

Appendix 5.5

Survey responses from string players and singers

6. General comments

Rachael Beesley:

- “Listening to singers and string playing in early recordings and noticing the nuanced rhythmic alternations, tempo rubato and portamento gives a wonderful historical insight into the preferred performance style of the time. These expressive devices give the modern performer a wealth of choices that expands our understanding and appreciation of composers and performers from the 19th century. Applying this style of performance becomes ingrained, when this type of shifting is the basis of one’s left hand technique and when employing improvisation in practice, creates the possibilities of freedom in performance.”

Emlyn Stam:

- “I view portamento in string playing as closely connected with historical approaches to singing. This allows us to connect the sense of melodic intervals and colour our approach as string players to resemble the approach taken by singers. The device offers numerous possibilities for variation but also for making the physicality of shifting from point a to b audible. The technique can be widely used in solo, chamber music and orchestral playing resulting in a very pleasant effect.”

David Milsom:

I think your survey needs to take more account of direction of slides. Generally, it also depends upon instrumentation: when playing on modern strings, personal experience suggests that sounded shifts are more easily avoided, which means, of course, that a deliberate use of them for stylistic effect needs to stress them more – maybe by slower and more dynamically-stressed means of playing them. On gut strings, the rougher string texture and lower tension seems to make shifts more conspicuous anyway. As far as I am concerned, the manner and frequency of portamenti depends upon context – if I am playing in a modern orchestra, any use of portamento would be curtailed; if I am playing string quartets with non-historical colleagues, I would perhaps use it less (especially in contrapuntal writing) as it would perhaps not be imitated by other players and sound stylistically out of place; if performing nineteenth-century music in a nineteenth-century manner, I would resort freely to the device, but this would also depend upon the precise geographical and pedagogic context – Joachim, for example, used the device very variably, but by no means indiscriminately, and often in such contexts, the onus is upon creating variety (for example of phrase repetitions). Likely too in any case, any parameter of performance may vary according to performance context – in a hot hall with strings tending to go flat, I might adapt an intended scheme (incorporating many harmonics and open strings) in order to mitigate against such procedural difficulties. My own performance in terms of all musical factors tends to be free up to a point depending upon the mood of the day and context, and this means that laying down rules about portamento would be difficult. This said, having studied nineteenth-century performance for more than 20 years and having divested myself of the hegemonic influence of performance ‘modernism’ I use portamenti regularly and unapologetically, and, increasingly, my seniority allows me to assert this more confidently when playing with others, whom I am happy to encourage to use this very beautiful device. Overall then, I use the device with circumspection (for any performance based upon trying to be ‘scholarly’ is liable to be wooden) but with enthusiasm as part of my own assimilated practice.

Leila Schayegh:

- "I mostly try to have a regular bow pressure during the execution of a portamento in order NOT to hide the shift."

Shunske Sato:

- In response to whether recordings make him change the number of portamenti in his playing:
 - o "Not at all. But this is not because of the portamenti themselves, but rather the approach with which I do recordings anyway: I try, especially in the "artificial" surroundings of a recording, to put spontaneity first. Recordings can actually be fun (!) if you see it as a chance to try out different versions and takes in a "safe" environment. One always hears whether a performer is being spontaneous or not, regardless of whether it's a recording or not. As such, the portamenti that might happen in the course of a recording will be part of the larger picture of inspired, in-the-moment performance and also be understood as such. Hopefully."
- In response to how to make a portamento:
 - o "Gut strings are rough and uneven to the touch, and elastic; they cling more to the bow and fingers than synthetic strings, and "give" more under pressure. Where HIP and gut-string playing are concerned, we often talk about contact between bow and string and how that directly influences sound quality: how "in the string" or "off the string" we should play, faster or slower bow, closer to or further from the bridge, and so on. And it gets talked about because gut strings are extremely reactive to the slightest variations of touch. The same tactile quality can be very useful where the left-hand fingers and portamento are concerned. When you slide a finger up and down a gut string, feel the slight unevenness or "bumps" along the way. Repeat it by varying the pressure: dig in, and the string "gives" and feels different; lighten up, and the "bumps" almost tickle your fingertips. In addition to considering the emotional, musical or theoretical aspects of any given portamento, the tactile element is in the end the most reliable for me. By opening up your tactile awareness, I believe it connects you better with your instrument and will help your performance to better mirror your intentions. The rest - style, application or type of portamento - is a matter of taste, experience and intent, and simply needs time to cultivate..."
- In response to whether or not doing portamento in combination with rubato/tempo flexibility helps create a more expressive performance:
 - o "Yes. It's a good thing to remind ourselves that the reason why we're trying to "revive" portamento, tempo rubato and other such expressive devices is because it brings us closer to natural human expression. Irregularity, fluctuation, lack of consistency, approximate, these are endearingly (or frustratingly) human attributes. Portamento belongs to a broad family of expression and can seldom be considered on its own."

Clive Brown:

- "The use of the left thumb (preceding the hand by moving down under the neck almost to a position where it is pointing directly towards the scroll) in shifting down makes a considerable difference in my experience."
- "The copy of the Schubert I attach to my mail is J. N. Rauch's Littolf edition. The pencil fingering in b. 10 is not mine, but it is what I would use. That and the other fingerings apart from mine are obviously early. I would treat the portamento differently on different occasions and certainly differently when the theme comes back in the recapitulation."

Koenraad Van Stade:

- “Question 3, 4 & 5 are heavily depended on individual cases; all very hard to specify in detail. Portamenti could enhance drama, sentiment &c. but not necessarily. Sometimes, the not-applying of the feature can create the same effect.”

Kati Debretzeni:

- “All of it depends on context, there are no hard rules, depends on tempo, musical context of what comes before and after, how much rubato one wants at that moment, etc. Should always be dictated by inner need to express. Bow should ask for portamento, not the other way around.”

David Greco:

- “From what I can tell, there is no ‘set portamento’ for any ‘set emotion’. It is always up to the will of the performer and the performer’s expressive temperament how he/she chooses to best emote a phrase. Certain emotions demand a certain effect however, but I don’t believe there is any hard and fast rule about this judging from the auditory evidence left to us.”