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An Annotated Bibliography for Debating the 'Authentic' Use of Vibrato in Early Bowed String Performance Practice

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*An Annotated Bibliography for Debating the ‘Authentic’ Use of
Vibrato in Early Bowed String Performance Practice*

ABSTRACT: Musicians debate daily the authentic execution of pretty much any music, especially historical styles, even among non-specialist performers. To be considered authentic, there is little consensus among musicians deciding upon a unified vision of accuracy. Maybe the idea of a strict authenticity threatens a musician’s fundamental understanding of musical expression. That discussion, alone, can become very personal in nature. For decades, semantic and philosophical discourses have driven the impetus to debate of what ‘authentic’ music is, and the answer is (mostly) clarified when you start to investigate minute and critical musical details.

Especially among period performance specialists, there tends to be stringent expectations within bowed string pedagogy regarding “correct” execution of vibrato and supplementing expression via adjusting bowing technique. It is a much more uncomfortable conversation outside of the period playing specialty that addresses the appropriate use of vibrato for authentic tone color. Realizing this idea in modern performance practice seems to have taken on a deep controversial stance. Suggesting a performance approach that abandons vibrato for an entire work – save for vibrating select pitches in structural context – might as well be an act of sacrilege. Vibrato is a pedagogical standard in modern bowed string performance, and it is fiercely coveted as a standard tone production technique. Having studied string performance for twenty years, I have witnessed many hot debates among string players and conductors of historically informed performance ensembles over the small, crucial detail: whether to use sustained, “romantic” vibrato... or not.

This annotated bibliography describes sources which address the following: the differing philosophies behind historical performance practice and the discourse of appropriate use of vibrato according to original pedagogical sources and modern musicologists. There are scant scholarly publications that explore instrumental vibrato in historical performance practice. The discussion is elusive. Maybe for the sake of maintaining pedagogical standards, and maybe because there is not enough research to suggest that this one aspect of bowed string performance practice could afford another fresh perspective. Thinking about this gap in information has inspired me to investigate why vibrato is not comfortably debated between professors and students. Is abandoning vibrato a matter of radically changing personal understanding of music? Is the “inappropriate” use of vibrato in HIP a justifiable judgment as over-romanticization?

Key words: String Performance, Performance Practice, Historically Informed Performance¹, Vibrato, Authenticity, Authentic

¹ The Historically Informed Performance movement is often dubbed “HIP” in academic journals and peer-reviewed publications, so I will refer to it as thus in the following annotations.

Dictionaries

- 1) *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v "authenticity, n.," Accessed October 25, 2021, <https://www-oed-com.du.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/13325?result=34&rskey=dcaKUX&>.

The Oxford English dictionary is considered a very reliable source of the English language, as Oxford is regarded authoritative of the convention of the English language. It is a historical dictionary of the English language and contains recorded instances of words used in various works. The definition of "authenticity" is stated as " 1. The fact or quality of being true or in accordance with fact; veracity; correctness. Also (overlapping with sense 3c) accurate reflection of real life, verisimilitude." This definition will likely differ from other common dictionaries used outside of academia, because the lexicon used in the definitions of this source is apt to slight differences from other dictionaries depending on the conventions used between regions (for example, American versus British English). Variations in definitions – despite attempting to communicate the same idea – could lead to semantic debates. If the definition of the word "authenticity" or "authentic" cannot be communicated consistently, then there will be discrepancies among understandings of the word itself and the overall concept of performing authenticity in music.

Dissertations

- 2) Verville, Timothy. "Instrumental Vibrato: An Annotated Bibliography of Historical Writings before 1940." D.M.A. diss. Arizona State University, 2012. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses International.

This is the first and only published dissertation showcasing all the authoritative sources addressing vibrato in period style instrumental music. This is a vital source for the topic of authentic vibrato practices in instrumental music. It is scratching the surface of this topic and he acknowledges that he had to define vibrato very specifically and apply that definition to primary sources for research. Verville investigated over 300 historical documents, and the vast majority (approximately 250) addressed instrumental vibrato. Verville does state that he "found no consensus at any time in the history of Western art music between 1550-1940 that *vibrato* is wholly acceptable or unacceptable." Since it is a neutral, investigative work, this dissertation is helpful for searching for historical sources and adding substantial period evidence to the debate for deciding if a sustained vibrato is "appropriate" or not for performing earlier period musics. Verville is the current director and conductor for the Georgia Symphony Orchestra, and has won the American Prize for Orchestral Performance. Dr. Verville's thesis was inspired by the HIP Early Music revival movement and Sir Roger Norrington's published plea from 2004 for a historical investigation regarding contextual consideration for the use of instrumental vibrato.

Essays in Collections

- 3) Kenyon, Nicholas. "Introduction: Authenticity and Early Music: Some Issues and Some Questions." In *Authenticity and Early Music*, by Brett, Philip, Howard Mayer Brown, Will Crutchfield, Robert P. Morgan, Gary Tomlinson, Richard Taruskin. Nicholas Kenyon. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Sir Nicholas Kenyon is an English musician, music critic, and freelance writer on music. He was appointed editor of the *Early Music* journal in 1983 and is an editorial board member with many other music historians – such as Margaret Bent, David Fallows, Tim Carter, and Tess Knighton. This book is a compilation (a "symposium") of input from historians that Kenyon specifically requested to engage in the authenticity conversation in the British-American HIP setting. Kenyon addresses in his *Introduction* the importance of recognizing the "shift" in the impetus behind performance of new music and the performance of "new" old music; the modern Early Music listener has been interested in hearing an old music performed in a fashion that is less recognizable to their modern ear. Kenyon poses some questions addressing the motivations behind the authentic performance movement and how thinking realistically about whether historical performance is achievable. He considers the use of reconstructed period-style instruments, the presence of manuscripts, and pedagogical manuals and treatises for defending the need to question historical context and suggests that when Early Music can be performed in an unquestioning manner will authenticity be a moot argument.

Journal Articles

- 4) Carter, Tim. "It's All in the Notes?," 40th Anniversary Issue, *Early Music* 41, no. 1 (February 2013): 81-2. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43306804>.

From his small two-page contribution, Dr. Carter explains his philosophy behind the musicological obsession among music students (namely performance majors) to lean heavily on notation. In addition, the general attitude of playing music "with sincerity and reverence" implies that musicologists are useless beyond creating program notes. In other words, we are not needed for helping to determine authenticity in Early Music performance. He warns that notated music does not indicate accuracy in music as much as we may want it to, and being a musicologist comes with a core belief that "we also accept that the impermanence of whatever solutions might emerge in any given moment, given the constant impulse of new research and new ways of thinking." This is a useful philosophical component to making the argument for or against the values around authentic performance practice debates. Dr. Tim Carter is, to put it modestly, an authoritative figure in Early Music. Carter is an Australian musicologist specializing in late Renaissance and Italian Baroque music; he is on the Board of Editors for the *Early Music Journal*, he is the department chair at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and holds the David G. Frey Distinguished Professor award.

- 5) Dodd, Julian. "Performing Works of Music Authentically." *European Journal of Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (June 2012): 485-508. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2012.00546.x>.

This article garnered a response from Stephen Davies, whom Dodd quotes and argues some critical philosophical points about 'score compliance authenticity' and 'interpretive authenticity.' Dodd argues that strict score compliance usually ends up either compromised or disregarded entirely for the sake of an authentic and successful performance for the listeners' sake, and therefore challenges philosophical values of authentic performance practice. Dodd refers to Peter Kivy, James Young, and Aaron Ridley for additive arguments since they argue that the priority for authentic performance should run along the lines of musical understanding and for providing a successful listening experience. Dodd's perspective of personal interpretation helps defend the idea that vibrato usage in period music – despite composer's intent – as a conscious musical decision, on the performer's part, for the sake of producing a satisfying sound for the listener could be authentic. Dr. Julian Dodd is an English professor of philosophy and head of the School of Philosophy at the University of Leeds (as of 2020), and served at the University of Manchester for twenty years before that. He earned his DPhil in Philosophy from Oxford University and specializes in the philosophies of art and music, metaphysics, and Wittgenstein.

- 6) Fabian, Dorottya. "The Meaning of Authenticity and the Early Music Movement: A Historical Review." *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 32, no. 2 (December 2001): 153-67. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1562264>.

Fabian claims to withhold a neutral position while providing a historical review of the Early Music movement between the 1950s and 1970s. Fabian maintains that a central component of the authenticity debate attempting to agree upon the definition and understanding of the word authentic within a musical context. Fabian asserts that it is generally either misunderstood or ignored. She provides a healthy selection of musicological and philosophical publications revolving around authenticity in her footnotes as authoritative philosophical sources to demonstrate the fundamental differences in semantic interpretation. She argues that the surge of the 1980s and 1990s philosophical writings of experts such as Richard Taruskin was a mere restatement of the British-American musicological debates and issues that argued and defended the relevance of historically accurate performance practice from twenty to thirty years earlier. The questions and conversations made about the Early Music movement in the 80s and 90s were not news; they were re-iterating the importance of asking what authenticity means beyond the fundamental concept of strict adherence to manuscripts and scores. Dr. Fabian is a professor of research at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, and she specializes in J.S. Bach performance practice, expressiveness in performance, sound recording research, and aesthetic perception.

- 7) Keller, Hans. "Whose Authenticity?." *Early Music* 12, no. 4 (November 1984): 517-9.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3137980>.

Keller provides an interesting perspective on the idea of authenticity in period performance settings. He argues the validity of authentic playing by insisting that the performance must be executed in a satisfying and musically interesting manner. He argues that the modern technique of vibrato "has narrowed down our expressive range" and changed the expressive relationship with the bow arm since the demand for bow expression changed as vibrato did. He further explains that a vibrato-less instruction to the modern instructor will not make sense since bow arm technique is often left out of the equation and renders the performance inadvertently inauthentic. Keller argued that the implementation of versatility in vibrato technique will deepen the "modern youngster's" understanding "complex" and advanced repertoire. He sums up his argument of authenticity is that the fallacy behind the entire argument fails to make a valid argument since accurate technique does not guarantee a successful performance. The truth of authentic performance actually relies on a simple concept: musical understanding and creative unpredictability that constitute the performance as art. Keller's education outside of violin instruction is not documented, but he known for having close personal ties to Oskar Adler, Benjamin Britten, and Arnold Schoenberg. He was one of Britain's most prolific war-time era violinists after he was forced to flee Vienna during WWII.

- 8) Lindley, Mark. "Authentic Instruments, Authentic Playing." *The Musical Times* 118, no. 1610 (April 1977): 285, 287-8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/958046>.

Lindley addresses in this article how there was a paradigm shift in the relationship between musicologists and organologists (those who can either study or build musical instruments). Musicology underwent a ton of change regarding specialties during this time, and the Early Music movement had emerged a decade earlier. He discusses antiquarian urge to reconstruct Early Music Baroque period instruments – such as the harpsichord and basse de viole – and how that impetus led to the validation of period performance practice as a specialty. Lindley cites primary sources as evidence for historical pedagogy and argues that retrofitting modern playing techniques to either antique or reconstructed instruments can help musicians and musicologists judge modern music aesthetics more carefully. Dr. Mark Lindley is a professor of economics, a historian of modern India, and a known musicologist. He received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and a Master of Arts from The Julliard School, and he has taught at numerous universities around the world – many of which between the U.S. and India.

Primary Sources

- 9) Geminiani, Francesco. *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick*, London, 1749.

Geminiani dedicated this treatise to Prince Frederick of Wales. Geminiani describes in this text the aspects musical skill that were considered necessary to perform music in “good taste.” Geminiani mentions that “expressing with strength and delicacy the intentions of the composer” is what all performers should aspire to achieve, and he provides fourteen examples of ornaments and their symbols that were considered in good taste. Of these, he describes three types of “shakes” (what Verville inferences to be a precursor term for *vibrato* in his dissertation); these can be performed vocally and instrumentally. He suggests strategizing duration of the shake to convey different qualities of emotional intensity. The “close shake” is a printed example of an instrumental pedagogue favoring a sustained use of vibrato on a stringed instrument (as he describes how to use the bow in conjunction with the vibrato). Reading this text could pose some difficulty for anyone not acquainted with antiquated English grammar and the use of the “long s,” which was conventional in printing practices until standard typefaces changed around the 19th century. Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762) was an Italian composer, violinist, and theorist who has been purported to be a student of Arcangelo Corelli and Alessandro Scarlatti – this information is not verifiable, however, since documented correspondences do not indicate a professional relationship between Geminiani and these composers. Though, he is known through written correspondences to have studied music in Rome for a short period (a matter of months according to documentation) before immigrating to England, and he communicated having forged a close musical bond with Corelli and other violinists who helped supplement his musical education.

Secondary Monographs

- 10) Kivy, Peter. *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Dr. Kivy addresses four possible conceptions of authenticity in music performance – composer’s intention, ‘contemporary sound’, ‘contemporary practice’, and personal authenticity (the ‘other’ authenticity). Kivy defines these authenticities in their own chapters – a set of four – and then expounds on the ‘authority’ of these authenticities in another four chapters. Ultimately, Kivy claims that any deviation from the first three authenticities validates the personal authenticity principle; his stance is: historical and personal authenticity are not mutually exclusive and can bear a complementary relationship. This concept could be the basis for the idea that vibrato does not have to be solely historically accurate; it could conceivably be considered authentic even while based on personal interpretation. Another source for arguing the validity of pursuing historical authenticity in music performance and judging whether a performance can be judged as successful. Dr. Peter Kivy was a Professor Emeritus of musicology and philosophy at Rutgers University from 1967 until his death in 2017; his master’s degrees were completed at the University of Michigan (philosophy) and Yale University (musicology), and he received his Ph.D. (philosophy) from Columbia University.

- 11) Lang, Paul Henry. "Authenticity." In *Musicology and Performance*, edited by Mann, Alfred and George J. Buelow. 175-84. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

Lang suggests that strict adherence to a musical score, to obsess over a composer's intent, risks sacrificing artistic enjoyment for the sake of historical accuracy. Doing this, Lang implies, could result in the watering down – the reduction of – a work of art into an "abstract." He criticizes a performer's effort to achieve historical authenticity as constricting; it inadvertently produces a music that ends up not being historically authentic and inadvertently produces a musical reality that "never existed at all" instead. Therefore, he calls to end the effort to perform and debate historically accurate music, because most of the historical evidence is too lacking. The effort is futile. Dr. Lang poses a strong stance on the desire to end the Western cultural obsession with acknowledging the past to a tee and accepting that 'new approaches' are acceptable for performance practice and pedagogy. Dr. Paul Henry Lang was Hungarian-American musicologist and music critic. He had studied music at the Budapest Music Academy with Zóltan Kódy and Erno Dohnanyi as his instructors. Dr. Lang earned his doctorate degree from Cornell University, and was part of the musicology faculty at Columbia University – he had been a department adviser for rising prominent musicologists including Richard Taruskin and James McKinnon.

- 12) Ritchie, Stanley. "Ornamentation: Un-notated Ornaments." In *Before the Chinrest: A Violinist's Guide to the Mysteries of Pre-Chinrest Technique and Style*. 73-5. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Before the Chinrest is a useful and popular pedagogical resource among Baroque violin specialists for learning how to play violin in this style. Ritchie addresses performance technique from instrument setup to stylistic phrasing to addressing the smaller details that are ornamentation – vibrato being mentioned in the "un-notated" section of the ornamentation unit. Ritchie briefly points out how modern violinists rely on vibrato as an "essential element of tone production" and verifies a recorded complaint from Leopold Auer – a 20th century violin pedagogue – had written about how "continuous vibrato" was becoming an annoyingly potent in performance practice in the 1920s. Vibrato, in this instance, is highly regarded as an embellishment by pedagogues, according to Ritchie. He states that "if you wish to play Baroque, Classical, and much Romantic music in a stylistically authentic manner, it is desirable to use vibrato strictly as an ornament," and subsequently directs the reader's attention to his *Left-Hand Technique* unit which mentions using the "vertical vibrato" on specific notes outside of an ensemble setting. Implying that vertical vibrato was mostly appropriate in soloistic settings. Stanley Ritchie is an Australian violinist, a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Violin at the Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University and won the Howard Mayer Brown Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Field of Early Music in 2009. Ritchie has had a rich career in performing and was appointed faculty of Baroque Violin at the new Early Music Institute at Indiana University in 1982.