

Title: Listening to the Past: Understanding the Effects of Historical Recording Technology

Abstract:

The fields of vocal pedagogy and voice performance often debate about the “state of the art of singing,” but such debates often center around subjective analyses of singers who were recorded with recording technology that was limited in its ability to capture a singer’s voice. In the modern day, the fields of singing voice science and digital signal processing have advanced to the point that it is now possible to study the differences between historical and modern audio recording technologies. By doing so, this research attempts to shed objective light on a topic that has been obfuscated for over one hundred years and aims to give our field a lens through which to interpret historical recordings of singers.

This poster paper presents the results from a multi-faceted study of professional opera singers—based in New York City—recorded on both modern and historical audio recording equipment (a flat-response microphone and a period wax cylinder phonograph). The presentation will take the form of a conventional poster presentation, but will include a QR-code link to online interactive media which will allow the viewer to listen to modern singers on two distinct recording technologies and to compare those recordings with historical singers from the turn-of-the-century.

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