



Interpretation of Baroque vs. Romantic Violin Repertoire: Challenges and Performance Practices

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Abstract

This article examines the interpretative differences between Baroque and Romantic violin repertoire in the context of performance practices, acoustic environment, and technological conditions of sound recording. The analysis is based on a comparative review of contemporary empirical and theoretical studies on historically informed performance, musical acoustics, and perceptual mechanisms of music cognition. It is shown that stylistic distinctions between the two periods emerge not through isolated techniques but through configurations of interrelated micro-parameters of sound production, including articulation, vibrato, agogics, and the dynamic arc. The study substantiates that fragmentary adoption of historical techniques leads to stylistic inconsistency, whereas a coherent parametric profile enhances expressive unity of performance. The influence of early recording technologies and spatial acoustic conditions on the audibility of performative gestures and the emotional predictability of sound is demonstrated. Particular attention is given to the hybridization of historically informed and contemporary interpretative strategies, which form multidimensional sound models instead of rigid stylistic schools. Interpretation is thus presented as a system of adjustable sonic characteristics sensitive to spatial and perceptual factors. The article may be of interest to scholars of music performance, educators, and professional violinists.

Keywords: *Historically Informed Performance, Interpretation, Articulation, Acoustic Environment, Music.*

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in historically informed performance, the expansion of concert spaces, and the availability of digital recordings are reshaping the ways in which the violin repertoire of different eras is interpreted. Previously, differences between Baroque and Romantic traditions were associated primarily with style and instrumental features; today, the key factor is the management of sound production micro-parameters—vibrato, articulation, agogics, dynamics, timbral brightness, and micro-timing—taking into account the acoustic environment and artistic context [5]. Interpretation is defined by the reading of the musical text and the correlation of historical sound norms with modern conditions of the stage, recording, and listener perception.

Despite the growth of research on Baroque and Romantic performance, the literature focuses either on the reconstruction of individual historical techniques or on the analysis of modern recordings, including directions of historically informed performance and studies of Romantic interpretation [9]. The comparison of interpretative strategies as holistic parametric profiles remains limited. Expressive means are often viewed in isolation—vibrato, portamento, bow strokes, dynamics—without considering

their relationship with the acoustics of the space, sound fixation technology, and the stability of emotional perception. This creates a methodological gap between historical analysis and modern performance practice and complicates the explanation of how historical techniques are integrated into Romantic and post-Romantic repertoire.

The aim of the study is to identify and conceptualize the interpretative differences between Baroque and Romantic violin repertoire through a comparison of performance practices and an analysis of contemporary methods of applying historical techniques in concert and pedagogical practice. To achieve this aim, the following tasks are addressed:

- define key parameters of distinction between eras at the level of articulation, phrasing, dynamics, and vibrato;
- compare the influence of the acoustic environment and technological recording factors on the legibility of interpretative gestures;
- identify stable and variable elements of contemporary violin practice combining historical and modernist approaches;
- form a parametric model of interpretative style combining sound micro-parameters and perceptual effects.

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The research hypothesis posits that the difference between Baroque and Romantic interpretation is determined not by individual techniques, but by the configuration of interrelated performance parameters—articulation, the dynamic arc, the character of vibrato, and adaptation to the acoustic space. Fragmentary adoption of historical techniques leads to stylistic eclecticism, whereas a holistic parametric approach enhances the expressive consistency and interpretative stability of the performance.

The scientific novelty of the work lies in the development of an analytical framework where Baroque and Romantic traditions are viewed as multidimensional sound profiles correlated with acoustic conditions, sound fixation technology, and mechanisms of listener recognition of expressiveness. Interpretation is treated as a controlled system of micro-parameters, allowing eras to be compared through measurable characteristics of the performer's sonic behavior.

The scope of the study is limited to the Baroque and Romantic violin repertoire and performance practices of stage and studio sound, and does not cover the compositional analysis of scores outside the performance context or sociological aspects of the music industry. The work is based on a comparative analysis of theoretical and empirical studies of performance, acoustics, and music perception.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological basis of the study was formed through stepwise selection and comparative-analytical study of peer-reviewed publications dedicated to historically informed performance, the acoustics of musical space, parameters of expressiveness, and the analysis of violin recordings. Source searching was conducted in international scientific databases and publisher repositories for 2018–2026, filtering by thematic relevance, the presence of an empirical, analytical, or modeling component, and reproducibility of conclusions. Selection focused on studies where interpretation was viewed as a set of measurable performance parameters or in direct connection with the acoustic environment, sound fixation technology, and listener perception.

The analysis included works with quantitative models, behavioral experiments, comparative recording designs, acoustic modeling, and theoretical-historical reconstructions of performance practices. Review publications without original results, duplicates, and studies lacking reconstructible links between performance parameters and their acoustic or perceptual effect were excluded. The primary dataset consisted of 47 publications; after abstract screening and full-text verification, 10 studies formed the final corpus.

The search was performed using keywords in Russian and English: “historically informed performance,” “violin interpretation,” “vibrato analysis,” “musical acoustics,” “soundscape,” “performance practice,” “expressive timing,” “phonograph effect,” “topophilia in music,” “baroque violin,” “romantic violin,” followed by manual relevance screening based on abstracts and reference lists of selected works.

The final corpus was structured according to three analytical levels of interpretative difference manifestation: parametric (sound production and expressiveness micro-parameters), acoustic-spatial (hall architecture, reverberation, sound environment), and technological-perceptual (recording, playback, and cognitive emotion recognition). Such structuring allowed the analysis to focus on repeating mechanisms of transforming a performance gesture into an audible result and its interpretative stability across different eras.

In the study by Choi [1], interpretation is described as a system of performance interaction and feedback with sound. Firat et al. [2] show the influence of a reconstructed acoustic environment on sound parameters. Harris et al. [3] record the role of place and time in the transformation of performance practice. Hung et al. [4] model the expressiveness of violin performance through micro-timing, dynamics, and vibrato. Ornoy and Cohen [5] identify the hybridization of historical and modern techniques in Romantic recordings. Proverbio et al. [6] confirm the link between acoustic parameters and the stability of emotional recognition. Rainer [7] reconstructs historical norms of vibrato and declamation. Szymańska-Stułka [8] treats space as a factor of interpretation. Vollmer and Bolles [9] demonstrate the influence of early recording technologies on performance gestures. Yang [10] describes the co-evolution of the violin, bow, and performance venues in Baroque culture.

Based on the comparison of conceptual frameworks, methodological assumptions, and empirical results of the indicated studies, a theoretical-synthetic analysis was performed, aimed at identifying repeating mechanisms of difference between Baroque and Romantic interpretation at the level of articulation, the dynamic arc, vibrato, and spatial sound adaptation. The synthesis involved consolidating parametric, acoustic, and technological factors into a unified analytical model without assuming direct experimental verification within the framework of the present work. The study is of a conceptual-analytical review nature with elements of interpretative modeling and is oriented toward identifying reproducible mechanisms of transforming performance parameters into stable stylistic profiles.

RESULTS

Comparison of sound production and phrasing parameters revealed persistent differences in articulatory segmentation, vibrato character, agogic accent distribution, and the dynamic architecture of the phrase. Baroque material demonstrates short sound arcs, frequent bow changes, and melodic line segmentation, whereas Romantic repertoire is characterized by phrase length and smoothed articulation. These differences are recorded as repeating performance parameters when comparing recordings and acoustic descriptions [1]. Vibrato manifests as a differentiating feature: in the Baroque context, it is localized at phrase anchor points and functions as an accent; in the Romantic context, it is distributed more evenly and forms a continuous spectral layer of sound [5].

The distribution of agogic accents differs in the method of

their inclusion in the metric structure. Baroque interpretation demonstrates micro-decelerations at phrase boundaries and rapid returns to the pulse, enhancing the rhetorical segmentation of the texture. Romantic practice is characterized by longer tempo stretches and smooth transitions between dynamic peaks, forming an extended dynamic arc [4]. The connection between dynamics and phrasing in Baroque material is manifested through local contrasts and a terraced model, whereas in Romantic material, it is through continuous dynamic gradients integrated into a large form [8].

In contemporary interpretations of Romantic repertoire, hybrid strategies are recorded, combining historically informed strokes with modernist timbral continuity. These manifestations are observed at the level of micro-timing, articulatory transitions, and narrow vibrato integrated into the general dynamic line. Table 1 shows the distribution of key interpretative techniques—*messa di voce*, agogic accents, tempo changes, and narrow vibrato—in modern recordings of Romantic violin repertoire.

Table 1. Manifestation of HIP Practices in the Interpretation of Romantic Violin Repertoire (Compiled by the author based on source: [5])

Interpretative Marker	HIP (n=3), performers	MS (n=7), performers	p (Fisher)
Messa di Voce	2	4	0.667
Tempo Modifications	2	3	0.500
Agogic Accents	2	2	0.333
Narrow Vibrato	3	2	0.083

Note: The column Interpretative Marker denotes a specific interpretative technique or expressive feature recorded in the recording analysis. HIP (n=3), performers shows the number of performers using historically informed practice in whom this feature was identified. MS (n=7), performers reflects the number of performers of modern (mainstream) interpretation with the same feature. p (Fisher) indicates the level of statistical significance of differences between groups, calculated using Fisher’s exact test and used to assess the stability of marker distribution.

The distribution structure of markers indicates the absence of rigid polarization between historically informed and modern performance manners. Agogic accents and tempo modifications appear symmetrically and function as elements of the general performance norm. *Messa di voce* acts as a transitional feature not fixed to a single strategy, whereas narrow vibrato demonstrates the greatest variability and is recorded as an indicator of technique hybridization. This distribution reflects the intersection of parametric profiles and the blending of performance models in the contemporary Romantic repertoire.

timbral contour, where local pitch and force fluctuations are perceived as more pronounced or smoothed regardless of the original technique [10].

Comparison of the acoustic characteristics of recordings and playback parameters showed that the interpretative gesture is formed at the moment of the performance action and during the process of technological sound transmission. Analysis of spectral profiles and dynamic contours revealed a persistent shift in volume balance and vibrato intensity during mechanical recording and subsequent playback. The amplification of specific frequency zones and simultaneous attenuation of fundamental components create an altered

Simultaneously, the dependence of “gesture audibility” on the acoustic environment of the performance was recorded. With short reverberation, the distinctness of attacks and stroke transitions increases, whereas with increased decay time, the tendency to smooth micro-articulation and timbral contrasts intensifies [8]. Identical performance parameters demonstrate varying degrees of legibility depending on spatial conditions, indicating the variability of the interpretative result with unchanged sound production technique. The link between the performance parameter and emotional response is manifested through the stability of acoustic pattern recognition, where signal intensity, texture density, and tempo fluctuations correlate with specific perception categories [6]. Table 2 considers the technological parameters of signal transmission and associated distortions of interpretative gestures during early playback.

Table 2. Numerical Effects of Playback Technology and Potential Distortions of Interpretative Gestures (Compiled by the author based on source: [9])

Analytical Object	Value / Range	Technical Meaning	Perceptual Effect
Resonant Level Boost	up to 20 dB	Amplification of specific spectral zones	Artificial sense of dynamic accents
Number of Playback Devices	20	Variation in frequency responses	Same performance sounds different
Device Period	1901–1933	Mechanical recording era	High sensitivity to playback chain
Lower Transmission Limit	~150 Hz	Attenuation of fundamentals	Thinner timbre perception
Peak Transmission Zone	~800 Hz	Mid-frequency dominance	Enhanced presence sensation
Upper Cut-off Limit	~2.4 kHz	High-frequency restriction	Reduced attack clarity

The parameter structure demonstrates a systematic redistribution of dynamic and timbral features outside of performance intent. The amplification of mid-frequencies and simultaneous limitation of the upper range alter the ratio of attack and decay, redistributing perceived accents and sound density [9]. These changes manifest as technologically conditioned sound variability, persisting despite the constancy of the original technique and recorded as a stable factor of the interpretative effect.

The obtained data record a reproducible dependence of interpretative perception on the technological and acoustic conditions of sound transmission. This dependence manifests at the level of timbral balance, dynamic legibility, and distinctness of the performance gesture, persisting given the constancy of the original sound production technique. The observed variability indicates the persistent influence of external environmental and playback parameters on the formation of the audible result, allowing technological and spatial factors to be viewed as an independent layer of the interpretative effect.

DISCUSSION

Comparison of performance parameters shows that the boundary between historically informed and modern playing manners functions not as a stable opposition, but as a fluid range of features. Practice demonstrates an overlapping of techniques where articulatory and timbral decisions are distributed along an intensity scale rather than by school affiliation. This state is manifested in repeating sound production micro-parameters—stroke density, localization of dynamic peaks, character of vibrato oscillation, and attack duration—and is recorded as structural mixing rather than stylistic eclecticism.

Baroque articulatory “speech” in modern Romantic interpretation is realized primarily at the level of sound line micro-segmentation. Short stroke units, controlled pauses, and accent shifts are used as a tool to increase phrase legibility and internal metric stability. These elements do not destroy the extent of the Romantic dynamic arc but redistribute tension within it through changes in sound density and transition duration between peaks. The observed integration indicates a shift in interpretative focus from epochal technique marking to its functional efficiency in a specific acoustic situation.

The intersection of techniques requires a different method of describing style than traditional epochal categories. The parametric model captures style as a set of measurable micro-features: vibrato width and speed, frequency of bow changes, amplitude of dynamic fluctuations, distribution of

timbral brightness, and position of agogic deviations. This approach allows interpretation changes to be described as variations within a unified sound space, rather than as a transition between isolated aesthetic modes. Style in this system acts not as a declaration of affiliation, but as a configuration of controlled sound characteristics.

The pedagogical implications of this model are manifested in a shift of educational emphasis from reproducing canonical formulas to developing control over performance micro-parameters. Practice shows that the stability of the interpretative result is determined by the ability to vary articulation, dynamics, and vibrato in response to acoustic conditions and the work’s structure. Training oriented toward awareness of the relationship between sound micro-characteristics and their perceptual effect forms flexibility of performance thinking and reduces dependence on fixed stylistic templates.

The acoustic environment manifests as an active regulator of performance parameters, not as a neutral sound background. Reverberation length directly influences the choice of tempo and the character of articulation: as decay time increases, the need to lengthen sound arcs and reduce stroke change density increases, whereas short reverberation allows for higher speed and clear line segmentation. Performance practice demonstrates that tempo in these conditions functions not as a fixed metric value, but as an adaptive parameter dependent on reflection duration and the degree of attack intelligibility [8].

The difference between chamber and large spaces manifests in volume projection and phrase structure. The chamber environment enhances micro-detailing and allows for more frequent use of short strokes and local dynamic accents. A large space, conversely, requires energy redistribution in favor of extended dynamic arcs and a reduction of sharp articulatory contrasts. Under these conditions, the sound line is restructured toward continuity, and internal segmentation becomes less pronounced.

The relationship between ornamentation and acoustic “dryness” is recorded as one of the most sensitive parameters of interpretation. In a space with short reverberation time, ornamental elements retain distinctness and legibility even with high texture density. As reflection time increases, the risk of ornaments merging with the main sound flow rises, leading to a reduction in their quantity or a change in duration. Ornamentation in this context acts not as a stylistic formula, but as an acoustically dependent magnitude regulated by the degree of sound “blurring.” Table 3 presents the reliability of listener recognition of emotional categories based on acoustic performance parameters.

Table 3. Reliability of Emotional Category Recognition in Musical Performance (Compiled by the author based on source: [6])

Emotion Category	Recognition Accuracy, M (%)	SD (%)	F1
Peacefulness	64.5	9.86	0.49
Joy	53.0	6.92	0.31

Melancholy	75.0	12.24	0.58
Argumentative	75.0	10.74	0.39
Tension	60.0	7.09	0.45
Power	59.0	17.33	0.59

Note: The column Emotion Category denotes the type of emotional state recognized by listeners based on the sound. Recognition Accuracy, M (%) reflects the average level of correct recognition of this category. SD (%) shows the degree of response variability and result dispersion among participants. F1 represents the integral indicator of recognition precision and recall, characterizing the overall stability of emotional profile identification.

The distribution structure of indicators points to the uneven stability of emotional categories during auditory recognition. The most stable states are associated with pronounced energy or, conversely, with a lowered level of arousal, indicating high listener sensitivity to contrasting acoustic profiles. Categories with a medium level of tension demonstrate more variable results and are characterized by partial feature overlap, complicating their unambiguous identification. The least stable proves to be the category associated with positive emotional coloring of moderate intensity, indicating the dependence of its recognition on contextual factors and comparative volume. Overall, the table reflects a direct link between the degree of acoustic expression of performance parameters and the stability of emotional perception, where the more clearly dynamics, texture density, and tempo fluctuations are distinguishable, the higher the predictability of the listener’s interpretative response.

The interpretation of violin repertoire manifests not as the reproduction of stable stylistic formulas, but as the result of the interaction of performance control, the acoustic environment, and the listener’s perceptual mechanisms. Differences between Baroque and Romantic traditions are expressed in methods of organizing the sound line, the degree of articulatory segmentation, and the character of dynamic development; however, in contemporary practice, these features increasingly function as complementary elements of a unified sound space. Spatial conditions, the bodily sensation of sound, and the choice of micro-techniques determine gesture legibility and the directionality of the expressive effect, forming flexible interpretative models instead of fixed schools. Such an understanding of interpretation allows performance practice to be viewed as a system of adjustable sound characteristics changing alongside performance conditions and the artistic task.

CONCLUSION

The analysis showed that differences between Baroque and Romantic interpretation are determined not by individual techniques, but by the configuration of interrelated performance micro-parameters—articulation, vibrato, agogics, and the dynamic arc. The Baroque tradition is oriented toward segmented sonic speech and local contrasts, the Romantic toward phrase extent and timbral continuity; however, modern practice demonstrates their persistent mixing. The obtained results confirm the hypothesis.

Expressive persuasiveness is linked to the integrity of the parametric profile, whereas fragmentary adoption of historical techniques leads to stylistic heterogeneity.

Interpretation manifests as a managed system of adjustable sound characteristics, sensitive to the acoustic environment and recording technology. Spatial conditions and playback specifics are capable of redistributing the legibility of articulation and dynamic accents on par with performance decisions, allowing historically informed practices to be viewed as a tool for flexible parametric adaptation rather than a set of fixed norms.

Prospects for further research are associated with the expansion of empirical recording corpora, controlled acoustic experiments, quantitative modeling of the link between sound micro-parameters and listener emotional recognition, and the comparison of interpretative models in other instrumental and ensemble practices.

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