CONCLUSION
THE SUBSTANCE OF STYLE

As it turns out, style does indeed have substance. A singer decides how she wants to approach a certain moment in her music; sometimes such decisions are made consciously and well in advance, while others are inspired by the creative alchemy that is performance. In both scenarios, however, a singer’s style is to some degree determined by habituated patterns of behavior. These patterns, these vocal habits, form the substance of one’s singing. And in turn, they become the substance of one’s style.

If we understand singing to be a collection of behaviors, it follows that a recording does indeed represent more than what a particular singer did in the studio on a particular day. Though it was convenient to construct a methodology that relied on pairs of recordings to demonstrate this point (see Chapter 3), in fact similar methods can be used even when no such pairs exist. Having heard numerous recordings by tenor Leo Slezak,1 we can now say that the most salient aspects of his style include declamatory rubato that results in enormous rhythmic flexibility, unusual in scope even for an artist of his generation; an enormous range of registration choices; a proclivity for falsetto; a tendency to sustain high notes; and an outsized, robust personality.2 We can therefore say that these traits make up his stylistic palette. Then, knowing his habitual style, we should be able to judge whether a recording is typical of Slezak or not.

1 These include CD 1, tracks 3, 8 and 35; CD 2, the second example on track 23; and CD 3, the fourth example on track 25, the third example on track 26, the fifth example on track 28, and the third example on track 29
2 Slezak’s memoir is Song of Motley: Being the Reminiscences of a Hungry Tenor (London: W. Hodge, 1938).

187
It has been suggested elsewhere that changing aesthetics of style are responsible for, among other things, declines in the use of portamento and rubato. But on vocal recordings especially, we should ascertain insofar as possible whether such trends are the result of evolving style cultures or of age. Because both portamento and rubato are affected by a singer’s weakening *portamento di voce* as he ages, it cannot be assumed that a decline in either signifies an aesthetic shift.

We should also be careful not to overgeneralize about the earliest recordings. For example, although we hear a kind of flexibility on early recordings that we don’t hear on later ones, early recordings do not demonstrate this kind of flexibility across the board. In actual fact, early recordings exhibit great diversity of rhythmic approaches, the poles of which are reflected in Demuth’s and Schumann-Heink’s “Die Forelle” recordings (CD 3, tracks 1 and 2). We might look to baritone Sir George Henschel, born in 1850, or to soprano Marcella Sembrich, born in 1858, as exemplars of a rhythmically flexible style; conversely, the soprano Lilli Lehmann, born in 1848, has much in common with Demuth in her rhythmically straight approach. So while it would be accurate to say that some early recordings display greater rhythmic flexibility than any recordings that have followed since, it would not be accurate to conclude that rhythmic style in early recordings was on the whole characterized by greater flexibility – unless we are referring to flexibility of choices.

Most importantly, we must recognize that certain kinds of portamento and rubato double as both style and as vocalism. If, in trying to conform to new cultural trends, performers repress passing portamento and declamatory rubato, their singing becomes less gestural, and *portamento di voce* suffers. In other words, the desire to make certain sounds while inhibiting others has far-reaching effects on vocal technique. This argument is similar to one made by both Mark Katz and Robert
Philip, that recordings have shaped how people play.\textsuperscript{3} Above all else, it was this simple truth – that vocal choices and stylistic ones affect each other – that compelled me to write this dissertation. We do not know what kinds of choices the next generation of singers will make. We can only hope that the choices they make will be well informed.

\textsuperscript{3} Katz, \textit{Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music}, and Philip, \textit{Performing Music in the Age of Recording}. 