

Where is the Line? Reflections on the Performer's Creative Space in Contemporary Practices

Óscar Caravaca González

Arts College - Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, China
e-mail: oscarcaravacagonzalez@gmail.com

Abstract

In contemporary performance practice, the question of where to draw the line between fidelity to the composer and the performer's creative freedom remains a subject of ongoing debate. Performers face the challenge of balancing the authority of the score with their own artistic instincts, navigating a space shaped by historical traditions, evolving cultural norms, and the expectations of modern performance contexts. While historical recordings and scores offer valuable insights, treating them as unchanging authorities risks reducing performance to passive reenactment. By contrast, artistic creativity rooted in the performer's co-authorial role, central to nineteenth-century traditions of score recomposition, is often restricted when so-called "correct" standards are prioritised over interpretive individuality. In addition to these challenges, the so-called moral dimension of interpretation is not intrinsic but created through ethical perspective. This raises questions about how performers should engage ethically with works created by others, particularly when tensions arise between historical fidelity and personal artistic agency. At what point does adherence to tradition become a moral imperative, and when might this very fidelity suppress the performer's "right" to individual expression? By reconceptualising tradition as a living, evolving framework rather than a rigid set of rules, this paper proposes an eclectic approach to performance that engages with the past while embracing the performer's voice from a contemporary perspective.

Keywords: ethical interpretation, performer's agency, textual fidelity, tradition

Introduction

This document begins with a brief outline of its structure to guide the reader through the main ideas. Section 1 introduces the theoretical background, examining the interaction between historical performance practices and the individual interpretative decisions that shape various contemporary aesthetics. It also situates my reflections within this dialogue, considering how tradition and personal instinct intersect in the creative act of interpretation.

Section 2 then turns to the rationale behind my chosen performance paradigm, articulating how my aesthetic orientation draws on nineteenth-century models, particularly the notions of *Vortrag* and the performer-composer ideal, which have influenced the way I conceive and construct my own artistic practice. Within this

framework, I discuss the methodological processes that underpin my work, including reflective strategies for analysing and re-evaluating interpretative models. These strategies involve identifying and classifying patterns and approaches that resonate with my artistic identity, followed by a critical process of questioning and reconfiguring them through declassification. This process supports the development of an eclectic practice that remains open to multiple interpretative perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

During my formative years, I encountered the pervasive rigidity surrounding the performance of canonical repertoire, where performers and educators are expected to faithfully convey what is presumed to be the composer's intentions, a concept that remains controversial and far from definitive. This approach was deeply ingrained in my training, with teachers conceiving the score as an unequivocal authority. Any deviation from their interpretation of the text, no matter how subtle, was met with scepticism or outright dismissal, stifling opportunities for creative reinterpretation that could revitalise these works. In this context, the weight of tradition, compounded by the scrutiny of mentors, critics, and audiences, perpetuated a cycle of artistic conformity and imposed a moral framework on what was deemed "correct".

In contrast, artistic disciplines such as theatre and opera thrive on reinterpretation and reinvention. Directors and actors frequently revisit classic works, uncovering new layers of meaning while engaging with contemporary social and cultural contexts. Modern opera exemplifies this adaptability. The 2019 revival of *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Opera House in London, directed by Kasper Holten, exemplifies the balance between tradition and modernity in opera production. While the staging introduced contemporary elements, such as a revolving set by Es Devlin and innovative video projections by Luke Halls, the orchestration remained rooted in classical practice. This juxtaposition of traditional orchestral setting with avant-garde visual storytelling highlights how opera can simultaneously relate to its historical roots and engage with contemporary audiences, reinforcing the timeless relevance of its themes.

This openness to reinterpretation aligns with the concept of intentional fallacy, as articulated by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946), which challenges the assumption that a work's meaning is confined to the creator's original intent. They argue that meaning evolves beyond the author's intentions, shaped by historical and interpretative layers. Similar ideas are echoed in Roland Barthes' *The Death of the Author* (1967), which posits that an author's role in shaping a work's meaning ends with its creation, emphasising that the reader, not the author, becomes the agent of meaning-making. Likewise, Reader-Response Theory, proposed by Stanley Fish, asserts that a text's significance is constructed through the reader's interaction with it, highlighting the subjective nature of interpretation. These perspectives collectively challenge the notion of fixed meaning, suggesting that performers, much like readers or directors, actively participate in shaping a work's evolving narrative.

The above discussion inevitably raises deeper conceptual questions: Where should the boundaries be drawn between fidelity to the score and the performer's

interpretative freedom? How should performers navigate their relationship with the score, particularly in light of the ethical considerations involved in interpreting a work authored by another? At what point does strict adherence to the composer's authority suppress the performer's expression, and when does interpretative flexibility become essential for emotional impact?

Regardless of the position one adopts, it is undeniable that performers bear a crucial responsibility in bringing music to life. However, navigating the delicate balance between what Chiantore describes as “the always complex inner tension between the authority of the composer, the freedom of the performer, and the weight of tradition” (2021, pp. 1–2) necessitates that performers make thoughtful and deliberate interpretative decisions. As Catarina Domenici observes in this regard:

The relation between the idea of the composer supposedly embodied by the score, and the force of a tradition to which performers who came before us have contributed so much, obliges contemporary performers to take up a position. It is up to them to either accept the situation or look for alternatives, since a voice only has power when there is someone who responds to it or obeys it” (as cited in Chiantore, 2021, pp. 1–2).

Given the wide range of tastes and preferences that exist within the realm of performance practice, the nuances of individual tolerance towards different modes of aesthetic engagement are integral to the formation of subjective standards of taste. Chiantore refers to this as “the scope of classical music” (*el ámbito de la música clásica*), in which certain performing paradigms, strongly inherited from the twentieth century, “form a precise hierarchy that drastically delimits performers’ margin for action” (Chiantore, 2017, p. 10). As he explains:

When in a class we are told that this is a good sound, and that other one is not, or that this type of phrasing is suitable for a certain repertoire but not for that other one, what we are verifying is that there are practices that are inside and others that are outside that ideal space. We are discovering that there are realities that are part of what is beginning to be defined in our minds as the scope of classical music and others that are outside it (Chiantore, 2021, p. 168).

To illustrate this phenomenon, I refer to a masterclass given by András Schiff at the Royal College of Music in London. During the session, Schiff specifically cautioned against excessive flexibility when producing a singing tone in the intervallic leap between mm. 32 and 33 in Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 3, Op. 90, as demonstrated in Example 1.

Example 1

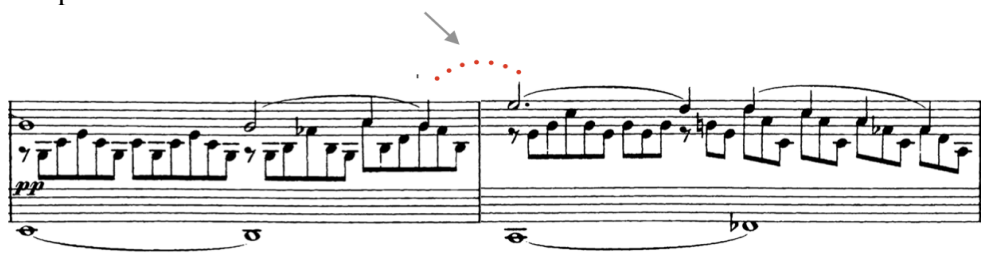


Figure 1. mm.32-33 from Schubert's *Impromptu* No. 3

As Schiff states:

So, a lot of emotions, sentiments, but never sentimentality. You cannot do this, for my taste [after these words, as an example of what he dislikes, Schiff plays the same passage by extending the time between the two notes in excess of his taste] ... When everybody might say, “agh! How beautiful!” but it is not ... It is cheap. Make it expensive (Schiff, 2016, 50:30).

Notably, this mode of expression, which appeared to be of questionable taste, may be related to a type of portamento and tempo modification used by certain singers in early recordings, such as Adelina Pattiⁱ. These recordings provide evidence that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, performers displayed a significant sense of rubatoⁱⁱ. Massimo Zicari has analysed Patti's distinctive interpretative style, noting that her performances are often dismissed under the assumption that late Romantic interpreters disregarded the composer's intentions, favouring overly indulgent and exaggerated interpretative choices (Zicari, 2017, p. 42). However, Zicari demonstrates that Patti's interpretations reflect a careful engagement with dramatic texts, resulting in interpretative choices that align with principles outlined in contemporary singing methods (Zicari, 2017, p. 52).

In my view, advancing the debate on the relationship between tradition and creative agency requires a more critical examination of the interpretative paradigms that inform performance practice. These paradigms, ranging from strict textual fidelity to more eclectic or hybrid approaches, provide performers with a conceptual framework through which to navigate the tension between historical conventions and contemporary artistic expression. To extend this discussion, I establish parallels between such interpretative models and analogous ideas in other disciplines. By doing so, I aim to situate performance practice within broader intellectual and methodological contexts, and to interrogate the assumptions that underlie interpretative decision-making (see Table 1).

Table 1

An Overview of Interpretative Principles and Their Parallels across Disciplines

Principle	Description
Historically Informed Performance (HIP)	Seeks to recreate music as it might have been heard in the composer's time, considering period instruments, historical tuning systems, or/and performance practices derived from primary sources. Parallel: Archaeological Reconstruction (Archaeology). Just as HIP reconstructs historical performance contexts, archaeology reconstructs past cultures using artifacts and evidence.
Werktreue (Fidelity to the Work)	Prioritizes the score as the ultimate authority, emphasizing precise adherence to its notations. Parallel: Formalism (Literary Criticism). Formalism, developed by scholars such as Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson in the early 20th century, focuses on the intrinsic structure and internal elements of a work. Both approaches treat the work as an autonomous entity, deriving its value and meaning primarily from its form and technical features (Shklovsky, 1917; Jakobson, 1921).
Komponistentreue (Faithfulness to the Composer)	Focuses on aligning with the composer's presumed intentions, treating these as the primary guide for performance, often with the expectation of interpreting the piece in "the way the composer played it the composer might have played it" (Bilson, 1997, 719).
Mainstream Interpretative Practice	Centres on widely accepted performance norms, emphasizing technical polish and stylistic consistency, offering interpretations that are accessible and broadly appealing. Parallel: Conventionalism in Philosophy (Poincaré, 1902; Duhem, 1914). Conventionalism posits that certain principles are adopted to ensure coherence and consistency within a system. Similarly, mainstream interpretative practice relies on shared conventions to maintain stylistic uniformity and meet audience expectations, prioritizing stability over innovation.
Aesthetic Consensus	Relies on collective agreement among connoisseurs and expert listeners to establish shared standards and stylistic ideals. Parallel: Scientific Paradigm Shifts (Kuhn, 1962). While mainstream practices maintain stability, aesthetic consensus reflects the collective shifts in artistic standards over time, akin to paradigm shifts in science. These shifts occur when prevailing interpretations no longer suffice, and new consensus emerges, redefining benchmarks of excellence.
Eclectic Exploration	Blends diverse stylistic elements from various eras and traditions, encouraging innovative and hybrid interpretations that connect historical and modern practices. Parallel: Postmodern Interdisciplinarity (Lyotard, 1979; Hutcheon, 1988). Like postmodernism, it embraces multiplicity and hybrid forms, challenging traditional boundaries and fostering new connections between disparate styles and ideas.
Individualistic Performance Styles	Highlights distinctive artistic expression, exemplified by performers such as Glenn Gould and Vladimir Horowitz, whose interpretative choices defy conventional norms. Parallel: Romanticism's Emphasis on Individual Genius (Philosophy/Art History). Celebrates unique personal interpretation over conformity.
Mentorship Tradition	Based on the master-apprentice model, this principle emphasizes the transfer of knowledge and technique through close mentorship, preserving performance standards within the classical music tradition. Parallel: Guild Apprenticeship Model (Craftsmanship). Similar to the model described by Richard Sennett in <i>The Craftsman</i> (2008), this approach highlights the importance of continuity and mastery through guided, experiential learning, ensuring the preservation and refinement of traditional skills.

Building on the preceding discussion, the following section examines the intricate relationship between historical fidelity, tradition, performative instinct, and creative interpretation. It aims to position my argument within the broader scholarly discourse while critically considering how these elements intersect and evolve within contemporary performance practice.

About Tradition

I would like to start shedding light on the word “tradition”, as I consider it a somewhat elusiveⁱⁱⁱ term. It is my perception that the word is often used to bestow an authority that it does not inherently possess, as it becomes evident that people’s perceptions of tradition are in constant flux. What is presently labelled as tradition may differ significantly from what previous generations considered traditional, as customs continually evolve over time. According to this view, tradition may be understood as a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon, moulded by the interplay between history and current cultural preferences, even though it often gives the impression of representing unchanging, age-old practices. In this context, tradition may also intersect with two other significant aspects: contemporary cultural norms and the social functions related to how people engage with music.

From my perspective, tradition is somewhat akin to an “illusory” realm that exerts influence over decision-making processes and often presents conflicting scenarios. When examining historical sources concerning the interpretation of slurs, for example, it becomes evident that they allow for multiple and sometimes divergent understandings of how such meanings may be realised in performance. Treatises offer valuable insights, but not in a one-size-fits-all manner, making it challenging to determine what may be deemed historically plausible in every case.^{iv}

Nevertheless, what intrigues me most about this concept is the significance of “the weight of tradition”, particularly in considering how the perceived continuity of tradition shapes the ways in which contemporary beliefs are accepted or rejected by today’s performers.

Renowned pianist Alfred Brendel firmly asserts that the tradition he upholds embodies a unidirectional relationship, in which the composer dictates instructions to the performer, rather than the reverse (Nicholas, 2008). This perspective often fosters an interpretative approach that relegates the performer to a subordinate role, in contrast to approaches that encourage performers to shape the work through personal contribution. Such rigid adherence to tradition can blur the line between plausibility and dogma, prompting reflection on whether a performance can ever be definitively classified as “valid”.

Each musician inevitably clings to personal convictions. My contention is that, regardless of the interpretative decisions one makes, there is always a risk of being perceived as either right or wrong, depending on the standpoint of individuals operating within this highly plural and strongly opinionated environment.

Between History and Instinct

“How’s your sack of intolerance?” David Owen Norris (1990) raised this question in relation to how historical perspectives may lead to distortions in the ways listening standards are conceptualised in the modern era. Norris suggests, through analogy, that once we become familiar with a particular type of “historical” sonic experience, which at first may sound acrid, it is “like tea without sugar. Once you got used to it you can’t imagine how you used to tolerate it any other way” (Norris, 1990, 01:43).

Through generations, metaphorically speaking, performers have contributed their own ideas concerning the flavour and amount of sugar that one may incorporate into the “tea”. The question, then, is not merely how performance should relate to a given aesthetic, but how evolving modes of listening and the material conditions of performance, such as modern instruments and the acoustics of larger venues, reshape our very perception of what authenticity entails.

Throughout the nineteenth century, there was an ideal aesthetic approach concerned with respect for the text. However, this awareness of conformity to the score was not always aligned with some performers’ dispositions towards modifying the score in the service of artistic pursuits.^v At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new understanding of recovering past practices began to emerge, strongly influenced by Wanda Landowska and Arnold Dolmetsch.^{vi} Both figures urged the need to maintain fidelity by considering historical accuracy alongside the use of period instruments in performance. This aesthetic coexisted with performance practices in which artistic decision-making was shaped to a greater degree by individual temperament than by historical convention. In light of this coexistence, the resulting paradigm generated sustained debate concerning how these two poles addressed performance and what might be considered more plausible.

The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould exemplified the latter stance, reimagining canonical works through an intensely personal lens that often departed from conventional interpretative norms. In contrast, others maintained a strong commitment to historical fidelity, asserting that the composer’s text should remain the ultimate authority. This latter attitude persists within academic environments, where performers frequently rationalise their interpretative decisions through expressions such as “bringing the composer’s artistic vision to life” or “capturing the essence of the original composition”. For example, Noah Bendix-Balgley, First Concertmaster of the Berliner Philharmoniker, stated during a masterclass on Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No. 8 in G major, Op. 30:

Nuances in dynamics and markings! Respecting all writings of the composer, I try to bring my interpretations as close as possible to their wishes. In doing so, we can further heighten our artistic performances (Bendix-Balgley, 2022).

Additional remarks in a similar vein emphasise the importance of consulting recordings made by composers themselves in order to align performance with perceived authorial intent. Pianist Juan Pérez Floristán articulated this position during his discussion of Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Op. 18:

Rachmaninov had a very large hand; therefore, he didn’t need to arpeggiate any chords, and he only played the first chord in a not arpeggiated way...Of course, with such a large hand, why did he arpeggiate it? Well, because he wants to, and not because he cannot reach that distance with his hand...Rachmaninov’s work clearly cannot be considered an Urtext edition...But, to attempt to do something so contrary to what he was doing, I wonder how much sense it makes? (Floristán, 2022, 3:54).

I contend that engaging with a composer's own recordings can provide a profoundly enriching experience. Nonetheless, the attempt to replicate a composer's interpretation may be regarded as eroding the inherent value of performance art and diminishing the importance of individual voice among performers.^{vii}

Consequently, the belief that a composer's intentions are fully captured in the score is inherently flawed. A composer's intentions are dynamic, evolving through a creative process influenced by factors such as rehearsals, premieres, and subsequent performances. Moreover, instances in which performers interact directly with composers can lead to new interpretative possibilities that may even prompt composers to reconsider their original perspectives. As Navickaitė-Martinelli (2014, p. 231) notes, this view reflects the attitudes of some composers of the past, who were often more tolerant of missed notes or deviations from the text than of failures in dynamics, expression, or overall character.

One illustrative example involves the renowned soprano Lotte Lehmann, who shared an anecdote about her collaboration with Richard Strauss. As recounted in *Challenging Performance* (Podcast No. 2, 2023), Lehmann described rehearsing a song with Strauss in which she initially adopted a much faster tempo than the composer had intended:

I must tell you a very funny story about this song. I sang it with Richard Strauss, and when we rehearsed it, I took a very wrong *tempo*. He wants it very slowly, but I felt it very differently. I felt it very quickly, and I started... He knows that he said, "Are you crazy? What's the matter with you? This is a slower *tempo*." And I said, "I think that's terrible. I felt it quickly," and he laughed... He had very much humour, and he said, 'No, this is very wrong, but let's go through it.' So if you like it, I want to hear it... and I sang it very quickly, and he laughed very much. In the end he said, "What you do is entirely wrong, but I like it" (*Challenging Performance*, 2023, Podcast No. 2).

Crafting a Personal Framework: Exploring Interpretative Freedom

Building on the preceding discussion of how performers negotiate emotional engagement and interpretative depth, Robert Levin offers an illuminating perspective on the performer's active role in shaping musical meaning. In a 2019 lecture, he emphasised the need for performers to immerse themselves fully in the "language and the plot" of a work in order to sustain the listener's attention and to shape a performance that communicates with the immediacy of spoken narrative:

We need to immerse ourselves in the language and the plot-how this becomes that-so that the audience, within seconds, is fascinated and absorbed, much like they are in the movies. (...) We, as performers, cannot achieve this without reaching the core truth of what happens in the music (Levin, 2019, 47:11).

Levin's observation foregrounds the narrative and affective dimensions of performance, highlighting the performer's capacity to render the structural and rhetorical logic of a work intelligible to the listener. While many performers share

this commitment, the strategies through which they realise it may differ considerably. Building on this idea, my discussion turns to the delicate equilibrium that emerges from the negotiation between personal agency and responsive engagement with a work's expressive architecture. This equilibrium is shaped by the interplay of structural, affective, and rhetorical forces through which musical coherence emerges, as well as by the question of how affective gestures may, at times, obscure rather than clarify a work's internal logic.

Looking back to earlier centuries, the concept of *Vortrag*, encompassing the expressive, rhetorical, and communicative realisation of a work in performance, occupies a central position in historical performance thought. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German theory, the term denoted the performer's capacity to transform musical notation into a living discourse, giving audible shape to a work's expressive character within its contemporary aesthetic framework.

Revisiting the concept of *Vortrag* from a contemporary standpoint offers a means of reconnecting historical models of expressivity with present-day concerns. In my view, this notion resonates strongly with the performer's search for an individual voice. Rather than replicating past conventions, a reflective engagement with *Vortrag* invites an understanding of the expressive principles that shaped historical performance and their reinterpretation through the artistic and aesthetic codes of the present. Foundational theorists such as Leopold Mozart, C. P. E. Bach, Daniel G. Türk, and Friedrich Starke articulated key aspects of this understanding, as summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

The Concept of Vortrag in 18th- and Early 19th-Century

Author	Quotation	Citation
Leopold Mozart	"Because the sorrowful often alternates with the joyous, so one must assiduously endeavour to perform each according to its manner. In a word, one must play everything in such a way that one is oneself moved by it."	Mozart (1951, pp. 255-256) in Bilson (1997, 716)
Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach	"In what, then, does good delivery (<i>Vortrag</i>) consist? In nothing other than the capacity for making the ear sensitive to the true content and affects of musical thoughts, by playing or singing."	Bach ([1753] 1992, p. 117) in Eriksen (2017, 2.1 Questions concerning musical empathy)
Daniel Gottlob Türk	"Whoever performs a composition so that the affect (character, etc.), even in every single passage, is most faithfully expressed (made perceptible) and that the tones become at the same time a language of feelings, of this person it is said that he is a good executant."	Türk ([1789] 1982, p. 321) in Bilson (1997, 716)
Friedrich Starke	"Whoever presents a piece of music so that the affect [character] in it is accurately expressed in every passage, and where the tones are turned into a 'language of the emotions', of that man we say, he has a good <i>Vortrag</i> ."	Starke (1819, p. 15) in Bilson (1997, 716)

Building upon this historical understanding of *Vortrag*, a further dimension of my inquiry concerns nineteenth-century performers who interpreted existing works while also reimagining them through recomposition, embellishment, and improvisation. In this context, the performer–composer emerged as an influential model for reconsidering the performer's role as an active agent in the continual renewal of the musical work. This creative dialogue with the score, often expressed

through the addition of preludes, interludes, and cadenzas, illustrates a performative attitude that conceives interpretation as an act of re-creation rather than reproduction. Franz Liszt famously articulated this view, asserting that the performer “is not a mason who, chisel in hand, faithfully and conscientiously whittles stone after the design of an architect... He creates as the composer himself created” (Doğantan-Dack, 2006, p. 8). This perspective positions the performer as a co-creator, participating in an ongoing process of artistic authorship alongside the composer.

Considering this interpretative approach as a creative point of departure has expanded my artistic possibilities, providing a framework that remains forward-looking while maintaining continuity with less conventional historical traditions. Much like theatrical productions that reinterpret a classic through contemporary staging, updated costumes, and dynamic lighting, this approach may revitalise established works and foster dialogue between tradition and innovation. Figures such as Leopold Godowsky and Ferruccio Busoni exemplify this ideal through their reimaginings of Chopin’s and Bach’s works, respectively.

The Process of Classification and Declassification in Developing an Eclectic Interpretative Approach

Building upon the historical and aesthetic considerations discussed above, I have sought to articulate my artistic stance through the framework of Eclectic Exploration, described in Table 1, an approach that aims to balance historical awareness with contemporary creativity.

A deeper engagement with the liberties characteristic of late nineteenth-century performance practice has been central to this rationale, particularly in relation to the integration of preludes and interludes. Historically, such interpolative gestures served both as expressive bridges and as spontaneous commentaries on the surrounding repertoire. Within my own work, they function as spaces of reflection and transformation, allowing personal and narrative dimensions of interpretation to emerge more vividly. This line of inquiry, explored further in my doctoral thesis (Caravaca, 2023), examines how such interpolations may operate as creative extensions of the score rather than as mere embellishments.

Furthermore, at the core of my inquiry lies a reflective process that critically evaluates interpretative choices through the dual mechanisms of classification and declassification, as articulated by Antonio García Gutiérrez (2007). In this context, classification functions as a process of synthesis and structure-building. It enables the performer to construct a coherent map of interpretative strategies by identifying, categorising, and hierarchising stylistic tendencies, expressive gestures, and phrasing models. In my own practice, this involved analysing and systematising interpretative perspectives drawn from both historical sources and contemporary performers’ recordings, while observing how specific gestures or expressive decisions might be associated with particular stylistic or rhetorical intentions. Through this process, the performer builds an ordered framework, a provisional taxonomy of expressive tools, that supports informed artistic decision-making.

Declassification, by contrast, serves a radically different yet complementary

function. It introduces a moment of rupture, a deliberate unsettling of the structures established through classification. Following García Gutiérrez (2007, pp. 5–6), this process involves questioning the hierarchies and boundaries that classification may create, in order to recover what might have been overlooked, marginalised, or normalised. Applied to artistic practice, it requires the performer to revisit and reconfigure the criteria that shaped the initial interpretative framework, questioning why a particular gesture, articulation, or expressive solution was adopted and whether alternative meanings or affective resonances might emerge through recontextualisation. In this way, declassification does not negate knowledge but redistributes it, transforming engagement with inherited norms into an active and self-reflective exercise of creative agency.

Overall, the interplay between classification and declassification encouraged the adoption of a horizontal mode of thinking that conceives interpretation as a dynamic process of “self-articulation”, rooted in the performer’s ongoing negotiation between personal identity and stylistic engagement.

Conclusion

The performer’s task of giving form to human feeling through sound remains central at a time when performance is increasingly understood as a dynamic and contextually responsive act. The reflections presented here do not seek to reproduce past conventions, but rather to question how inherited traditions might continue to generate meaning within contemporary artistic practice. As Norris perceptively asks, “And now we were self-aware, could we go on playing in the old instinctive way? New ways had to be invented...” (Norris, 1990, 1:15:48).

From this standpoint, my work moves beyond the search for historically correct answers towards expanding the expressive possibilities of performance in the present. The past, rather than serving as an unquestioned authority, becomes a reservoir of creative potential, a source to be reinterpreted and transformed through contemporary sensibility. In this sense, interpretation emerges as a forward-looking act, one that reimagines tradition as a living process capable of renewal and continuous reinvention.

Notes

ⁱ A practice also endorsed in the singing methods of the nineteenth century; see, for example, Corri, D. (1810). *The singer’s preceptor, or Corri’s treatise on vocal music* (Vols. 1–2). London: Hurst, Rees & Orme, and García, M. (1857). *García’s new treatise on the art of singing: A compendious method of instruction*. London: Beale & Chappell.

ⁱⁱ It is worth noting that while tempo modifications were a widespread characteristic in the latter half of the nineteenth century, their prevalence notably diminished during the twentieth century; see Zicari, M. (2017). Expressive tempo modifications in Adelina Patti’s recordings: An integrated approach. *Empirical Musicology Review*, 12(1-2), 45. <https://doi.org/10.18061/emr.v12i1-2.5010>

ⁱⁱⁱ The notion of flaws within traditions was originally advanced in 1983 by Hobsbawm and Ranger. See Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1992). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge

University Press.

^{iv} For further contextualization and details from treatises, see Brown (1999, p. 178).

^v Kivy (1995, p. 278) refers to the emerging aesthetic as “composer’s worship,” tracing its origins to the 19th-century cult of genius, where composers were elevated from artisans to artists and revered as infallible figures. Jackson (1997, p. 8), drawing on Taruskin, highlights the “great divide” around 1800, when music transitioned from being a performer-oriented activity to a composer-oriented aesthetic object. Kenyon (Norris, 1990) notes that, despite a growing archaeological interest in the past, 19th-century performance practices, such as Mendelssohn’s adaptation of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*, often involved significant alterations, reflecting a flexible approach to historical works.

^{vi} For further contextualisation about these two figures see, Haynes (2007, p. 38) *Prophets of the Revolution: Dolmetsch and Landowska*.

^{vii} To provide context for the tensions that arise when performers express their individuality in contrast to the printed text, see Taruskin, R. (1993, November 28). Recordings view: Why do they all hate Horowitz? *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/11/28/archives/recordings-view-why-do-they-all-hate-horowitz.html>

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