine quality of tone of the violinist, is altered by this major fault. This evil is all the more dangerous in that it is magnified by the natural emotion that affects the performer when he appears in public.

In the art of performance there is no true emotion except that to which the artist abandons himself, but when he cannot control it, it always exceeds the limits of truth. With the artist dominated by this fever to produce an effect, whether singer or violinist, the vibrato is nothing more than a convulsive movement that destroys strict intonation and thus makes him fall into ridiculous exaggeration. Vibrato, therefore, must not be used except where the dramatic action requires it; but the artist should not seek to acquire this dangerous ability, which he must not use except with the greatest moderation.

Almost all violinists who make too much use of portamento abuse the vibrato; the one fault inevitably leads to the other. The affectation shown in the use of these

techniques renders the playing of the artist mannered, exaggerated, for it gives the piece more expression than is consonant with truth.

Bériot's condemnation of the excessive employment of vibrato on string instruments is echoed by numerous other nineteenth-century authorities, both French and German. Similar warnings are given in García's discussion of vibrato,³⁶ where he remarks: »The tremolo is employed to depict sentiments, which, in real life, are of a poignant character, – such as anguish at seeing the imminent danger of any one dear to us; or tears extorted by certain acts of anger, revenge, etc. Under those circumstances, even, its use should be adopted with great taste, and in moderation; for its expression or duration, if exaggerated, becomes fatiguing and ungraceful. Except in these especial cases just mentioned, care must be taken not in any degree to diminish the firmness of the voice; as a frequent use of the tremolo tends to make it prematurely tremulous. An artist who has contracted this intolerable habit, becomes thereby incapable of phrasing any kind of sustained song whatever. Many fine voices have been thus lost to art.«³⁷

The strength of these warnings contrasts with the treatment of the subject in earlier nineteenth-century writing where, if the matter was addressed at all, the reader was only mildly cautioned not to use it too much. Spohr and Baillot content themselves with merely describing and illustrating vibrato usage. Bériot's and García's admonitions suggest that the use of vibrato was beginning to be seen as problematic in the 1840s and 1850s, and this impression is strengthened by later diatribes, which seem to have gained in vehemence as the century progressed.³⁸

Unlike some earlier writers, such as Leopold Mozart and Spohr, Bériot does not differentiate between categories of vibrato specifically on the basis of the speed of the undulation; this is never mentioned in his account. In fact his three different kinds of vibrato are characterised descriptively in terms that seem rather to imply volume. The appearance of the signs he uses to mark it in the music, however, suggests that the distinction may be one of pitch variation rather than speed: the greater the intensity implied by the verbal description, the greater the extent of the undulation. Such a distinction would indeed fit well with the evidence of early recordings of singers and violinists, in which vibrato varies from a slight ›shimmer‹ with almost no discernible undulation of pitch, to vibrato effects that, in the case of singers, sometimes approach a semitone.

³⁶ Referred to by García as tremolo in his English text. For the different uses of the terms tremolo and vibrato in string playing and singing in the nineteenth century see Brown: *Classical and Romantic*, p. 520–521.

³⁷ García: *A New Treatise*, p. 66.

³⁸ See Brown: *Classical and Romantic*, p. 521–557 for a historical account of changing attitudes towards the use of vibrato.

Signs Explanatory of vibrato employed in the three degrees of expression

soft expression [Expression douce] 

moderate expression [Expression moyenne] 

strong expression [Expression forte] 


To demonstrate the use of vibrato we present here some examples of contrasting character.

The first three belong to serene, tranquil music, requiring calmness in the emission of the sound.


The last two, on the contrary, imbued with a passionate and dramatic colouring, permit the trembling emotion of the voice which always accompanies the agitation of the soul.

EXAMPLE 12A-E


a) **LA MUETTE**
de Portici
Auber. *Larghetto.*




b) **LA FÊTE**
du village voisin
Bastien. *Andantino.*



c) **AVE MARIA**
Salubert. *Très lent.*



d) **GULLAUME TELL**
Rossini. *Adagio.*



e) **OTHELLO**
Rossini. *All.^o agitato.*

Li - ra d'av - ver - so, d'av - ver - so fa - to io più no
no non te - me - rò Mor -
ro, ma ven - di - or - to do - po - le - i do - po - le - i mor - rò
si do - po - le - i si do - po - le - i do - po - le - i mor - rò.

Examples 12d and 12e correspond closely with examples from Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and *Otello*, and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* given by García, even to the extent of indicating a wavy line above repeated notes of short value.

Melody corresponding to the examples on the previous page. Serious and soft character. Limpid emission of the sound. [CD 1, track 26–27]

EXAMPLE 13A-B (SHORTENED)

a) *Largo.* $\text{♩} = 65.$ 4.^{te} Corde

b) *Andantino.* **GULNARE.**

The total absence of vibrato signs in these two pieces suggests that Bériot intended them to be played throughout with a completely steady left hand.

Melody. Sombre and dramatic colouring. Necessary use of vibrato and portamento in the places indicated. [Example 14; CD 1, track 28]

The frequency with which Bériot marks vibrato in this piece, and the musical contexts in which it occurs, strongly suggests that his aesthetic stance in this matter is broadly in line with that of Spohr and the German school up to Joachim.

In subsequent pieces in the *Méthode*, Bériot illustrates the use of portamento and, much less frequently, vibrato in a variety of musical contexts in the works of Italian, French and German composers, and concludes with a carefully annotated version of his

Andantino con molto espress. ♩ = 92.

VIOLON.

PIANO.

dim.

espress.

ritard.

2ª Corde.

morendo.

EXAMPLE 14

own Ninth Concerto. Bériot's commentary on the performance of the concerto provides more detailed information about his conception of the ways in which these expressive devices would have been expected to be used in his own music, as the first page of the first movement illustrates (Ex. 15). Portamento plays a much more prominent role than vibrato, which is indicated only three times in the whole of the first movement (CD 1, track 29).

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9^{me} CONCERTO.

The commencement bold, brilliant, and with full tone. — A. Fling the E with force. — B. The minims sustained, the shake and final group clearly articulated. — C. The A attacked with the heel, the long passage $\frac{3}{8}$ of the bow.

Début fier brillant et à plein jeu. — A. Lancez le Mi avec force. — B. Les blanches soutenues, la cadence et le groupe final clairement articulés. — C. Le La attaqué du talon, le trait large aux $\frac{3}{8}$ de l'archet.



D. Carry the sound with the little finger to the high A with vivacity and force, then descend to the E with the same finger by a soft portamento: — E. Portamento plaintive and descending from the B to the F# without affectation in drawing out the sound.

D. Portez le son du petit doigt jusqu'au La aigu avec vivacité et force, puis descendez au Mi du même doigt par un port-de-voix doux. — E. Port-de-voix affectueux en descendant du Si au Fa# sans affectation dans la trainée de son.



F. Portamento thrown quickly on the B. — G. The group of demisemiquavers brilliant, equal and measured. — H. This group like the preceding.

F. Port-de-voix lancé vivement sur le Si — G. Le groupe des triples croches brillant, égal et mesuré. — H. Ce groupe comme le précédent.

I. Follow here

I. Suivez ici



*the indications given at the commencement.
les indications données au début.*



K. At this change of tone let the playing immediately change in colour, softer, more caressing, more sustained, avoiding, however excess in drawing out the sound.

K. À ce changement de ton, que le jeu change immédiatement de couleur, plus doux, plus caressant, plus soutenu, en évitant toutefois l'excès dans les trainées de son.



L. Expression and vibration of the finger on the appoggiatura G#.

L. Expression et vibration du doigt sur l'appoggiature Ut#.



M. N. Increase the sound little by little in these two bars.

M. N. Augmentez peu à peu le son sur ces deux mesures.

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EXAMPLE 15

Present-day musicians may nevertheless question whether a more pervasive, minimal, but essentially continuous vibrato might have characterised the sound of singers and violinists in places other than those identified by nineteenth-century authorities. Many modern singers passionately believe that a basically pure tone, with no pitch or intensity fluctuation is inconceivable, especially for this ›Romantic‹ repertoire. The ›outright disdain‹ with which ›suggestions that the modern prominent and continuous vibrato may even not be typical of nineteenth-century style tends to meet with from singers,‹³⁹ will be familiar to many musicians involved in historically informed performance. The reluctance of musicians, and even of scholars, who grew up in the middle of the twentieth century, when continuous vibrato was virtually ubiquitous and widely seen as an indispensable element of beautiful sound, to accept that a basically non-vibrato style of playing and singing could ever have been regarded as musical is well documented. There is nothing in the nineteenth-century literature, however, to suggest that any kind of background vibrato was assumed either in singing or string playing. The frequency of natural harmonics and open strings, often on long notes, in the course of a lyrical passage, indicated by Spohr, Bériot, Ferdinand David and many other such nineteenth-century violinists, militates against any such notion.⁴⁰ Styra Avins's contention that nineteenth-century string players used vibrato extensively as a means of mimicking the ›harmonic richness of an open string‹⁴¹ is highly questionable.

While it seems plausible that a background ›shimmer‹ in the sound, not involving perceptible pitch fluctuation, may often have been present as an adjunct of different qualities of tone in nineteenth-century singing, the evidence of recordings by distinguished singers born in the middle decades of the century strongly suggests that the basic sound was expected to be without either an undulation of pitch or intensity. Adelina Patti (b. 1843), the earliest great soprano on record, still exhibited remarkable purity and steadiness of voice at the age of 62. As Freitas notes: ›Many of her tones are absolutely straight, while some show a slight ›shimmer‹, a quite rapid oscillation never amounting to more than a quarter-tone; only a few strained high notes really start to waver.‹⁴² Similar steadiness of pitch can be heard in the recordings of Emma Albani (b. 1847), Marcella Sembrich

39 Freitas: *Verdian Ideal*, p. 235.

40 See, for instance, Clive Brown: *Ferdinand David's editions of Beethoven*, in: *Performing Beethoven*, Cambridge 1994, p. 138–140.

41 Styra Avins: *Performing Brahms's music: clues from his letters*, in: *Performing Brahms*, ed. M. Musgrave and B. D. Sherman, Cambridge 2003, p. 11–47: 26. Her claim that the 1905 English translation of the Joachim and Moser *Violinschule* recommends much more extensive use of vibrato than the German one of the same year is based on a misidentification of a later ›revised edition‹, made after Joachim's death, as the original 1905 edition.

42 Freitas: *Verdian Ideal*, p. 236.

(b. 1858), and the early recordings of Nellie Melba (b. 1863). The evidence of Patti's recordings is particularly apposite in this context, since Verdi, who seems to have considered her the greatest soprano of the day, praising her for the »purest style of singing«, ranked her even above Bériot's wife, Maria Malibran.⁴³ Among early recorded violinists, similar tonal qualities, involving a more or less restrained and intermittent vibrato can be heard in the recordings of Joachim (b. 1831), and Marie Soldat-Roeger (b. 1863), whose playing was particularly admired by Brahms, and in those of Hugo Heermann (b. 1844), and Leopold Auer (b. 1845). There are good grounds for thinking that nineteenth-century singers and violinists of Bériot's generation would, in general, have used vibrato even less frequently, relying more on bow speed and pressure to give life to longer notes.

Writing in 1880, Franklin Taylor stated that the vibrato of pitch »assumed the character of a vocal vice about 40 years ago, and is supposed to have had its origin in the vibrato of Rubini, first assuming formidable proportions in France, and then quickly spreading throughout the musical world.«⁴⁴ This tallies with Henry Chorley's complaint in 1862 about the growing habit of vibrato since the 1830s, when a visiting French soprano's career prospects in London had been blighted because »her voice ere she came had contracted a habit of trembling, in those days a novelty (would it had always remained so!) to which English ears were averse.«⁴⁵ The probability that violinists' use of vibrato paralleled that of singers is strong. It is clear, too, both from documentary and recorded evidence, that the increasing frequency and obtrusiveness of vibrato in violin playing during the second half of the century was more characteristic of the so-called Franco-Belgian school (of which, ironically, Bériot was seen as the founder) than of the mainstream German tradition. It is probable that the trenchant criticisms of Franco-Belgian violinists, in the Joachim and Moser *Violinschule*, for »faults and mannerisms that are dictated by a deficient management of the bow« was seen as related to these violinists' progressive adoption of »a flickering tone production created by unbearable vibrato, which in conjunction with portamento, generally executed in an incorrect manner, is the deadly enemy of every kind of healthy music making.«⁴⁶ It seems clear from Bériot's *Méthode* that, with respect to vibrato, his own style, probably reflecting the practices of the most admired singers of his day, and certainly in conformity with the teaching of his brother-in-law García, preceded this change; there is, to my knowledge, no documentary evidence to link Bériot with the development of continuous vibrato.

43 Freitas: *Verdian Ideal*, p. 231.

44 Article »Tremolo«, in: *Grove's Dictionary*, first edition, vol. 4, p. 166.

45 Henry Fothergill Chorley: *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections*, London 1862, p. 4.

46 Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser: *Violinschule*, Berlin 1905, vol. 3, p. 33, 34.

Bériot's treatise, therefore, describes a style in which, in contrast with modern practice, vibrato effects are very sparingly employed for the embellishment of highly expressive notes while portamento is frequently introduced as a means of enhancing legato or as an expressive gesture in its own right. There can be no doubt that Bériot's usage of both these techniques was closely modelled on the practices of the best singers of his time. The many parallels between his *Méthode* and Manuel García's *Traité* are striking, and between them, these instruction books provide a revealing glimpse of mid nineteenth-century practices, which may help us better to envisage the style of performance that was admired in the greatest singers of Maria Malibran's generation.

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ZWISCHEN SCHÖPFERISCHER INDIVIDUALITÄT
UND KÜNSTLERISCHER SELBSTVERLEUGNUNG

Zur musikalischen Aufführungspraxis im 19. Jahrhundert •

Herausgegeben von Claudio Bacciagaluppi,

Roman Brotbeck und Anselm Gerhard

MUSIKFORSCHUNG DER
HOCHSCHULE DER KÜNSTE BERN

Herausgegeben von Roman Brotbeck

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