

CHAPTER 2

THE SOURCES OF STYLE

To date, many scholarly studies of style have revolved around quantifying gestures such as portamento, rubato and vibrato.¹ Such stylistic effects are typically described as choices, and at times they surely must be. But very often, performance gestures have roots in a singer's vocal habits. Exploring the connection between habitual vocalism and style is the subject of this chapter.

By vocal habits, I refer to how a singer customarily approaches his instrument. Such habitual vocalism is often called technique, but the term is problematic, loaded with multiple meanings and connotations. Whereas some singers speak of “their technique” as unchanging, others note that they adapt their technique to different repertoires – effectively using different techniques for different genres. Moreover, “technique” has been cast as the enemy of expression by some singers – an issue that will be explored more fully below. Be that as it may, most singers would agree that at a certain basic level, they do cultivate some general vocal habits, spending long hours in a practice room so that when they perform they can rely on a set of rehearsed behaviors. In any case, the expression “vocal habits” carries fewer associations than technique, and will be used to describe how a singer habitually uses his voice.

Though aesthetics of vocal production vary, most mainstream classical pedagogies do share some goals. In particular, classical singers pay a great deal of attention to breathing and vowels in pursuit of what is widely called an even registration. This even registration, as we shall see, refers to a certain consistency of function that, in certain situations, results in a smoothness of sound as a singer moves from pitch to pitch. Though all the singers considered in this paper pursue this ideal to

¹ Several of these were described in Chapter 1.

a degree, some singers privilege evenness in order to achieve one manner of emotional expression, whereas others sacrifice it in pursuit of another. How a singer aligns himself in these matters fundamentally affects certain kinds of vocal gestures, particularly portamento and a kind of rubato I call “gestural singing.” By gestural singing, I refer to the kind of rubato that results when a singer simultaneously declaims the text rhythm in a natural manner while allowing his exhalation to continue unchecked through a phrase.

To discuss portamento and rubato, which involve how a singer gets from pitch to pitch, we must first consider how singers think about vocalism. To that end, the initial section of this chapter concentrates on establishing some common vocabulary. Typically, singers discuss the voice *qua* voice in terms of registers and registration, so I will begin by exploring both how these terms are used by singers and the extent to which they are understood by voice scientists. There follows a large section in which recordings are used first to develop an aural palette of the kinds of things singers do with regard to registration, and then to demonstrate two vocal techniques that are intrinsically connected with registration, *messa di voce* and *portamento di voce*.

With a textual and aural vocabulary firmly established, it becomes possible to consider the relationship between “technique” and “style.” Many writers divide singers and pedagogies into two distinct camps. One of these camps claims to privilege textual or emotional expression over technique; the other implies, essentially, that the technique creates the expression. This binary opposition is overly simplistic and will be problematized; nevertheless, there are singers who, by virtue of their own writings or their pedagogical association, fall cleanly into one camp or the other. Their recordings demonstrate each view of singing.

As a direct consequence of their views, each of these groups makes audible habitual choices; their vocal habits then affect portamento and rubato. The last section

of the chapter uses case studies to explore the consequences of distinct types of vocal habits on portamento, and concludes with a brief discussion of gestural singing.

While the framework I am proposing could certainly be applied to the operatic repertoire, it has particular value in relation to performance analysis of Lieder. More so than opera criticism, Lieder analysis posits a dichotomy between vocalism and expressivity, suggesting that Lieder performance is somehow “more than singing”² – but at the same time, that it is somehow less. This apparent paradox forms the framework that encloses the middle section of this chapter.

Registers

While the register concept is in general use, there is unfortunately no widespread agreement as to what registers are, let alone what they should be called. The reasons that register terminology is in such chaos are complex, and involve inconclusive or even conflicting evidence, divergent readings of historical documents, and no small degree of mistrust.³ To make matters worse, the issues surrounding register disagreements cannot be resolved using scientific evidence.⁴ As we shall see, the confusion about register terminology occurs at least partly because the terms themselves are grounded in registration theories that describe aesthetic constructs as well as physiological realities. The following brief overview is by no means meant to

² This phrase may come from the title of a book by Lotte Lehmann: *More Than Singing: The Interpretation of Songs* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1945; reprint edition, New York: Dover Publications, 1985).

³ As Richard Miller writes in *Training Tenor Voices* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993), 1: “Reports of perceptual studies on vocal registers frequently are confusing because the trained singer does not display the sudden register shifts that the researcher finds in amateur or student-level singing unless the singer expressly wishes them. (We should be skeptical of scientific studies that purport to use ‘professional opera singers;’ they often include student-level performers.)”

⁴ See Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 50: “voice research has not developed to the point of any complete understanding of the glottal mechanism and its voice quality aspects.”

solve these issues, but rather is offered in hopes of establishing some vocabulary where none exists in the mainstream musicological lexicon.⁵

On a physiological level, the term “register” describes the relationship between physical function and pitch. The nineteenth-century pedagogue Manuel Garcia, a pioneering force in voice science, defined the term as follows:

By the word register, we understand a series of consecutive and homogenous tones going from low to high, produced by the development of the same mechanical principle, and whose nature differs essentially from another series of tones equally consecutive and homogenous produced by another mechanical principle.⁶

More than a century later, Garcia’s definition remains valid, though it has been further developed. In the 1960s, the pedagogue William Vennard demonstrated that what singers described as registers corresponded to physiological changes in how the vocal folds approximated pitch. In the lowest register, Vennard notes, increased activity in the *vocalis* muscle itself creates the tension that caused pitch to rise. In the highest register, however, Vennard observes that vocal fold lengthening increases tension and affects pitch. In other words, changes in the laryngeal mechanism correspond with sensations that singers experience as discrete ranges of pitches.⁷

Most often, the range in which singers are most likely to experience increased *vocalis* muscle activity is called “chest voice,” whereas vocal fold lengthening is associated with “head voice.” These terms almost certainly have their origins in

⁵ There is nothing about vocal registers or vocal registration in *The New Grove*, where the articles on these subjects discuss organ and instrumental terminology exclusively.

⁶ Manuel Garcia, *Mémoire on the Human Voice*, translated by Edward Foreman, xli.

⁷ William Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, Revised Edition (New York: Carl Fisher, 1967), 66-67.

singers' experience of resonance in different pitch ranges,⁸ but they are still in common usage even though it is now known that they describe a result rather than a cause. That is to say, singers may experience the sensation of resonance in the head or chest, but sound does not actually originate in either of these places. For this reason, some pedagogues and voice scientists advocate substituting other terms for chest and head voice; however, their use in both the scientific and pedagogical communities is widespread, perpetuated by institutional inertia.

In addition to the low and high registers, both singers and scientists often describe a “middle” register as well.⁹ This middle register borrows characteristics from both chest and head – although, strictly speaking, if “register” refers to a discrete set of physiological phenomena, the middle is not really a register but merely a range. In addition, voice scientists and pedagogues use the term “falsetto” to describe the highest range of the male voice¹⁰ – but while scientists are able to describe the physiological phenomena involved in falsetto singing, it is important to note that different singers create it in different ways.¹¹ Be that as it may, falsetto is caused by

⁸ See Johan Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 68-69: “...tones belonging to the same register sound similar and, during phonation, feel as if they are produced in a similar way.”

⁹ It should be noted that most scientific papers use a two-register system to describe men's voices, calling the registers modal/chest and falsetto. In *The Science of the Singing Voice*, the voice scientist Johan Sundberg suggests that his decision to adopt a three-register system for women and a two-register one for men is somewhat arbitrary, but published research belies this claim: nearly all scientific studies adhere to the same register systems.

¹⁰ The term “falsetto” has not always been used in this way. In the eighteenth century, it was used synonymously with head voice. But in the nineteenth century, Garcia used it to refer to a range between chest and head voice. He did so in order to underscore his claim that the falsetto was not a real register, but a false one: “The register designated under the name falsetto-head as belonging to a single register, and considered by musicians as formed by two adjoining registers, of which the lowest takes the name of *false*, or *medium*, and the highest takes the name of *head*. In order to be more easily understood, we will make provisory use of that division, reserving until later the demonstration of its inconsistency.” Garcia-Paschke 1, xl-xli, and ff.

¹¹ Not all falsetto is created with the same coordinations. As Sundberg notes in *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 41: “some types of phonation in the falsetto register use a complete closure in the glottal vibratory cycle and some do not; and the type of falsetto singing used by countertenors is probably different from other types of falsetto. The fundamental frequency control may very well differ between such different types of phonation in falsetto register.”

yet another set of coordinations, and is therefore typically considered a distinct register.¹²

While it is useful to understand registers as separate entities, in reality they overlap. This overlap may be described in a couple of ways. First, many pedagogues assign the name “passaggio” (plural, “passaggi”) to any discrete range of pitches where a singer transitions from one register to another. The passaggi usually occur in similar pitch ranges according to voice type; in fact, many pedagogues rely on their (and their students’) perceptions of the passaggi in determining a singer’s voice category, or “Fach.”¹³ In the following pages, I will adhere to the following: any register transition may be called a passaggio; the transition from chest to middle register may be called the lower or *primo* passaggio; the transition from middle to head register may be called the upper or *secondo* passaggio. By passaggio I refer to a range of three to five semitones.

Second, it is important to understand that register overlap occurs not only through the passaggi, but throughout a singer’s voice. This overlapping or balancing of registers, which is both innate and cultivated, is known as registration. A singer’s approach to registration determines how many registers he describes, or whether he describes any at all:

The idealistic concept is that of one “one register.” The voice, if possible, should produce all the pitches of which it is capable smoothly and consistently, without

¹² For an extremely thorough physiological overview of the falsetto and other register coordinations, see Vennard, *Singing: The Mechanism and the Technic*, 52-79.

¹³ For a brief definition of “passaggio,” see Reid, *Dictionary*: 265. For an important historic approach whose traces are found in many current pedagogies, see Garcia-Paschke: 1, 15-21. For examples of typical contemporary pedagogies, see Richard Miller, *Training Soprano Voices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and *Training Tenor Voices* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993). For a thorough discussion of the Fach system, including some historical overview and a comprehensive list of voice categories, see Richard Boldrey and Robert Caldwell, “Voice Categories,” in *Singer’s Edition: Operatic Arias* (Dallas, Texas: Psst...Inc., n.d.): 1-11. For a more practical approach to the Fach system, see Gail Sullivan and Dorothy Madison, *Kein’ Angst Baby! A Guide to German Auditions in the 1990’s* (Maplewood, NJ: New York Opera Newsletter Books, 1994): 20-22 and 119-48.

“breaks” or “holes” or radical changes of technic... The realistic philosophy, however, is that of “three registers.” If one goes by the facts of vocal experience, be they ideal or not, one recognizes distinct qualities of tone, produced by distinct adjustments of the larynx... there is [also] an hypothesis of “two registers” ...that every voice has a potential of roughly two octaves of “light mechanism” and two octaves of “heavy.”¹⁴

In other words, we call the areas that we can identify in the voice “registers,” and refer to the balance of these areas “registration” – yet these aren’t exactly two different things. A singer’s understanding and/or experience of one affects his description of the other, and vice-versa.

In actuality, the same singer might even describe the voice according to two different registration principles, depending on context. The great German soprano Lilli Lehmann recognized the existence of varying laryngeal coordinations:

Between these two extreme functions of the vocal organs, the deepest chest and the highest purest head voice or falsetto, lie all grades of the lower and higher middle range, as well as the mixed chest and head voice, the “voix mixte,” everything which may be secured through the adjustment of the muscles of the vocal organs, that is, through the fit adjustment of the vocal organs in mixing.”¹⁵

But she also was reported to have said that:

In the formation of the voice no registers should exist or be created. As long as the word is kept in use, registers will not disappear.¹⁶

In fact, these two statements are not necessarily in conflict. As we shall see, classical singers strive to cultivate a smooth coordination throughout the voice, which can

¹⁴ Vennard, 69, 73.

¹⁵ Lilli Lehmann, *How To Sing* (New York: Dover, 1993), 21.

¹⁶ Harriet Brower and James Francis Cooke, “A Visit to Mme. Lilli Lehmann,” in *Great Singers on the Art of Singing* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 87.

diminish both listeners' and singers' perceptions of different registers. In other words, "one has registers, but sings like one doesn't."¹⁷ This theory of registration is exemplified in the following chart, taken from *Training Tenor Voices* by the American pedagogue Richard Miller.

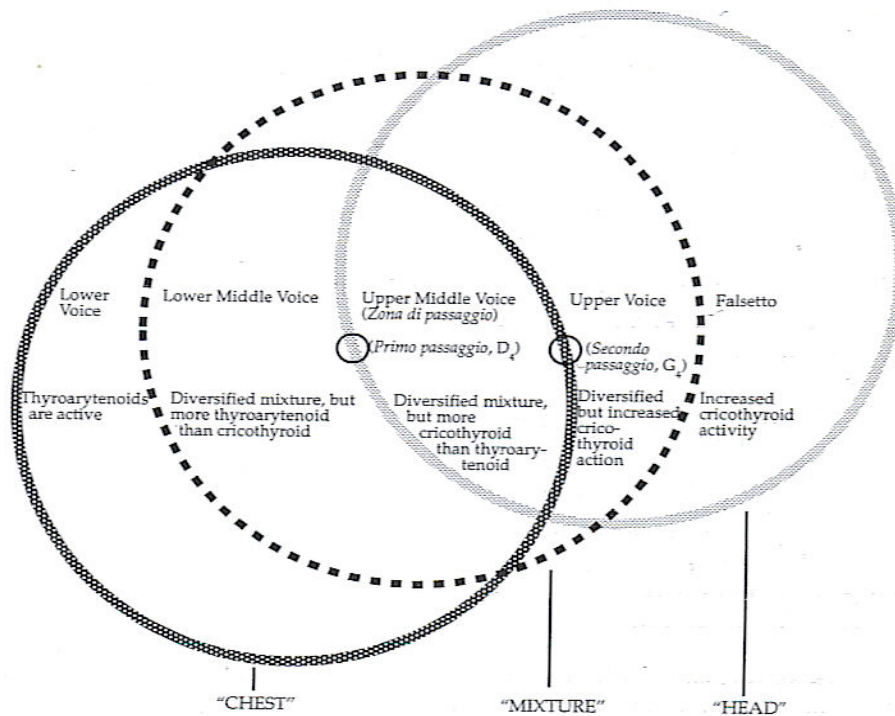


Figure 2.1, Diagram depicting a dynamic model of vocal registration¹⁸

Not only do singers subscribe to different registration principles, but it is also not uncommon to find a singer who subscribes to more than one. For these reasons, it would be impossible to settle on one set of register terminology. Luckily, it is not necessary to limit this discussion in such a way, nor would it be advisable to do so. As we shall see, the recordings demonstrate a variety of registration aesthetics –

¹⁷ Jane Randolph, in conversation with the author. Vennard, too, advocates a pedagogical approach that draws on more than one theory of registration: Vennard, 69.

¹⁸ Richard Miller, *Training Tenor Voices*, 4.

sometimes more than one theory in a single example. Therefore, all of the terms mentioned previously – chest, modal, middle, head and falsetto registers – will have their place in the following discussion of registration.

Registration

Registration is both innate and cultivated. Every voice possesses a naturally occurring potential to be “registered” in certain ways. The terminology is awkward: to “register” a voice means not to create registers, which are innate, but to develop a balance between registers – in other words, to cultivate registration. In addition, numerous other factors – innate, cultivated and cultural – contribute to a singer’s registration.

To the extent that registration is perceived to be innate, singers are often described as “having” a certain kind of registration. Rossini tenors and soubrettes, for example, are commonly described as “light,” while more dramatic voices are called “heavy.” Light and heavy refer in part to timbre, but these metaphorical expressions describe anatomical qualities as well.¹⁹ Typically, voices with light registration are naturally more flexible, whereas those with heavier registration have greater sustaining power.²⁰

Insofar as registration is cultivated, registration goals are affected by changing aesthetics. Nevertheless, since the first vocal treatises appeared, a fundamental goal of classical pedagogy has remained unchanged: to train singers to negotiate the *passaggi*,

¹⁹ In fact, it is important to note that whereas vocal color is often related to registration, it is not absolutely so.

²⁰ Although registration is related to range – higher voices tend to have lighter registration, and lower voices, heavier registration – the two are not correlated absolutely. Whereas categories such as “soprano” and “baritone” are used to describe a singer’s comfortable range and the location of his *passaggi*, the terms light or “lyric” and heavy or “dramatic” are applied to them as adjectives that describe registration. Thus, for example, we understand the difference between a lyric tenor and a dramatic tenor to be one of registration, not of range; similarly, a dramatic soprano may sing with heavier registration than a lyric mezzo.

or transitions, between each pair of registers.²¹ In the eighteenth century, the Italian pedagogue Pier Francesco Tosi writes that the “diligent singing master” should

...leave no Means untried, so to unite the feigned and the natural Voice, that they may not be distinguished; for if they do not perfectly unite, the Voice will be of divers Registers, and must consequently lose its Beauty.²²

A generation later, another Italian, Mancini, writes:

The voice in its natural state is ordinarily divided into two registers, one of which is called the chest, the other the head or falsetto... So art must remedy the defects of nature, for with assiduous study youths may equalize the disparity in registers.²³

And in the nineteenth century, Garcia devotes an entire chapter – “On Blending the Registers” – to the subject:

When the chest voice has been well established (which should be done in a few days), the student must immediately work to blend that register with the next... One will practice by passing alternately from one register to the other on the tones [D-E^b-E-F] without interruption and without aspirating in that passage between registers.²⁴

²¹ This is true whether one believes that registers were to be kept distinct or uniformly blended.

²² Tosi/Galliard, 1926 reprinting of the 1743 edition, 23-24. As Galliard, Tosi’s English translator, notes, the term “Register” comes from organ terminology. The original Italian reads: “Un diligente Istruttore sapendo, che un Soprano senza falsetto bisogna che canti fra l’angustie di poche corde non solamente procura di acquistarglielo, ma non lascia modo intentato acciò lo unisca alla voce di metterlo in forma, che non si distingua l’uno dall’altra, che se l’unione non è perfetta, la voce sarà di più **registri**, e conseguentemente perderà la sua bellezza.” From the Leonesi edition, 38-39. In this and the two subsequent examples, the emphasis is mine.

²³ Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, The editions of 1774 and 1777 compared, translated and edited by Edward Foreman (Champaign, Illinois: Pro Musica Press, 1967), 20. The original Italian reads: “Le voci ordinariamente si dividono in due registri, che chiamansi, l’uno di petto, l’altro di testa, ossia falsetto... La grande arte de’ cantanti dev’esser quella di rendere impercettibile a chi li sente, o li vede cantare la minore o maggiore difficoltà, con cui cavano le voci dei due differenti registri di petto e di testa.” Reprint of 1777 edition, 63-64.

²⁴ Garcia-Foreman, *Traité complet sur l’Art du Chant*, 50. For a brief discussion of aspirates, see Chapter 1, p.6.

Such admonitions to smooth the transitions from one register to the next remain in effect to the present day, and distinguish classical registration ideals, in a broad sense, from genres of music in which register transitions are not smooth.²⁵ No amount of training could change the inalterable aspects of a singer's natural registration, such as the location of his or her passaggi, but classical singers cultivate vocal production in such a way that the breaks between registers become inaudible.²⁶ The cultivation process itself also bears the name "registration."

It should be noted that, aside from making smooth transitions through the passaggi, there is little agreement as to what registration ideals have been, are or should be in any given era. Primary and secondary sources alike are full of admonitions and judgments.²⁷ As we shall see, it would be easy to cull quotes from primary sources and construct an argument suggesting a predominant registration aesthetic or ideal that applied to German singers in the first few decades of the twentieth century – but a survey of recordings suggests how misguided such a strategy would be, for in reality, the singers adhere to a variety of registration goals.²⁸

²⁵ Smooth registration distinguishes classical singers from those who specialize in popular genres. One need think only of singers like Joni Mitchell and Tori Amos, or of countless "bari-tenors" of contemporary pop (such as Chris Martin of the band Coldplay), all of whom rely on stark register contrasts as an important element of style.

²⁶ The passaggi are notoriously weak areas of any voice, so how a singer negotiates them determines how his voice works throughout its entire compass. Singers commonly describe the importance of not taking too much weight up through each of the passaggi: depending on their natural capabilities, the results of doing so might include making the entire voice unstable, or limiting access to the extremes of their range.

²⁷ For example, Michael Scott refers to "correct" registration throughout *The Record of Singing*. More nuanced is this example from "The Baroque Era: Voices" in *Performance Practice Since 1600* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 102, where Ellen T. Harris cites the passages from Tosi and Mancini quoted above and draws the following conclusions: "Both authors imply that the chest and head voices should maintain their distinctive qualities and should not be blended throughout the entire range." Yet there may be another way of reading these passages, depending on how "distinctive" and "blended" are defined.

²⁸ As perceptual studies have indicated, listeners are able to distinguish among different registers with great accuracy. See Anat Keidar, Richard R. Hurtig and Ingo R. Titze, "The perceptual nature of vocal register change," *Journal of Voice* 1/3 (1987), 223-233.

Registration recorded

Smooth registration does not imply that the timbre differences associated with registers disappear, as the following recordings demonstrate. In the first excerpt, which features a 1921 recording of lyric soprano Hulda Lashanska singing Carl Loewe's "Canzonette," smooth registration is evident in the consistency of Lashanska's vocalism. There is hardly any temporal space between pitches, even at huge leaps – which Lashanska sings cleanly, with little portamento (Figure 2.2; CD 1, track 5).²⁹

At the opposite end of the range and registration spectrum stands the bass Alexander Kipnis. Kipnis' voice has a naturally heavy registration, but he approaches it with a variety of registration aesthetics, sometimes heavier, sometimes lighter – as his 1927 recording of Schubert's "Der Wanderer" demonstrates. Again, however, the consistency with which Kipnis changes pitch – though his singing is perhaps not quite as seamless as Lashanska's – demonstrates his smooth registration. It is striking that when Kipnis reaches the syllable "hauch," there is an audible change in vocal color, a timbre with an almost metallic edge – but the transition is smooth, with no interruption of vocal vibration (Figure 2.3; CD 1, track 6).

In fact, seamless registration is more challenging for dramatic voices, which have a greater range of register choices available to them on any given pitch. Dramatic voices are characterized by the great range in both power and timbre afforded to them by the broad scope of their natural registration, so their register shifts are more obvious. In the second example, Kipnis demonstrates a technique known as "pulling off the voice," something dramatic singers can do for effect:³⁰ at the words "immer, wo?" Kipnis goes suddenly from full voice to falsetto. This effect is called

²⁹ It should be noted that the Lashanska recording is in English.

³⁰ See Vennard, 68-9.

Adagio.

Nr. 21.

War schö - ner als — der

schön - ste Tag, drum muss — man mir — ver -

zei - hen, dass ich — sie nicht — ver -

ges - sen mag, am we - nig - sten — im Frei - en. Im

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo is marked 'Adagio.' The score consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'War schöner als — der schön - ste Tag, drum muss — man mir — ver - zei - hen, dass ich — sie nicht — ver - ges - sen mag, am we - nig - sten — im Frei - en. Im'. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a simple harmonic accompaniment in the left hand.

Figure 2.2: Loewe, “Canzonette,” mm. 1-13

Figure 2.2 (Continued)

Gar - ten war's, sie trat her - an, mir

ih - re Gunst zu zei - gen; das

58
Ich wan - dle still, bin we - nig froh,

61
und im - mer fragt der Seuf - zer: wo? im - mer

64
wo? Im Gei - sterhauch tönt's mir zu - rück: „Dort, wo du

68
nicht bist, dort ist das Glück!“

Figure 2.3: Schubert, “Der Wanderer,” mm. 55-72

pulling off the voice because it involves going from a heavier to a lighter registration – what some people call “taking the chest out” of the voice.

From this example, it is not clear whether Kipnis maintains smooth registration as he takes weight out of the voice, because he breathes immediately before the

registration shift.³¹ Other examples reveal singers making smooth register transitions without stopping the vocal line – though to do so is quite difficult, as this excerpt from a 1903 Johanna Gadski recording of Schubert’s “Du bist die Ruh” suggests (Figure 2.4; CD 1, track 7):



Figure 2.4: Schubert, “Du bist die Ruh,” mm. 54-67

Gadski’s pitch goes somewhat sharp as she pulls off the voice; nevertheless, the excerpt does demonstrate a smooth register shift from a heavier to a lighter registration. We hear a similar shift – in this case, to falsetto – in this excerpt of Leo Slezak singing Hugo Wolf’s “Verschwiegene Liebe” (Figure 2.5; CD 1, track 8). Like Gadski’s, Slezak’s registration is mostly smooth – though again, he makes an abrupt register shift when transitioning from a heavier to a lighter coordination during the long decrescendo on “frei.”³²

³¹ In fact, Kipnis may breathe to facilitate the registration shift, or to create an illusion of smoothness.

³² That Slezak negotiates this register shift as well as he does is remarkable – especially in light of the vowel, [a]. Vowel choice is thought to affect registration by changing, among other things, the shape of the singer’s mouth. See Ingo Titze, “The Human Instrument,” *Scientific American* (January 2008), 100-101.

hol - - te sie ein? Ge -

dan - - ken sich wie - - gen, die Nacht ist verschwie - - gen, Ge -

dan - - - ken sind frei. Er -

Figure 2.5, Wolf, “Verschwiegene Liebe,” mm. 7-12

Registration and breath 101: messa di voce

As the preceding excerpts demonstrate, there is a connection between dynamics and registration. It is well known that both airflow and subglottic air pressure affect registration, though the connection is not yet completely understood. Nevertheless, it is this connection that led many early pedagogues to advocate *messa*

di voce exercises for “blending” the registers. Today we think of “the” *messa di voce* as a kind of ornament – a crescendo-decrescendo.³³ But as the name *messa di voce* – “placement of the voice” – implies, the expression refers to something fundamental about vocalism.

Since “voice” itself is a metaphorical construct that includes apparatuses for breathing, phonating and resonating, the idea of placing “it” anywhere is obviously metaphorical. But the nature of the *messa di voce* exercise lends concrete meaning to the expression. From the name and the exercise itself, we can easily infer that “voice” refers to phonation and “the place” is, figuratively speaking, on the breath.³⁴ A *messa di voce* requires that the singer start *piano* to ensure that the onset of phonation would consist of nothing but the movement of the vocal folds and the muscles related to

³³ Though both Agricola and Galliard translated *portamento di voce*, they left *messa di voce* in the original Italian. This suggests that the expression had already come to refer to a specific ornament – a crescendo-decrescendo – as it still does today. In *NG*, Ellen Harris puts this the other way around – that *messa di voce* began as an ornament and eventually became a teaching tool. But I think that both the context in which it appears in Tosi and the name itself suggest the opposite: that a technique for teaching “vocal placement” came to be an ornament. Or, perhaps most likely, these interrelated aspects of *messa di voce* developed side by side. Still, it seems obvious to me that the expression “vocal placement” would have come into being to describe a technique for singing primarily related to vocal function, and not a sound – which is what the word “ornament” implies.

³⁴ Today, the term “placement” is most commonly used to refer to “the place” in the vocal tract where a voice resonates: a nasal voice may be said to be placed “too far forward,” just as one with a husky, throaty quality may be considered “too far back.” Perhaps the most common metaphor of this kind is “placement in the mask,” described here by the soprano Renée Fleming: “Pat [Patricia Misslin, Fleming’s first voice teacher] put a tremendous amount of emphasis on resonance, focus, and placing the voice... to understand the concept of actually aiming sound mentally, and to learn how to place the voice ‘in the mask.’ The mask, I quickly came to understand, meant the nose and cheekbones—the nasal and sinus cavities where sound resonates.” See Renée Fleming, *The Inner Voice: The Making of a Singer* (New York: Viking, 2004), 17. “Placement in the mask” may also refer to a spectrum envelope peak known as the “singer’s formant” that is typically present in professional singers (see Sundberg, *The Science of the Singing Voice*, 119) or to certain sensations in the bones of the head and face: “The amplitudes of the higher partials of the voice source spectrum... may give rise to sensations in the frontal part of the face. At least, this is suggested by the very widespread opinion among voice teachers and singers that the tone must be placed “in the mask” (Sundberg, 163).

These different understandings of placement are not necessarily mutually exclusive. A teacher whose object is to “place” the voice “on the breath” most probably uses some aural criteria in determining how efficiently the voice is resonating. Be that as it may, “placement” may refer to sound, to a perception of resonance, or to function; “on the breath” refers to function. It is of course easier to judge function in live performance than on recordings; nevertheless, the distinction will prove significant, as I describe below.

phonation frequency. Then, the crescendo and decrescendo that followed would demonstrate that “support” comes from the breath and breath alone – again, not from auxiliary muscles in the throat or elsewhere. Correctly executed, the *messa di voce* exercise would ensure an optimized relationship between air and phonation.³⁵

The expression *messa di voce* gives rise to another important registration-related metaphor: “on the breath.” “On the breath” singing is evident in all of the preceding examples – perhaps the most so in the Lashanska. Determining whether a singer is “on the breath” can be described with some degree of objectivity. When a singer begins a phrase on the breath, the precise moment of attack is almost imperceptible. By contrast, an attack that is not on the breath may be indicated by scooping, by breathiness in the tone, by a sudden explosion of sound that indicates that muscles in the throat were tensed against the easy flow of air. Analogously, a voice that is on the breath sounds limpid, fluid, well oiled – expressions singers often use to describe how singing feels when it feels good. Conversely, if the voice sounds breathy, nasal, or throaty; if the pitch is unstable or the vibrato uneven; if the resonances are unbalanced – all these are symptoms of singing which is inadequately “supported” (to use another common metaphor) by the breath.

Because the relationship between air and phonation is fundamental to vocalism, *messa di voce* is one of the parameters according to which a singer’s vocal habits may be described. That said, though pedagogies privilege certain techniques of *messa di voce* as being “on the breath,” the term can be understood more generally as describing any relationship between breath and voice. As such, it can describe a singer’s habitual vocalism no matter what kind of vocal aesthetic he subscribes to.

³⁵ Garcia later suggested that *messa di voce* exercises were important in blending the registers (registration becomes heavier as one crescendos and lighter in reverse).

Registration and articulation

All the songs considered so far have been in a lyrical idiom, and the singing quite legato. While even registration can and often does result in legato singing, not all legato singing is caused by even registration. Some singers minimize consonants to create a smooth sound – exemplified here by two recordings of Richard Strauss’ “Traum durch die Dämmerung,” the first, a 1943 by Heinrich Schlusnus, and the second, a 1917 recording by Jacques Urlus (Figure 2.6; CD 1, tracks 9 and 10). Heard side by side, it is clear that Urlus and Schlusnus create legato by very different methods. Urlus minimizes his consonants in a technique known, colloquially, as “toothpaste-tube legato,” for it creates the impression that the singer is somehow squeezing out smoothness. By contrast, Schlusnus lets his smooth registration create a legato line through his vocalism itself. In this regard, Urlus and Schlusnus create legato quite differently, perhaps to the point that these two styles of articulation should hardly be called by the same name.

It should be noted, however, that smooth registration does not necessarily result in legato. And similarly, although it may be easier to hear smooth registration in a lyrical composition, it does not follow that lyrical writing is a prerequisite for smooth registration to exist. It is in fact possible to sing with smooth registration in an accented style. Compare these two recordings of “Begegnung” by Hugo Wolf – the first, again, a 1943 performance by Schlusnus, and the second this time a 1931 recording by Elena Gerhardt (Figure 2.7; CD 1, tracks 11 and 12, beginning in A^b Minor and G^b Minor, respectively). Schlusnus does make numerous accents, but at the same time, his consistently smooth registration results in a vocal line. As such, it has much in common with the Lashanska excerpt of Loewe’s “Canzonette,” heard earlier. By contrast, Gerhardt’s singing creates the impression that each individual pitch is an isolated event.

Sehr ruhig

pp *legatissimo*
con Ped.

Wei - te Wie - sen im Däm - mer - grau; die

Son - ne ver - glomm, die Ster - ne ziehn, - nun

cresc.

Figure 2.6, Strauss, “Traum durch die Dämmerung,” mm. 1-18

Figure 2.6 (Continued)

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The first system features a vocal line with a *pp* dynamic and a piano accompaniment with a triplet in the right hand. The second system continues the vocal line with a *pp* dynamic in the piano accompaniment. The third system shows a key change to D major (two sharps) and includes a *pp* dynamic in the piano accompaniment. The fourth system concludes the piece with a *espr.* (espressivo) marking in the piano accompaniment.

geh' ich hin zu der schön - - sten Frau,
weit ü - ber Wie - sen im Däm - mer-grau, tief in den
Busch von Jas - min. Durch Däm - mer-grau in der
Lie - be Land; ich ge - he nicht schnell, ich ei - le nicht; mich

Lebhaft bewegt

Was doch heut Nacht ein Sturm ge-we - sen, bis erst der Mor - gen sich ge-regt!

Wie hat der un - ge - be - tne Besen Ka - min und Gas - sen aus - ge-fegt!

Da kommte in Mä - d - chen schon die Stra - ssen,

Figure 2.7: Wolf, "Begegnung," mm. 1-24

Figure 2.7 (Continued)

As the two preceding sets of examples demonstrate, what sets Schlusnus' singing apart from that of Urlus and Gerhardt can be understood only in part as articulation. It is his articulation in combination with a more basic, pervasive choice: his smooth registration. In fact, early pedagogues distinguished smooth registration from both legato and marcato articulation. They called it *portamento di voce*.

Registration and breath 102: portamento di voce

It appears that what is now called smooth registration may have roots in what was once called "*portamento di voce*," or "carriage of the voice." In the eighteenth century, *il portamento di voce* was a fundamental, constant feature of good singing, without which singing was considered to be worthless.³⁶ Moreover, *portamento di*

³⁶ Tosi/Leonesi, 116. "Esercizio non men necessario di quello è lo studio mellifluo del Portamento di voce senza di cui ogni applicazione è vana."

voce did not necessarily lead to what we would now call legato articulation. Because Tosi's admonition that *portamento di voce* should be present at all times precedes his discussion of the marked and slurred styles, we can infer that he would have expected *portamento di voce* to underlie both *marcato* and *legato* articulation. Therefore, *portamento di voce* could not have been the same thing as our modern portamento.³⁷

It was only in the nineteenth century that *portamento di voce* – what Garcia called *port de voix*³⁸ – came to be understood as a discrete mode of articulation:

Garcia considers *port de voix* one of the five ways in which a singer can move between notes in a passage: the notes can be 'carried' (porter), 'connected' (lier), 'marked' (marquer), 'pointed' (piquer), or 'breathed out' (aspirer).... Garcia's definition of legato (lier) stresses the precise intonation of the individual notes: 'To connect the notes is to pass from one to another in a distinct, sudden, spontaneous way, with the voice neither stopping nor dragging over each intermediary note.' ...*Port de voix* differs from mere legato by the presence of intermediary pitches: 'To carry the voice is to go from one note to another by passing through all the possible intermediary notes.'"³⁹

From this passage, it is easy to imagine how Garcia's *port de voix* came to signify the ornament we now call a portamento. But Tosi and Mancini never spoke of *a* portamento as such – of portamento as an ornament. They always referred to *the* portamento, or *il portamento di voce*. For them, "the carriage of the voice" referred to omnipresent vocal habits.

In other words, if registration and *messa di voce* describe vocal function on any given pitch, *portamento di voce* describes vocal function as a singer changes pitch.

³⁷ For an alternative view, see Harris, "Portamento," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

³⁸ In the eighteenth century, a *port de voix* involved adding passing notes to fill small intervals; as such, it was treated as an ornament in the treatises. See Harris, "Portamento."

³⁹ Deborah Kauffman, "Portamento in Romantic Opera," *Performance Practice Review* 5/2 (Fall, 1992), 141-2.

Like *messa di voce*, *portamento di voce* is a metaphor relating to breath. Whereas the former refers to getting the voice on the breath in the first place, the latter means “vocal carriage;” as such, *portamento di voce* expresses the concept that it is breath pressure that “carries the voice” smoothly from pitch to pitch without interference from auxiliary muscles of the throat. Carriage of the voice depends on placement of the voice; placement of the voice refers, specifically, to the metaphorical placement of the voice on the breath.

To summarize: a singer’s vocal habits include his natural and cultivated registration, the latter of which includes his *messa di voce* and *portamento di voce*. In particular, *messa di voce* describes the relationship of breath to phonation, and *portamento di voce* describes how a singer gets from pitch to pitch. And how a singer performs these tasks, habitually, has far-reaching impact on his style.

Interpretative divide

While pedagogical manuals would seem to suggest that techniques such as *messa di voce* and *portamento di voce* should be habituated and performed in a particular way, the recordings heard so far demonstrate that singers actually make diverse choices with regard to vocal habits. There are as many sets of choices as there are individual singers – but at a broad level, these fall into discrete categories. Whereas some singers appear to have privileged the technical skills just described above all else, others claim that expressivity is more important. In some measure, it is this divide that leads to the stylistic differences on the previous recorded examples.

It is a divide whose roots are seen in instructive writings about singing – among them three books, all of which appeared in the mid-1940s, and which were intimately associated with the most prominent Lieder artists of the preceding quarter century. Two of these were in fact written by great German singers: Lotte Lehmann’s

More Than Singing: The Interpretation of Song and Elisabeth Schumann's *German Song*. Schumann's book is largely historical, with some insight into singing techniques and interpretation of Lieder. Lehmann's book comprises interpretive sketches of 81 songs and five song cycles; it also includes an introduction in which the author discusses her views on the relationship between expression and technical skill.

The third book, though its author has slipped into relatively obscurity, is no less important. It was written by the pedagogue Louis Bachner, an American-born pianist turned voice teacher who spent 25 years in Berlin. There, he taught many of the great singers of his day, including Sigrid Onegin, Frida Leider, Ria Ginster and, above all, Heinrich Schlusnus. In 1935 Bachner, who was Jewish, returned to Philadelphia; in 1944, he published *Dynamic Singing*, a handbook that outlines the principles of his teaching. While Bachner's book has a much more technical focus than those of Schumann or Lehmann, he does also share his views on interpretation and vocal style.

The two sets of writings differ greatly in their attitudes towards the relative importance of technique and expressivity. On the one hand, Schumann and Lehmann suggest that technique should be subservient to expression; on the other, Bachner implies that vocalism itself is expressive. Numerous critics have validated this binary, underscoring its premises throughout their writings. But to do so is to buy into the assumption that technique and expression are inherently separate. Instead, it is worth exploring the points made by each group, and the technical tools favored by each – for, as recordings demonstrate, each stance engenders different expressive possibilities.

“More than singing”

It is not clear at what point technique became diametrically opposed to emotion, but it surely occupies that position in the writings of Elisabeth Schumann:

The criteria of success in the presentation of an opera or oratorio role are the quality of voice and vocal technique, musicianship and sense of style on the singer’s part. But, besides all these, the presentation of a song demands something more which can never be attained by study...⁴⁰

Few if any would disagree that opera and Lieder make different demands; however, Schumann’s assertion that a song requires something “more” lays the groundwork for the technique vs. expression divide. A page later, Schumann sets up a dichotomy that posits “a strong voice” and “rigid adherence to a rule” against “personality”⁴¹ – and with that, the technique vs. expression paradigm takes shape.

Three years later, Lotte Lehmann states the paradigm more explicitly. In the introduction to *More Than Singing*, Lehmann writes that technique should become unconscious, so as to become subordinate to interpretation.⁴² Later, however, she not only subordinates technique, but demonizes it:

In a certain sense, it seems that perfect technique and interpretation which wells from the heart and soul can never go hand in hand and that this combination is an unattainable ideal. For the very emotion which enables the singer to carry her audience with her into the realm of artistic experience, is the worst enemy of a crystal clear technique.⁴³

Though Lehmann immediately tries to back off from this position, writing:

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Schumann, *German Song* (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1948), 67.

⁴¹ Schumann, *German Song*, 68.

⁴² Lehmann, *More Than Singing*, 10.

⁴³ Lehmann, *More Than Singing*, 17.

For heaven's sake do not misunderstand me: control of the voice is the soil from which interpretation springs – – but do not despair over small imperfections, over mistakes which are difficult to eliminate... For if your soul can soar above technique and float in the lofty regions of creative art, you have fulfilled your mission as a singer.⁴⁴

In the end, she once again subordinates technique to expression – this time, to creativity, to an artistic mission, to the singer's very soul.

Lehmann so loads the terms of her argument that it becomes hard to disagree with her. After all, what singer would oppose a soaring, creative, soul-baring artistic experience... especially in favor of something cast as so cold and calculated? Perhaps the more pressing question is this: what is it that led Lehmann to establish such a paradigm in the first place? The answer to this question may lie, at least in part, in Lehmann's career path, and in Schumann's as well. Both have endured wide criticism for never developing a solid "technique:" in Schumann's case, for never properly equalizing her registration; in Lehmann's, for her shallow breathing, evidenced by the loud gasps and short phrases that characterize her recordings.⁴⁵ Lehmann herself hints of this when she alludes to her own shortcomings – but immediately falls back on the position that technique is cold:

Perhaps, in this case, I am the well known fox for whom the grapes hang too high... May be! ... But I have found again and again, that a singer who delights in technique (much as I may admire her virtuosity) still, in some way, leaves my heart cold...⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lehmann, *More Than Singing*, 17.

⁴⁵ See Scott, *The Record of Singing*, Volume 2, 200-202 and 211. It is worth noting that, for a brief time, Schumann and Lehmann studied with the same teacher, Alma Schadow, in Berlin. Neither stayed with Schadow very long – but the common genealogy may be significant, in that singers whose natural inclinations are similar often choose teachers with similar pedagogical approaches.

⁴⁶ Lehmann, *More Than Singing*, 17. The ellipses are in the original text.

In place of “technique,” what did Schumann and Lehmann prescribe?

Schumann privileged words over music. But ironically her formulation leans heavily on a technical effect: diction. In other words, the artistry described by Elisabeth Schumann sounds rather technical:

As a first essential, the words must be enunciated as clearly as though they were declaimed in speech. To that end, the phrasing of words and music must go together hand in hand; breaks must be equally appropriate for both. But a singer is often faced with a problem where the composer has devoted more loving care to his musical phrase than to the text, so that the punctuation demanded by the words will not do for the music. In such a case I think it best, whenever possible, to let the due declamation of the words take precedence; it was Hugo Wolf’s principle that “the words come first, and music takes second place.”⁴⁷

Elisabeth Schumann’s approach to singing is shown to its best advantage in this excerpt, the beginning of her 1930 recording of Robert Schumann’s “Aufträge” (Figure 2.8; CD 1, track 13).

In Lehmann’s case, however, artistry was something less calculated, something that privileged the soul over the thinking brain. Her artistic approach is apparent in recordings of both *innig* and emotionally extroverted songs, as these excerpts from Schubert’s “Nacht und Träume” (1947) and Brahms’ “Meine Liebe ist Grün” (1935) demonstrate (Figures 2.9 and 2.10; CD 1, tracks 14 and 15).

Many find Lehmann’s interpretations to be irresistibly engaging. Even Michael Scott, a critic who has strong biases with regards to technique and who normally pulls no punches, has this to say about her recordings:

⁴⁷ Schumann, *German Song*, 70-71.

Leicht, zart

p

Nicht so schnell - le, nicht so

p

con Pedale

2

schnell - le! wart' ein we - nig, klei - ne

fp

fp

3

Wel - le! will dir ei - nen Auf - trag ge - ben an die Lieb - ste

p

5

p

mein. Wirst du ihr vor - ü - ber schwe - ben, grü - sse sie mir fein!

p

fp

Figure 2.8, Schumann, “Aufträge,” mm. 1-12

Figure 2.8 (Continued)

7

Sag', ich wä - re mit - ge-kom - men,

8

auf dir selbst her - ab ge - schwom - men:

9

für den Gruss ei-nen Kuss kühn mir zu er - bit - ten; doch der

11

rit. Zeit Dring-lich-keit hätt' es nicht ge-lit - ten. *a tempo* Nicht so ei - lig! halt, er -

fp *p a tempo*

con Pedale

3

Heil - - - ge

6

Nacht; du sin-kest nie - der; nie - der wal-len auch die

9

Träu - me, wie dein Mond-licht durch die Räu - me,

12

durch der Men - schen stil - le, stil - le Brust.

Figure 2.9, Schubert, “Nacht und Träume,” mm. 3-14

20

Mei-ne See - - le hat Schwin -

23

*
- gen der Nach - ti - gall und wiegt sich in blü - hen-dem

26

Flie - der, und wiegt sich in blü - hen-dem Flie - der, und

29

jauch - zet und sin - get vom Duft be - rauscht viel

Figure 2.10, Brahms, “Meine Liebe ist Grün,” mm. 20-36

Figure 2.10 (Continued)

The image displays a musical score for a vocal and piano piece, spanning measures 31 to 34. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are: "lie - bes - trun - ke - ne Lie - der, viel lie - bes - trun - ke - ne Lie - der." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass, with a key signature of two flats. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a forte (f) dynamic marking in measure 32. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and triplets.

And her faults, what of them? Like those of Maria Callas they are so glaringly obvious that even the most insensitive ear can identify them. To mention them again would be gratuitous; one may as well complain that the Venus de Milo has no arms.⁴⁸

Judgments aside, both Lehmann and Schumann had huge careers: on the concert stage, in the recording studio, as authors and as pedagogues. If for the moment we evaluate their work for what it is, not in comparison with how anyone thinks it should be, we can escape the idea that their work is un-technical. For it *is* technical – it just subscribes to technical ideals that are different from those who privilege smooth

⁴⁸ Scott, *The Record of Singing*, Volume 2, 213.

registration. Each in her own way suggests that emotional expression and words come first, before *messa di voce* and *portamento di voce*.

The Bachner pupils

In his book *The Grand Tradition*, the critic J.B. Steane includes a chapter called “Keepers of the Seal,” in which he praises a cadre of German singers as the best of their generation, outshining even their Italian contemporaries in the “classic Italian technique.”⁴⁹ As it happens, two of the five singers Steane includes in this chapter – Heinrich Schlusnus and Sigrid Onegin – studied with Louis Bachner, the aforementioned author of *Dynamic Singing*.

The recordings of Schlusnus and Onegin, as well as those of Bachner pupils Ria Ginster and Frida Leider, all reflect Bachner’s teaching. Above all else, Bachner privileged what he termed the “free functioning of the instrument:”

Conditions which permit freedom in singing can be consciously and voluntarily established and controlled. These are: correct posture and functional freedom in breathing. Changes of adjustment of the various mechanisms which function in the production of vocal tone (mechanisms of pitch, volume, articulation, etc.), function involuntarily and freely in response to the psychological desire to sing (when there are no interferences and weaknesses). With correct posture and functional freedom in breathing, compensatory adjustments being necessary, the production of any vocal sound *must* free and develop the mechanisms which produce that sound... It must again and again be stressed that singing is the expression of musical sound with emotional content through the medium of vocal tone, and not an attempt to do something with vocal sound.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ The subsequent chapter, “More Than Singing,” takes its name from Lehmann’s book, and discusses her singing as well as that of Elisabeth Schumann, Elena Gerhardt, Karl Erb, Herbert Janssen, Gerhard Hüsch and Alexander Kipnis. See Steane, *The Grand Tradition*, 216-236.

⁵⁰ Louis Bachner, *Dynamic Singing* (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1944), 108-9.

As the last sentence suggests, Bachner's method suggests an interrelationship between technical freedom and emotional expression. However, for Bachner, expressivity should not compromise the free functioning of the instrument; as such, his view on expressivity in singing was diametrically opposed to Lotte Lehmann's. He writes that, in singing,

The conflict between expression of emotional values and the technical means of expression is of particular difficulty... As the living instrument is a part of our body, there is a tendency for it to become influenced by the emotions which are being expressed... To be emotionally involved directly in the first person, prevents all discipline and control. Such emotion, being involuntary, upsets the repose and balance necessary for freedom of voice production. The interpretative emotional values of a composition should, of course, be expressed by the singer. Such emotional expression, however, should always be disciplined, never unrestrained and uncontrolled.⁵¹

On recordings, both these ideals are reflected through Bachner's students' singing. The next excerpts feature Ria Ginster singing Schubert's "Wiegenlied," D. 867 (1933), and a 1931 recording of Heinrich Schlusnus in Mendelssohn's "Venetianisches Gondellied" (Figures 2.11 and 2.12; CD 1, tracks 16 and 17).

Perhaps the most striking similarity between these recordings is how consistent the vocalism is. Although neither Ginster nor Schlusnus sacrifices clear diction to achieve this consistency, they do privilege smooth registration over momentary expression of individual words. This is in keeping with Bachner's stated registration ideal:

⁵¹ Bachner, 103-4.

pp
con Ped.

Wie sich der Änglein kind-licher Himmel, schlummerbe-lastet, lässig verschliesst!

pp

Wie sich der Änglein kindlicher Himmel, schlummerbe-lastet, lässig verschliesst!

Figure 2.11, Schubert, "Wiegenlied," D. 867, mm. 1-19

Ein Schif - fer - kleid trag ich zur sel - bi - gen Zeit, — und zit - ternd dir
sag ich: das Boot ist be - reit, das Boot ist be - reit! — O komm jetzt, wo
Lu - nen noch Wol - ken um - ziehn, — o komm jetzt, — o komm
jetzt! laß durch die La - gu - nen, Ge - lieb - te, uns fliehn, durch die La -
gu - nen, Ge - lieb - te, uns fliehn! Wenn

Figure 2.12, Mendelssohn, “Venetianisches Gondellied,” mm. 27-58

In freedom of voice production, there are no changes of production throughout the entire range of the voice. There is a consistency in the feel of the production, whether the tone produced is high or low in pitch. There is a consistency in the character of tonal vibrations, or timbre, throughout the entire range. There are no differences of production in the various categories of voices.⁵²

Certainly the preceding Ginster and Schlusnus excerpts, with their consistently smooth *portamento di voce* and vocal tone, exemplify Bachner's teaching.

Two aesthetics of expressivity recorded

It is tempting to give in to the dichotomy that posits technique vs. expression, and many writers do. To do this is simultaneously to capitulate to the following: the technical singers are unemotional, and the expressive singers are technically inadequate. This is an oversimplification, albeit one that is made all the time. Preferably, we might instead say that some singers privilege evenness in favor of one manner of emotional expression, whereas others sacrifice it in pursuit of another.

Different aesthetics of expressivity are heard in the following two pairs of recordings. In excerpts of Schubert's "Das Lied im Grünen," first Elisabeth Schumann (1932) makes a case for her more word-based style of interpretation, then Sigrid Onegin (1930) for her vocally based one (Figure 2.13; CD 1, tracks 18 and 19, the latter in G^b Major). Schumann's recording creates contrasts between vowels and consonants. Right from the start, the closed [y] of "Grüne" is almost immediately followed by the short [k] of "lockt." These contrasts lend her recording a kind of effervescence. Schumann's highly shaped performance demands less imagination on the part of the listener than Onegin's smoother one, which in a certain sense requires

⁵² Bachner, 100-101.

4

In's Grü - ne, in's Grü - ne, da lockt uns der Früh - ling, der

8

lieb - li-che Kna - be, und führt uns am blu - men-um wun - de-nen Sta - be hin-

12

aus, wo die Ler-chen und Am - seln so wach, in Wäl - der, auf Fel - der, auf Hü - gel zum Bach, in's

16

Grü - ne, in's Grü - ne. Im

Figure 2.13, Schubert, "Das Lied im Grünen," mm. 4-19

the listener to understand the words and project his own feelings and images onto them. If we feel that Onegin's performance succeeds, it is through the sheer gorgeousness of her voice combined with Schubert's equally gorgeous song.

Onegin is not a prisoner of her technical ideals, however. Her recording of Schubert's "Erlkönig" reveals her scooping (a rare effect for her), suggesting that auxiliary muscles in the throat are involved in initiating her sound. Even so, it is interesting to consider Onegin's recording alongside Lotte Lehmann's with registration in mind. Each singer responds to the drama of "Erlkönig" within the range of her normal vocal habits – so in these excerpts, which feature Lehmann first (1947) and Onegin second (1929), it is not surprising that Onegin's registration is still the more even of the two (Figure 2.14; CD 1, tracks 20 and 21).

Lehmann's version is recorded very close to the microphone, which she treats as an extension of her instrument – she was one of the first classical singers to do so. Her singing lacks resonance, but she compensates by practically speaking her performance. Lehmann must have created some specific gestures with the microphone in mind: her sudden intake of breath near the end of the song has a more intimate effect than it would have in a hall, and her whisper of "war tot" is a real whisper, not a stage whisper. Not surprisingly, Onegin relies on her tremendous instrument for dramatic contrasts. In her version, the father has a *voice* – and her breath technique allows her to sing some of the Erlking's speeches as single, creepily wafting phrases. But Onegin's recording is also significant in the use it makes of tempo shifts for contrasts – and her version is clearly not recorded close to the mic, hearing as we do that she has to pull away from it on the Erlking's repetition of the word "singen."

Figure 2.14, Schubert, “Erlkönig,” mm. 97-end

94

sin - gen dich ein, sie wie - gen und tan - zen und sin - gen dich ein."

97

Mein Va - ter, mein Va - ter, und

100

siehst du nicht dort Erl - kö - nigs Töch - ter am

103

dü - stern Ort? Mein

106

Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh es ge -

decresc.

f

Figure 2.14 (Continued)

109
 nau, es schei - nen die al - ten Wei - den so grau.
cresc. *ff*

113
 "Ich lie - be dich, mit
p *pp*

118
 reizt dei - ne schö - ne Ge - stalt, und bist du nicht wil - lig, so

122
 brauch ich Ge - walt." Mein Va - ter, mein Va - ter, jetzt
fff

126
 faßt er mich an! Erl - kö - nig hat mir ein
sf sf sf sf

Figure 2.14 (Continued)

The musical score is divided into five systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

- System 1:** The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Leids ge - tan!" followed by a rest and then "Dem Va - ter". The piano accompaniment features a series of chords in the right hand and a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand. Dynamic markings include *sf* and *f*.
- System 2:** The vocal line starts at measure 134 with the lyrics "grau - set's, er rei - tet ge schwind, er hält in". The piano accompaniment consists of a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The marking *accelerando* is above the vocal line, and *cresc.* is below the piano part.
- System 3:** The vocal line begins at measure 138 with the lyrics "Ar - men das äch - zen - de Kind,". The piano accompaniment continues with the sixteenth-note pattern. A *ff* marking is present in the piano part.
- System 4:** The vocal line starts at measure 142 with the lyrics "er - reicht den Hof, mit Müh und". The piano accompaniment maintains the sixteenth-note texture. Dynamic markings *sf* and *f* are used.
- System 5:** The vocal line begins at measure 145 with the lyrics "Not; in sei-nen Ar-men das Kind wartot." followed by a rest. The tempo marking *Andante* appears. The piano accompaniment changes to a slower, more sparse texture with chords. Dynamic markings include *fp*, *pp*, *p*, and *f*.

Consequences of vocalism: “passing portamento” and “gestural singing”

Regardless of which aesthetic of expressivity one prefers – if indeed one prefers one at all – recordings clearly demonstrate that each has stylistic consequences beyond differences in Affekt. In particular, the Bachner students make certain kinds of portamento as a natural consequence of their vocal habits. On slurred pairs of notes, very common in the Lieder repertoire, a singer whose *portamento di voce* remains consistent will make a kind of portamento almost in passing – insofar as portamento means “a continuous movement from one pitch to another through all of the intervening pitches, without, however, sounding these discretely.”⁵³

Moreover, the Bachner students have phrasing that is, for lack of a better term, more “gestural.” By gestural, I do not mean that their style evidences a greater number of discrete gestures – in fact, I mean quite the opposite. If we define a phrase as what happens between breaths, the Bachner students sing each phrase as a single gesture, rather than making many internal gestures within a phrase. Each phrase is a single gesture insofar as it happens on a single exhalation; for the most part, Schlusnus, Onegin and Ginster sing without in any way manipulating or stopping the breath.⁵⁴

Both gestural singing and passing portamenti are evident in this excerpt of Schumann’s “Der Hidalgo,” recorded by Heinrich Schlusnus (1932) – especially compared with a second excerpt (1924) by the baritone Heinrich Rehkemper (Figure 2.15; CD 1, tracks 22 and 23, the former in B Major, the latter in B^b Major).⁵⁵

⁵³ *New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), s.v. “Portamento.”

⁵⁴ In the following comparisons, I have paired each Bachner pupil with a close contemporary who adhered, generally, to a more emotional or word-based aesthetic of expressivity. First are the sweet-voiced lyric sopranos Ria Ginster and Elisabeth Schumann, born in 1898 and 1888, respectively; next, the lyric baritones Heinrich Schlusnus and Heinrich Rehkemper, born in 1888 and 1894; then the contralto Sigrid Onegin and the mezzo soprano Elena Gerhardt, born in 1889 and 1883. In each case I have listed the Bachner pupil first.

⁵⁵ It is interesting that both Schlusnus and Rehkemper ignore the sixteenth-rest in bar sixteen. Perhaps their doing so was part of an oral tradition; I do not know of a printed edition that eliminates it.

Etwas kokett

Es ist so süß zu scher-zen mit Lie - - dern und mit

f *p*

Ped.

Her - zen und mit dem ernsten Streit! Englänzt des Mon-des

Schim - mer, da treibt's mich fort vom Zim-mer, durch Platz und Gassen weit; da

bin zur Lieb' ich im - mer wie zum Gefecht, wie zum Gefecht be-reit.

p

Es ist so süß zu soher-zen mit Lie - - dern und mit Her - zen

p *f*

Figure 2.15, Schumann, “Der Hidalgo” mm. 1-26

Figure 2.15 (Continued)



Particularly striking is Schlusnus' manner of singing the slurred pairs on "scherzen," which he does in such a way that the second pitch is not distinct. These make a strong contrast with Rehkemper's interpretation, which is strongly articulated; the contrast also underscores the underlying gestural quality of Schlusnus' singing.

The following excerpts from Schubert's "Auf dem Wasser zu singen" (1941 and 1927) offer a comparable comparison between Frida Leider, another Bachner student, and Lotte Lehmann. Though Leider's slurred pairs are sometimes disconnected, they are much more legato than Lehmann's, which for the most part are heavily aspirated (Figure 2.16; CD 1, tracks 24 and 25). Differences in passing portamenti and gestural singing are similarly evident in these excerpts from Brahms' "Von ewiger Liebe," as sung by Sigrid Onegin (1929) and Elena Gerhardt (1925). Here, it is especially clear that whereas Gerhardt accents every syllable, Onegin sings each musical phrase as a single gesture. But also, in Onegin's recording, there is a clear difference between the passing portamenti that characterize her singing of most slurred pairs, and the occasionally more protracted portamenti heard at the end of "ändern" and on "Liebe" (Figure 2.17; CD 1, tracks 26 and 27). Finally, these excerpts from recordings of Schubert's "Seligkeit" by Ria Ginster (1933) and Elisabeth Schumann (1937), underscore a similar point. In the first excerpt,

7 *pp*
Mit - ten in Schim - mer der

10
spie - geln - den Wel - len glei - tet, wie Schwä - ne, der wan - ken - de_ Kahn;
sempre simile

13 *mf*
ach, auf der Freu - de sanft - schim - mern - den Wel - len glei - tet die See - le da -
mf *cresc.*

16 *p*
hin wie der Kahn, ach, auf der Freu - de sanft - schim - mern - den Wel - len
p

19 *cresc.*
glei - tet die See - le da - hin wie der Kahn;
cresc. *p*

Figure 2.16, Schubert, “Auf dem Wasser zu singen,” mm. 7-21

„Lei - dest du

Schmach und be - trü - best du dich, lei - dest du Schmach von

an - dern um mich, wer - de die Lie - be ge - trennt so ge -

poco più f

schwind, schnell wie wir frü - her ver - ei - ni - get sind.

Figure 2.17, Brahms, “Von ewiger Liebe,” mm. 41-60

Figure 2.17 (Continued)

Ginster makes numerous passing portamenti, but also adds more protracted, ornamental portamenti on “Verklärten,” “wie,” “sein” and “freun.” In the second excerpt, Elisabeth Schumann’s performance may not include the same passing portamenti, but she does make ornamental portamenti on “wie,” “sein,” “freun,” and an especially long one on the last “und” (Figure 2.18; CD 1, tracks 28 and 29, in E Major and F Major, respectively).

As a group, these recordings suggest that there is an important distinction to be made between a passing portamento, which happens as a consequence of the singer’s habitual vocalism, and an “ornamental portamento,” which results from her desire to make a particular sound. Moreover, an ornamental portamento can be in time or it can be agogic – the distinction being that, for an “agogic portamento,” the singer alters basic pulse while singing the portamento. And finally, it must be emphasized that one

sing an ornamental or agogic portamento with or without consistent *portamento di voce*.⁵⁶ Of course, some or all of these possibilities often coexist in a single recording.

1. Freuden son-der Zahl — blühn im
Himmels-saal — En-geln und Ver-klär - ten, wie die Vä - ter lehr-ten.
O da möcht ich sein, — und mich e-wig freun, — und mich e-wig freun!

Figure 2.18, Schubert, “Seligkeit,” first stanza

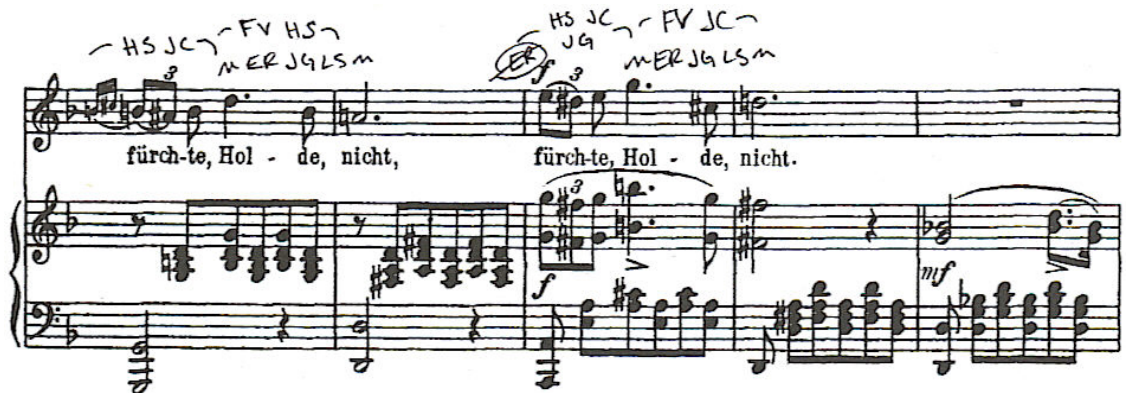
⁵⁶ In his recent article “Portamento and Musical Meaning,” Daniel Leech-Wilkinson defines a portamento as being distinct from two other gestures. These include several kinds of what he calls “swoops” (various ways of approaching a target pitch) and glissandi, about which he writes: “Glissandi are also used in performance in a different way from portamento, for they are not so much connections between two notes as self-contained gestures in themselves.” As for portamenti, Leech-Wilkinson notes, they are neither of these things: “Although they depend on continuous pitch glide, they are not there to give emphasis but, rather, offer a way of getting from one pitch to the next, a way that—whatever the technical advantages—seems to bring with it added meaning, usually of a particularly affective kind” (237).

Portamento as choice

As the following examples will show, greater consistency of *portamento di voce* predicts only whether a singer will more regularly make portamento on agogically unaccented slurred pairs. It does not necessarily result in a singer making a greater number of portamenti. Moreover, there is an audible difference between portamenti made by singers whose *portamento di voce* is consistent, and those made by singers whose *portamento di voce* is less consistent. Finally, performers' personalities become evident as we begin to notice patterns in which singers avail themselves of which occasions for portamento. Each of these points will be examined in a short case study, beginning with Schubert's "Ständchen," D. 957, no. 4.

Interestingly, singers with consistent *portamento di voce* may be less likely to make the kind of big, swoopy portamenti that are so commonly criticized. This is nowhere more evident than in slow, lyrical songs, like Schubert's "Ständchen." In the notated score that follows, performers are represented by their initials: ER (Elisabeth Rethberg), FV (Franz Völker), HS (Heinrich Schlusnus), JC (Julia Culp), JG (Johanna Gadski) and LS (Leo Slezak). When a singer makes a smooth portamento or sings with consistent *portamento di voce*, there is a slur on either side of his or her initials. When a singer makes an unsupported portamento (i.e. with inconsistent *portamento di voce*), this is indicated by a jagged line. Slurred pairs sung without *portamento di voce* are indicated by placing the singer's initials inside a circle with a line through it. On the accompanying CD, the excerpts are by Culp (1915), Gadski (1908), Rethberg (1924), Schlusnus (1938), Völker (1928) and Slezak (1928), and they are in the following keys: Culp and Schlusnus, C Minor; and Gadski, Rethberg, Völker and Slezak in D Minor (Figure 2.19; CD 1, tracks 30-35):

Figure 2.19 (Continued)



On these recordings it is Schlusnus and the Dutch mezzo Julia Culp who sing with the most consistent *portamento di voce*, and who more typically sing clean legato intervals rather than big portamenti. Culp gives a particularly unaffected, unsentimental performance. The recording of German soprano Elisabeth Rethberg demonstrates her tendency to sing toothpaste-tube legato. Interestingly, her portamenti and those of the German dramatic soprano Johanna Gadski have a fluttery quality that is correlated with their fast vibrato. Both Rethberg and Gadski sing many more ornamental portamenti than the more reserved Culp.

As for the men, Schlusnus' legato is as natural and uncontrived as breathing, his slurred pairs as gestural as if he were speaking rather than singing. In contrast, although the singing of German tenor Franz Völker has fairly consistent *portamento di voce*, from the very first slurred pair it lacks this gestural quality of Schlusnus'. Yet Völker consistently makes longer ornamental portamenti than Schlusnus, as does the dramatic tenor Leo Slezak. All three recordings are highly expressive; the primary indication that Schlusnus' version is the most gestural are the slurred pairs that begin many phrases. Whereas Völker and Slezak often sing these with some articulation, Schlusnus sings them with absolutely smooth *portamento di voce*.

Sometimes, it is possible to perceive a qualitative difference between portamenti made by singers with consistent *portamento di voce* and those without. The difference is often described as “good” and “bad” portamento among voice professionals. Demonstrating this point are four excerpts from the end of Brahms’ “Botschaft,” sung in order by Ria Ginster (1933, in D^b Major), Lotte Lehmann (1937, in C Major), Heinrich Schlusnus (1937, in B^b Major) and Heinrich Rehkemper (1929, also in B^b Major). When Ginster and Schlusnus make portamenti, their vocal tone remains constant. By contrast, when Lehmann and Rehkemper sing portamenti on the same musical gestures, their vocal tone changes, giving the impression that their portamenti are accomplished by the throat muscles or by a change in air pressure. The following score includes a crude attempt at showing the difference between portamenti sung with *portamento di voce* by a curved line, and those that involve throat muscles by a straight line (Figure 2.20; CD 2, tracks 1-4).

In the Schlusnus recording especially, the portamenti seem totally integrated with his vocal production – a natural consequence of gestural singing and changing pitch. The difference between the portamenti of Schlusnus and Ginster and those of Rehkemper and Lehmann is one of throatiness: the latter give the impression of compressing throat muscles to give the impression of consistent *portamento di voce* while changing pitch. Rehkemper’s portamenti in particular give the impression of “sliding” rather than vocal carriage.

Whereas passing portamenti tell us about a singer’s vocal habits, ornamental portamenti tell us about a singer’s demand for a particular sound. It follows that when a singer whose style includes few ornamental portamenti starts making them, they are especially marked. Compare the “Ständchen” recordings of Schlusnus and Culp, which were relatively reserved, with their versions of Mendelssohn’s “Auf Flügeln des

GINSTER
BEHKEMPER
SCHLUSNUS
LEHMANN

sprich: „Un - end - lich war sein We - he, höchst be - denk - lich sei - ne

p *poco cresc.*

La - ge, höchst be - denk - lich sei - ne La - ge, a - ber je - - tzo kann er

Figure 2.20, Brahms, “Botschaft,” mm. 40-63

Figure 2.20 (Continued)

GINSTER
REHKEMPER
SCHLUSSTUS
LEHMANN

hof - fen wie - der herr - lich auf - zu - le - ben, denn du, Hol - de,

denkst - an ihn, denn - du, Hol - de,

denn - du, Hol - de, denkst, -

denkst an ihn!

The musical score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line is in the soprano register. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line. Performance markings include *legato* and *cresc.* (crescendo). The lyrics are in German, and the piece concludes with a final vocal phrase and a piano accompaniment ending.

Gesanges.” that of Schlusnus, from 1932 and in G Major, and Culp’s from 1924 and in G^b Major (Figure 2.21; CD 2, tracks 5-6). As their recordings demonstrate, both singers make many more ornamental portamenti in the Mendelssohn than they did in the Schubert.

In comparison with the Schubert, what stands out is a difference in Affekt. Both Culp and Schlusnus sing “Ständchen” with a degree of intensity that is lacking in “Auf Flügeln des Gesanges.” Culp sings the Mendelssohn with a certain caressing playfulness; Schlusnus’s recording is tender, and while not quite playful, seems quite light in spirit. Nonetheless, Schlusnus’ and Culp’s performances of “Auf Flügeln des Gesanges” underscore the point that, whereas *portamento di voce* is habitual, ornamental portamenti arise from a singer’s mental demand for a particular sound.

Conclusions and prospects for further analysis

As I hope this brief survey demonstrates, not all portamenti are the same. In particular, there is an important distinction to be made between passing portamento, which is the result of consistent *portamento di voce* and gestural singing, and ornamental portamento, which is more deliberate. Moreover, the qualitative aspects of portamento are at least as important as their quantity. A singer may stay in tempo while making a portamento, or may use a portamento to facilitate some kind of agogic accent, like a ritard; I distinguish the latter from the former by calling it an agogic portamento.

For today’s singers, the distinction between passing and ornamental portamento is of the utmost importance. As we have seen, “good” portamento is not a sound but a natural consequence of consistent *portamento di voce* combined with

HEINRICH SCHLUSNUS (HS)
JULIA CULP (JC)

1. Auf Flü - geln des Ge - san - ges, Herz - lieb - chen, trag' ich dich

2. Die Veil - chen kichern und ko - sen, und schau'n nach den Sternen em -

pp *sempre piano e legato*

fort, fort nach den Fluren des Gan - ges, dort weiss ich den schön - sten Ort. Dort

por, heimlich erzählend die Ro - sen sich duf - ten - de Märchen in's Ohr. Es

liegt ein rothblühender Gar - ten im stil - len Mon - den - schein; — die Lo - tosblumen er -

hü - pfen herbei und lau - schen die from - men, klugen Ga - zell'n; — und in der Fer - ne

war - ten ihr trau - tes Schwester - lein, — die Lo - tosblumen er - war - -

rau - schen des heil' - gen Stromes Well'n, — und in der Fer - ne rau - -

HS *JC* *dim.* *p* *cresc.* *do* *dim.* *pp*

Figure 2.21, Mendelssohn, “Auf Flügeln des Gesanges,” mm. 1-24

Figure 2.21 (Continued)

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top two staves are vocal lines, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment. The vocal lines have lyrics in German: "- ten ihr trautes Schwesterlein." and "- schen des heiligen Stromes Well'n." The piano accompaniment features a flowing, arpeggiated pattern. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), and *dim.* (diminuendo). There are also handwritten annotations "HS" and "JC" above the vocal staves, possibly indicating specific performance techniques or corrections.

gestural singing. Repressing that naturally occurring portamento would have global consequences for vocalism, for it would in turn repress *portamento di voce*. The same could be said of gestural singing. When a performer sings gesturally, we hear no space between discrete pitches; we hear continued vocal vibration or “spin” and/or vibrato. Again, it is *portamento di voce* that suffers if a singer suppresses the gesture of a phrase.

This brings us back to one of the original questions of this chapter: what is vocal technique? Is it really different from emotional or musical expression, and if so how? If we define technique as something that has an end in and of itself, then it is indeed the enemy of expressivity. If instead one defines technique as a set of habitual behaviors, then one must only ask the question: is there anything in these behaviors that limits one’s ability to express? An answer to this last question is implied in the following description of technique, attributed to Franz Liszt:

Aus dem Geist schaffe sich die Technik, nicht aus der Mechanik! (Let your spirit, rather than mechanics, be the creator of your technique.)