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Performance Practice Issues in the Short Solo Works of Serge Koussevitzky

Maurice Kelley
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, gkelley53@gmail.com

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Performance Practice Issues in the Short Solo Works of
Serge Koussevitzky

by

Maurice E. Kelley II

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Major: Music

Under the Supervision of Professor Russell White

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Performance Practice Issues in the

Short Solo Works of Serge Koussevitzky

Maurice E. Kelley II, D.M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2006

Advisor: Professor Russell White

This document deals with performance practice issues in the four original short solo double bass compositions of Serge Koussevitzky. There has been minimal literature published concerning performance practice issues for the double bass as a solo instrument. By analyzing the 1929 recording Koussevitzky made of two of his pieces for double bass and the 1988 recordings modern bass virtuoso Gary Karr made of Koussevitzky’s four short pieces a direct comparison of performance practice issues can be made. The four short pieces, Andante, Valse Miniature, Chanson Triste, and Humoresque were written by Koussevitzky around 1900. His recording of Chanson Triste and Valse Miniature provides the opportunity to compare the first known recording of a double bass virtuoso performing his own compositions to that of a modern virtuoso. By comparing Koussevitzky’s recordings to those of Karr performance practice issues such as vibrato, rubato and portamento can be analyzed and changes in their use can be
determined. The outcome of this comparison will provide performers with the tools necessary to produce a historically informed performance of all four pieces.

This study examines the most striking differences between the Koussevitzky and Karr recordings in regards to performance practice, focusing on tempo manipulation (tempo rubato), vibrato, and portamento. Chapter Two analyzes tempo manipulation as it applies to recordings of *Valse Miniature* and *Chanson Triste*. Chapter Three focuses on the use of string instrument vibrato during the late nineteenth century and includes an analysis of Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato. The use of portamento by Koussevitzky’s and Karr’s recording of *Chanson Triste* is examined in Chapter Four. Chapter Five brings together the material collected in previous chapters and presents a detailed method for creating an historically informed performance of the two pieces Koussevitzky did not record, *Andante* and *Humoresque*. Chapter Six concludes the study by addressing the issue of authenticity and balancing the primary source material (the recordings of Koussevitzky performing his own compositions) with the expectations of a twenty-first century audience.
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Chapter One

Introduction

A great deal has been written about the technical and mechanical development of the double bass. In contrast, there is a relatively small portion of literature concerning the history of the bass as a solo instrument from a performance practice perspective. The lives of the few early double bass virtuosi have been documented in a variety of books and articles. It is a simple matter to access information about bass virtuosi such as Dragonetti and Bottesini. Biographical data, such as when and where they performed, their compositions for solo double bass, and documents written by their contemporaries, are readily available and provide some understanding of their technical ability. With the assistance of modern scholarship, we can even speculate what their performances might have sounded like. In 1929 Serge Koussevitzky recorded his Chanson Triste, Op. 2, Valse Miniature, Op. 1, and the second movement of his Concerto for Double Bass, Op. 3. It is not until this time that we have indisputable evidence of a composers’ intent.\(^1\) With these early recordings, Koussevitzky presents a unique opportunity to hear him perform his own compositions and compare them to more recent renditions. By making this comparison, an historically informed performance of his four short solo pieces for double bass can be achieved.

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Koussevitzky was born in Russia in 1874 and is best known for his work as conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a post which he held from 1924 until 1949.² His career as a bassist has been largely overlooked outside the bass community. At the age of 14 he enrolled in the Moscow Philharmonic School as a recipient of a double bass scholarship. He completed the program, for which five years was usually allowed, in five months. In 1894 he received his degree and began his professional career as a bassist. By the end of the century he had established himself as a virtuoso instrumentalist.³ It was during this period that he made his most lasting contributions to the bass repertoire. He transcribed several works to be performed on his recitals, including Bruch’s Kol Nidrei,⁴ Mozart’s Concerto for Bassoon, K. 191, and Eccles’ Sonata in G Minor among others.⁵ Koussevitzky also wrote four original short solo pieces for double bass around this time. Andante and Valse Miniature, were originally published under the title Deux morceaux, Op. 1. These two works, along with the Humoresque, Op. 4, were originally published in Moscow during the 1890s. The Chanson Triste, Op. 2, was also published in Moscow in 1896.⁶ All four original pieces were published by the firm P. Jurgenson and were probably composed during the 1890s.⁷

In comparing Koussevitzky’s recordings to more recent renditions it makes sense to examine the modern double bass virtuoso Gary Karr as a representative of the modern

⁴ Max Bruch, Kol Nidrei. Transcribed for double bass by Serge Koussevitzky. Manuscript (photocopy), Koussevitzky Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
⁵ Lourie, 37.
style of double bass performance. The relationship between Karr and Koussevitzky is filled with irony and coincidence. Koussevitzky’s 1611 Amati double bass was given to Karr by Olga Koussevitzky, Serge’s wife. According to Karr, in 1962 Olga heard him perform Koussevitzky’s Concerto for Double Bass in recital. The next day she invited him to her apartment where she offered Koussevitzky’s double bass to him as a gift. She did this because she felt he was the one to carry on her late husband’s legacy. She told a mutual friend that during Karr’s performance she saw the ghost of her husband with his arms around Karr, and this vision influenced her decision to give Karr the instrument. This has produced a significant amount of speculation concerning a psychic or paranormal link between Koussevitzky and Karr. Patrons often refer to the “aura” or ghost of Koussevitzky looking over Karr during recital performances.

In 1988 Gary Karr recorded *The Spirit of Koussevitzky* using the 1611 Amati double bass given to him by Koussevitzky’s widow. This recording includes both short pieces that Koussevitzky recorded as well as the *Andante*, Op. 1, and the *Humoresque*, Op. 4, in addition to compositions by contemporaries of Koussevitzky. The four short solo pieces, *Andante*, *Valse Miniature*, *Chanson Triste*, and *Humoresque*, were written by Koussevitzky prior to 1900. These recordings provide the unique opportunity to compare the first known recording of a double bass virtuoso performing his own compositions to that of a modern virtuoso. By comparing the recordings of *Chanson* and *Valse* of Koussevitzky to that of Karr, one may hear the transition in performance

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11 Lourie, 37.
practice between the early and later twentieth century. By further analyzing Karr’s recording of the *Andante* and *Humoresque* in comparison to Koussevitzky’s performance, an historically informed performance of all four pieces can be achieved. The fact that both recordings, made 59 years apart [Koussevitzky in 1929 and Karr in 1988], are performed using the same instrument is an added bonus.\(^\text{12}\)

Before a direct comparison can be made between the recordings there are several factors that should be considered. Almost thirty years passed between the time that Koussevitzky wrote and first performed his compositions\(^\text{13}\) and the date he recorded them. It is impossible to know for certain whether or not Koussevitzky’s interpretation of his own compositions changed during this time. Also, there is very little documentation concerning the physical adaptations made to this particular instrument and how that may have influenced Koussevitzky’s performance of his compositions. In addition, there have been significant advances in recording technology during the twentieth century.

It is important to note that it was during the 1930s when the first complete set of aluminum-covered strings were developed for the double bass.\(^\text{14}\) These strings were developed by Pierre Delescluse and were admired by Koussevitzky. Delescluse was hired as a bassist by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Koussevitzky\(^\text{15}\) and sometime after this the section adopted the strings. It is unclear when Koussevitzky became aware of these strings, although development of metal strings for the double bass had been under way for some time.

\[^\text{12}\text{ Angarano.}\]
\[^\text{13}\text{ Ibid. Koussevitzky is thought to have first performed his compositions in a Berlin recital (1903) using his newly acquired Amati double bass.}\]
\[^\text{14}\text{ Brun, 16.}\]
\[^\text{15}\text{ Ibid, 170.}\]
A silent auction was held during the 2005 *International Society of Bassists* convention in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Among the items for bid were some of the contents of the case which held Koussevitzky’s double bass at the time it was given to Karr. Two of Koussevitzky’s gut strings probably dating from the 1920’s were included (Figure 1.1).

**Figure 1.1**

*Photograph of Koussevitzky’s gut strings, taken at the 2005 International Society of Double Bass Convention by the author.*

It is impossible to know if these were the actual strings that were on the bass when Koussevitzky made his recordings; however, the fact that they were in his case and date from the 1920’s makes it likely that Koussevitzky was using gut strings at the time of the recording in 1929 (Figure 1.2).16

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Re: two items in auction

Dear Mr. Larson,

Koussevitzky’s last string and his last cake of rosin probably date back to the 1920s or earlier. When Olga Koussevitzky gave me his great double bass, it arrived in a large brown leather case that was especially designed for this instrument. It looked like a giant violin case with green velvet linings inside and a couple of pockets with velvet veneered wooden flaps in which I found these two items. I wish that I had saved the bass case, but the leather had deteriorated beyond restoration capabilities and I didn’t think that it was worth bringing it back to its original state. I therefore brought the empty case to Boston where, after some appropriate parting words of respect, I placed it in a skip next to Symphony Hall. To this day, I’ve felt rather guilty about this act of abandonment because I’m sure that the Koussevitzky Amati missed her especially designed cubbyhole, which fit her like a glove. I’m glad I saved the string and rosin that I am happy has found a new home where I know they will be cherished as much as I cherished them for the past forty-three years. As an aside, Fan Tao of D’Addario Strings great coveted the string and rosin when he saw them at my home a few years ago. I thought for sure that he was going to bid on them, but I’ll bet he never knew about the auction (though I did tell Madeleine about him).

Very basst wishes,

[Signature]

Daniel Larson

GARY K KARR
The choice of metal versus gut strings is important and is directly tied to the issue of tuning. There are a variety of tuning schemes for the double bass. The most common, referred to as *orchestral* tuning, has the bass tuned E-A-D-G. However, bassists often use the alternate tuning of F#-B-E-A, transposing the instrument from the key of C to the key of D for solo performance. This is generally referred to as *solo* tuning, since many solo works are written for bass in D and it is not used for playing in ensembles. Koussevitzky clearly intended his pieces to be played using solo tuning. He used this tuning when he made his recordings in 1929\(^ {17}\) and most of the older editions of his compositions call for it.\(^ {18}\) In addition, a reverse image copyist’s score of *Chanson Triste* dated 1896 is written with both the bass and piano parts in the key of e minor.\(^ {19}\) Before the advent of metal strings, bassists often used the solo tuning mentioned above to create more tension on the gut strings, therefore producing more sound and a more incisive, soloistic quality. One current argument is that with the technological advances in metal strings, the solo tuned bass is no longer necessary since the metal strings render a less noticeable difference between the tunings than their gut predecessors.\(^ {20}\) An historical summary of the various changes and inconsistencies in tuning the double bass is outside of the scope of this document. It is sufficient to say that even today there are many players who do not use the standard tuning of the double bass, choosing their tuning scheme based more on individual preference than any other factor. Since publishers now have the capability to change the key of an accompaniment part with the push of a button, many solo works are

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\(^{17}\) Koussevitzky, *Complete Double Bass Recordings.*


\(^{19}\) Koussevitzky, Reverse image copyist’s score, *Chanson Triste.*

published with piano parts in two keys, one in orchestral tuning and one in solo tuning. This allows the bassist to finger the solo the same way regardless of the tuning scheme. However, it was not until David Walter’s 2001 edition that the four short Koussevitzky compositions were accompanied by piano and bass parts written in the same key, indicating it should be played using orchestral tuning.21

Significant advances in recording technology have also been made during the twentieth century. How the limited technology available to Koussevitzky in 1929 effected his recording is impossible to determine for certain.

This study examines the most striking differences between the Koussevitzky and Karr recordings in regards to performance practice, focusing on tempo manipulation (tempo rubato), vibrato, and portamento. Chapter Two analyzes tempo manipulation as it applies to recordings of Valse Miniature and Chanson Triste. Chapter Three focuses on the use of string instrument vibrato during the late nineteenth-century and includes an analysis of Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato. The use of portamento by the Koussevitzky and Karr recordings of Chanson Triste is examined in Chapter Four. Chapter Five brings together the material collected in previous chapters and presents a detailed method for creating an historically informed performance of the two pieces Koussevitzky did not record, Andante and Humoresque. Chapter Six concludes the study by addressing the issue of authenticity and balancing the primary source material (the recordings of Koussevitzky performing his own compositions) with the expectations of a twenty first-century audience.

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21 Koussevitzky, Four Pieces, ed. Walter.
Chapter Two

Tempo Manipulation in *Valse Miniature* and *Chanson Triste*

**Tempo Rubato**

A great deal of research has been dedicated to the practice of tempo modification during the later Romantic period and early twentieth century. The rubato of Chopin is well documented\(^2\) and several books contain information or are entirely dedicated to the history of rubato. When it comes to manipulating the tempo where no indication is made by the composer, there are essentially two types of rubato. The first deals with changing note values or rhythms without altering the beat. For instance, the accompaniment stays steady and the musician is free to stretch or push individual notes or rests, or to manipulate melodic passages throughout a phrase.\(^3\) This type of rubato will be referred to as ‘type A’ throughout this document. The second form of rubato, hereafter referred to as ‘type B’, deals with altering the beat. Wherein the basic pulse of the music changes either for a short time or for an extended passage for structural, dramatic or expressive purposes.\(^4\) While there are examples of both types of rubato in the recordings of


\(^4\) Ibid, 377-378.
Koussevitzky and Karr, the type B rubato is the most common type associated with later Romantic performance practice.  

**Valse Miniature**

By examining *Valse Miniature* in regards to tempo modification, the first noticeable difference is the slower overall tempo that Karr chooses. The performance length of Karr’s rendition is three minutes and twenty-three seconds compared to Koussevitzky’s two minutes and thirty-four seconds. The introduction in each performance foreshadows each artist’s interpretation. Koussevitzky’s accompanist, Pierre Luboshutz, maintains a steady beat during the four bar introduction, using a modest amount of the type A rubato, but generally maintaining a consistent downbeat (dotted half note equal to 54 beats per minute). It is not until Koussevitzky enters in the fifth bar that there is any large sense of tempo manipulation. Even though Koussevitzky utilizes both the type A and B rubato throughout his performance he reserves significant changes in tempo in order to emphasize the transitions from section to section. Within the first A section (mm. 5-20) the downbeat stays relatively consistent. This section is divided into four phrases, four measures each, that play out as an antecedent-consequent, antecedent-consequent pattern which is repeated. Two-measure groupings are evident within each phrase. Example 2.1 shows the antecedent-consequent relationship.

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25 Hudson, 300.
26 Karr, *Spirit of Koussevitzky*.
27 Koussevitzky, *Complete Double Bass Recordings*.
28 Ibid.
Example 2.1 (a)-(d). Antecedent-consequent pattern, section A, *Valse Miniature*.

(a) Antecedent 1: mm. 5-8 (also mm. 43-46, 91-94).

(b) Consequent 1: mm. 9-12 (also mm. 47-50, 95-98).

(c) Antecedent 2: mm. 13-16 (also mm. 51-54, 99-102).

(d) Consequent 2: mm. 17-20.
By using the “Tap” feature on the Dr. Beat metronome it easy to measure the changes in tempo throughout this section.\(^9\) As mentioned above, the four measure piano introduction is consistent with a dotted half note equal to 54 beats per minute. When the soloist enters, the tempo slows slightly for the first antecedent, but only to approximately 48 beats per minute. The consequent increases to a tempo slightly faster than the original tempo established during the introduction to 60 beats per minute, only to give way to the restatement of the antecedent at the original tempo. He stays at 54 beats per minute until the middle of the next consequent where there is a slight acceleration into the first ending. Koussevitzky uses a slight, momentary rubato in mm. 5-6 as well as in subsequent statements of the antecedent. This manipulation gives the listener the impression of accelerating slightly at the beginning of m. 5 and holding back for the last three eighth notes of m. 6. This is achieved while generally maintaining a steady downbeat from measure to measure. The first consequent is steady and is followed by a restatement of the first antecedent. This statement of the antecedent mirrors the first statement. The following consequent seems to accelerate during mm. 17-18; however, the overall tempo only increases slightly, with the piano slowing in m. 20 before the repeat.

The repeat of the A section, while varying to a slight degree from the pattern established above, follows the same general contour throughout until it reaches the second ending. At this point the pianist does not slow down, giving the impression of moving forward into the new section. There is a beat of indeterminate silence before the anacrusis to the B section. Overall the A section has a distinct sense of push and pull. The tempo seems to sway back and forth using the 54 beats per minute, established during the

\(^9\) The “Tap” feature of the Dr. Beat DB-88 metronome indicates in beats per minute how fast an individual is tapping a pad on the control panel. By tapping the beat along with the recording one can come very close to establishing the actual tempo of a section, measure or individual beat of music.
introduction, as point of departure. While Koussevitzky does move the tempo faster and slower, he never wanders very far in either direction. It is in the upcoming B section that the first dramatic change in overall tempo is heard.

Gary Karr’s rendition of the A section is significantly different than Koussevitzky’s, but does maintain some traits of late Romantic performance practice techniques in regard to tempo fluctuation. As mentioned above, the first noticeable difference is the tempo established by the accompanist. The introduction to Karr’s version gives the impression of a slower tempo, since the pianist does slow down in m. 4. The established tempo is very close to the tempo established by Koussevitzky’s accompanist, but this is where the similarities end. By placing a slight rallentando on the second and third beats of m. 4 and changing the placement of the following downbeat Karr’s accompanist has foreshadowed his approach to rubato throughout the section. The significant difference between Karr and Koussevitzky’s rendition of the A section are evident in the statement of the first antecedent. Karr starts the antecedent at tempo and accelerates through mm. 5-6, with only a slight hesitation near the end of m. 6. The tempo then slows significantly in m. 8. The consequent follows the same pattern; there is a significant acceleration during the first two measures, followed by a retardation of the tempo in m. 12. The restatement of the antecedent mirrors the first phrase, but the consequent, after a slight push forward in m. 17, slows throughout mm. 18-20. This is a dramatic departure from Koussevitzky, who placed a slight accelerando in m. 18. Throughout the A section Karr pushes the tempo during the measures that have running eighth notes only to pull back during the measures that contain sustained notes. With the exception of the first couple of notes in each statement of the antecedent, Karr’s eighth
notes are relatively equal in length, albeit faster than the established tempo. Koussevitzky alters the length of his eighth notes during the first two measures of each phrase.

Applying the “Tap” feature to Karr’s performance and establishing an overall tempo for the A section is somewhat more challenging than applying it to Koussevitzky’s rendition. As mentioned above, the tempos established by the accompanists are very similar (54 beats per minute), but where Koussevitzky leaned more toward the type A rubato, only moving slightly on each side of the established tempo and maintaining a consistent downbeat, Karr moves significantly and utilizes the type B rubato to a much greater degree. Overall, Karr’s tempo averages somewhere between 40 and 50 beats per minute with the first two measures being faster than the second pair of measures in each phrase. The slower average tempo is due to a significant slowing of the tempo at the end of each phrase. The fast measures accelerate to as quick as 63 beats per minute, and the slower measures decelerate to as slow as 36 beats per minute.\(^{30}\) There is not a sense of maintaining a steady downbeat, and the time each measure occupies changes significantly throughout Karr’s A section.

A mathematical analysis of the overall tempo of each performer’s A section further indicates his use of the different types of rubato. This section, including the introduction and repeat is 36 measures in length and takes Koussevitzky 40 seconds to complete. The result is an average tempo of 54 beats per minute for his A section, which is consistent with the starting tempo determined by using the Dr. Beat metronome. This supports the conclusion that Koussevitzky utilizes the type A rubato, since his overall average tempo and measure to measure tempo are the same. Karr’s A section takes 49

\(^{30}\) This still uses a dotted half note as the beat, although to establish this it was necessary to “tap” quarter notes and divide the tempo by three.
seconds to complete even though he begins at the same pace as Koussevitzky. The result is an average tempo of 44 beats per minute, which is somewhat slower than the tempo established at the beginning, and supports the conclusion that he utilizes the type B rubato to a greater degree since his starting tempo and overall average tempo are significantly different.

The B section, beginning with the pickup to m. 23 and ending at m. 42, is a section that each performer interprets differently in terms of tempo. As has been established, Karr’s rendition of this piece is 49 seconds longer that Koussevitzky’s, and the B section is the first section to contribute significantly to the difference. Koussevitzky takes 28 seconds to perform this short section and Karr takes 40 seconds.

As mentioned earlier, when Koussevitzky gets to the second ending of the A section, there is no slowing of the tempo. After a rest in the second measure of the second ending (m. 22) Koussevitzky establishes a new tempo with his pickup note that is steady for several measures. This increased tempo, now approximately 74 beats per minute, drives this section forward until a somewhat sudden change to 66 beats per minute in m. 35. From this point the tempo slows slightly until a very deliberate ritardando in mm. 39-42. When Koussevitzky begins to slow the overall tempo in m. 35 he still projects a sense of moving forward until m. 39. He does this by slightly increasing the tempo of the eighth notes in mm. 35 and 37 while still maintaining a gradual slowing of the overall beat. Measures 35 and 37 begin slightly slower than they end, but Koussevitzky still allows the sequence to slow during both iterations (Example 2.2).
**Example 2.2.** mm. 34-38. *Valse Miniature.*

Koussevitzky’s ritardando in mm. 39-42 is very dramatic. He uses the octave leap in m. 40 to slow the beat from a dotted half note being equal to approximately 65 beats per minute to a quarter note being equal to approximately 54 beats per minute with a continued ritardando until the end of the section at m. 42 (Example 2.3).

**Example 2.3.** mm. 39-42. *Valse Miniature.*

Karr’s approach to the B section is different. The sound never stops between the A and B sections as it does during the second ending of Koussevitzky’s version. This interpretation causes the listener to perceive the sustained note in the second ending as a fermata instead of a set rhythmic duration. Where Koussevitzky establishes faster tempo with the anacrusis, Karr maintains the slower tempo but shifts to more of a type A rubato for mm. 23-31. During this portion of the B section Karr’s performance mimics the type A rubato used by Koussevitzky in the A section. The B section contains two measure groupings with a forward push of the tempo during mm. 23, 25, 27, and 29 and a hesitation after each half note in mm. 24, 26, 28, and 30. Unlike Koussevitzky, who
maintained a steady tempo during this section, Karr alternates the length of every other measure. Each two measure group takes up the same amount of time, but the odd numbered measures are faster, and therefore shorter, than the even numbered measures (Example 2.4). This projects a sense of swaying back and forth around the established tempo. The overall tempo during these measures stays relatively consistent at around 48 beats per minute when the two measure groupings are considered, which is very close to the average tempo Karr used in the A section.

Example 2.4. mm. 22-30. Valse Miniature.

Both performers elongate the last note of m. 30 to emphasize the octave leap and the end of the phrase (Example 2.4, last note). Instead of simply establishing a slower tempo during the second half of the B section, as Koussevitzky did, Karr places a ritardando in m. 32 which is continued by the accompanist in mm. 33-34 under Karr’s sustained note. The sustained note is held through the rest in m. 34 and the pick up to m. 35 is held out of tempo. The pattern, increasing the tempo during the measures with faster rhythmic motion and slowing during measures that contain sustained notes, continues until mm. 39-40 where there is a significant ritardando. This ritardando is taken
even further by the accompanist under the sustained note in m. 41, then in m. 42 the chromatic descent slows freely and leads back to a restatement of the A section (Example 2.3).

While this document deals expressly with the recorded performances of Karr and Koussevitzky it should be noted that in both the International\textsuperscript{31} and Liben editions\textsuperscript{32} of this work the only indication of tempo fluctuation occurs at the end of the B section. Fred Zimmerman’s 1949 International edition indicates \textit{rit.} beginning in m. 39 and \textit{tempo} when the A section returns in m. 43. David Walters’ 2001 Liben edition indicates \textit{poco a poco rall.} under the second beat of m. 40, and \textit{a tempo} as the A section returns at m. 43.

The A section that follows is identical to the first statement, with the exception of the last four bars of the second consequent and the omission of the repeat (Example 2.1, a-c). During this A\textsubscript{1} section both performers stay very close to where they started with regard to overall tempo and the use of rubato. The only noticeable difference occurs in the second consequent at the point where the music changes. In m. 54 there is a slurred leap up from a half note C\# to the quarter note G which occurs in the first statement. The downbeat of m. 55 is another articulation of the G, but this time it is a quarter note and is followed by another G an octave lower (Example 2.5). Koussevitzky uses this as a point of momentary hesitation before moving to the end of the phrase. In the middle of m. 56 he accelerates to the end of the phrase moving the tempo forward as a foreshadow to the upcoming variation of the A section. Karr’s treatment of the altered consequent is similar to Koussevitzky’s in that he uses the C\# to G in m. 54 as a point of hesitation. Karr, however, does not increase the tempo at the end of the phrase. He concludes this phrase


\textsuperscript{32} Koussevitzky, \textit{Four Pieces}, ed. Walter.
in a very relaxed way that is similar to his conclusion of the first A section. As Koussevitzky did, Karr foreshadows his interpretation of the following section with his treatment of this consequent (Example 2.5).

**Example 2.5.** mm. 55-58. *Valse Miniature.*

The ensuing section, mm. 59-90, is a conversational variation of the A section. The accompanist plays the antecedent that has previously been played by the soloist to mark the beginning of each A section. The bassist takes on an accompanying role for two measures. Instead of playing straight quarter notes, as was the case when the pianist accompanied the bassist, the bassist now plays a syncopated pattern, then echoes the motive heard in the first measure of this section by the pianist (Example 2.6).

**Example 2.6.** mm. 59-62. *Valse Miniature.*
This interplay between bassist and accompanist continues throughout the section. The music maintains the same overall shape as the A section, but the motives are passed back and forth during the antecedent phrases.

It is during this variation on the A section that Koussevitzky makes his most dramatic changes in tempo. The syncopated effect is somewhat ambiguous throughout the section due to his use of both types of rubato, coupled with the way he connects the syncopated notes. The connectivity and fluid tempo sometimes obscures the syncopation. Another reason the syncopation sometimes seems unclear could have to do with the recording technology of the time. The bass is the most prominent sound on the recording, even when it should be in an accompanying role. When the motive first appears in the piano it is overpowered by the bass. This, coupled with the use of rubato throughout the performance, makes the beat difficult to find when this section begins and therefore further obscuring the syncopation. The listener is unsure whether there is a rhythmic error occurring or if the passage is being played accurately. It should be noted, however, that rhythmic accuracy did not take precedence over musical effect during the early twentieth century, and Koussevitzky’s performance of the syncopated patterns is more likely a convention of that period. Koussevitzky’s tempo, once established, is very similar to the opening and utilizes the type A rubato for the first several measures. However, he adds a significant stretch on the held notes at the end of each phrase, thus changing the beat and incorporating the type B rubato. This elongation of what are generally the highest notes in the phrase occurs in m. 62 (Example 2.6) and again in mm. 65-66 (Example 2.7).
Example 2.7. mm. 63-66. *Valse Miniature.*

Measures 71-74 mark the point of most dramatic tempo manipulation by Koussevitzky in the piece. At this point the quarter note slows to 66 beats per minute, effectively changing the pulse from a dotted half note to a quarter note (Example 2.8).

Example 2.8. mm. 71-74. *Valse Miniature.*

After a point of indeterminate hesitation in m. 74, Koussevitzky returns to a tempo only marginally faster than what he established at the beginning of this section and moves forward. He continues to elongate the higher sustained notes that occur at the end of each phrase in mm. 78, 82 and 86. The final consequent of this A section is a slightly compressed version of the final consequent of A1 (Example 2.5) discussed earlier, and is handled in much the same way (Example 2.9).

Example 2.9. mm. 87-90. *Valse Miniature.*
Karr’s interpretation of this section does not vary significantly from Koussevitzky’s. The most prevalent difference is, again, the overall slower tempo he chooses. Many of the same manipulations of tempo occur in Karr’s rendition; however, they do not appear to have the same effect due to Karr’s slower tempo of approximately 48 beats per minute. The syncopation is clear from the beginning of the section, and the balance between bassist and pianist is appropriate. As mentioned above, this could be due to advances in recording technology. The first place Karr deviates from Koussevitzky’s example occurs in mm. 65-66 (Example 2.7). Karr employs a more significant slowing of the beat and holds the sustained note in m. 66 longer than Koussevitzky. Karr also slows down in mm. 71-74 as Koussevitzky did (Example 2.8); however, relative to the tempo he has chosen, this segment of Karr’s type B rubato does not appear to be as dramatic as Koussevitzky’s. The peak note for Karr is the high sustained half note in m. 82. He sets this up by employing the type B rubato in the preceding phrases, specifically in mm. 77-78 and 81 (Example 2.10).

**Example 2.10.** mm. 75-82. *Valse Miniature.*
As related above, Koussevitzky drives forward between mm. 75-81. Following suit with his conclusion to the A1 section, Karr chooses a much more relaxed approach to the final antecedent-consequent of this section.

Measure 91 begins the final statement of the A theme before the end of the work. Measures 91-102 are identical to both the A and A1 statements (Example 2.1, a-c). Both performers handle this iteration as they did previously, although Koussevitzky increases his tempo marginally to 60 beats per minute. The transition to the closing material occurs at m. 103 where the second consequent phrase should be. This is the same point in the antecedent-consequent relationship that section A1 deviated from what had been established in A (Example 2.5). The closing material takes the place of the second consequent.

Measure 103 marks the beginning of the closing section with a descending diminished arpeggio. Koussevitzky uses this as a vehicle to begin his race to the end. He slurs the arpeggio in groups of two and lands in m. 104 at an increased tempo of 71 beats per minute, which is maintained until the end of the piece. The next six measures consist of tonic and dominant arpeggios, first presented as eighth notes, then triplets. He maintains a consistent tempo, but the written part creates the sense of acceleration. The last six measures of his performance are simply a means of ending the work. Measure 110 consists of the same arpeggio heard in m. 103, only this time it is ascending. While it is written as straight eighth notes, Koussevitzky takes liberty with his own composition and maintains a triplet feel, significantly changing the rhythm and employing rubato to the end.\textsuperscript{33} The final flourish of the tonic arpeggio in triplets with a lower neighbor in mm. 112-113 is altered as well. By the time Koussevitzky gets to m. 113 he has abandoned the

music and is moving forward, playing a harmonic arpeggio until he arrives at the dominant-tonic final cadence. Koussevitzky takes advantage of the early twentieth-century notion that the motion and overall intent of the music is more important than each individual note. This use of the type A rubato and the exciting concluding flourish creates an exciting and flashy end to the piece (Example 2.11).

Example 2.11. Closing Material, mm. 103-end. *Valse Miniature.*

Karr’s ending is equally as exciting, although he employs the type B rubato, demonstrating a different interpretation. As it has been throughout the piece, his tempo is slower than Koussevitzky’s. Another significant difference is that every note is clear, articulated and audible. Although the tempo only increases marginally, there is a distinct sense of acceleration to the end. After elongating the descending arpeggio in m. 103 as
Koussevitzky did, Karr incorporates a slight acceleration in tempo from m. 104, which is approximately 48 beats per minute, to m. 110, which is approximately 63 beats per minute. Measure 110 slows marginally while ascending to m. 111. After the downbeat of m. 111 he prolongs the rest therefore creating a moment of hesitation to set up the final flourish from m. 112 to the end. Karr takes advantage of the increase in written rhythmic intensity, conveying a sense of ending flourish to the listener without sacrificing any of the cleanliness expected from modern performance practice. Karr sets up the final flourish by stretching the rest in m. 111 (Example 2.11).

**Chanson Triste**

As with the *Valse Miniature*, the title of the *Chanson Triste* establishes the overall tone for the performance of the piece. Triste is defined by the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* as:

Triste. (1) [Fr., Sp.] A love song of sad character found in Peru and Argentina, closely related to the Andean *yaraví*. The *triste* is slow, varied in meter, and often with an alternating or concluding section in faster tempo.  

The tempo indication supplied by Koussevitzky at the beginning of the piece is *con tristezza* or “with sadness”. Both Koussevitzky and Karr use rubato as one of the tools to relate sadness to the listener.

As in the *Valse Miniature*, the first noticeable difference when comparing Koussevitzky and Karr’s recordings of the *Chanson Triste* is the tempo taken during the three measure introduction. Koussevitzky’s accompanist establishes a slow tempo of

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35 Koussevitzky, Reverse image copyist’s score, *Chanson Triste*. 


approximately 46 beats per minute, and as was the case in *Valse Miniature*, does not deviate until Koussevitzky enters on the down beat of the A section (Example 2.12, a).

Karr’s accompanist begins the piece at a slightly faster pace, establishing a tempo of 54 beats per minute. Unlike Koussevitzky’s accompanist, Karr’s includes a metered ritardando by adding a fourth measure to the introduction. The introduction is written as three measures. However, Karr’s accompanist establishes the beat and performs four measures, placing what is written on beat three of m. 3 on the downbeat of what would be m. 4 and making it a dotted half note (Example 2.12, b).\(^{36}\)

**Example 2.12.** mm. 1-3. *Chanson Triste.*

(a) The introduction as written and played by Koussevitzky’s accompanist:

(b) The introduction as played by Karr’s accompanist:

\(^{36}\) The International Edition (1949) and the copyist’s score (1896) both have a three measure introduction. The David Walter edition (2001) indicates a four measure introduction.
Koussevitzky enters after the introduction and any sense of a steady beat is lost for several measures. The first two phrases of the A section make abundant use of the type B rubato. The tempo immediately slows during mm. 4-5 to approximately 33 beats per minute, but to say this is an established tempo would not be accurate. On beat three of m. 5 Koussevitzky elongates the triplet pattern, slowing the tempo even more until he arrives at m. 6. Measure 7 is not metered. Koussevitzky ignores his own rests in m. 7 and enters with the downbeat of m. 8 as the notes in the previous bar decay (Example 2.13).

Example 2.13. mm. 4-7. *Chanson Triste.*

Koussevitzky enters early after a held note or during a rest several places throughout the A section, and the rest of the piece. This obscures the beat and maintains a sense of free or non-metered time. There are instances when the loss of time is almost metric. In m. 14 there is a half note followed by a quarter note; Koussevitzky moves to the quarter note almost exactly a half a beat early, making this particular measure sound as if it is written in 5/8 time.

Just as there are several occasions at which Koussevitzky loses time, there are as many at which he gains time. This usually comes when there is a moving pattern, such as

37 Examples of the bass part for *Chanson Triste* are written as it sounds (solo tuning).
the triplets in m. 5 (Example 2.13), or when three eighth notes follow a dotted quarter note, as in mm. 10, 13, 16, and 17 (Example 2.14).

Example 2.14. rhythmic pattern mm. 10, 13, 16, and 17. *Chanson Triste*.

Usually this stretching of the rhythm is accomplished by prolonging the first eighth note with the following two eighth notes in the previously established tempo. This is often emphasized by the use of portamento, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Karr’s treatment of the A section is similar to Koussevitzky’s in some aspects but differs significantly in others. Both performers enter at a slower tempo than their accompanists established during the introduction; however, Karr’s beat is easier to discern than Koussevitzky’s. A tempo of approximately 43 beats per minute is established by Karr in m. 4, and his accompanist and is steady until the triplet pattern in m. 5. As Koussevitzky did, Karr slows the tempo during the triplets making m. 5 longer. The sustained note that follows in m. 6, however, is given its full value and is in tempo. Where Koussevitzky ignored the rests and entered early in m. 7, Karr enters late, stretching the rests to create a slightly longer pause before his entrance in m. 8 (Example 2.13). Karr follows this pattern throughout the A section.

At the points where Koussevitzky entered early, Karr tends to hesitate or stay very close to his established tempo. Both performers use occurrences of faster rhythmic
motion to manipulate the tempo. Karr, however, slows down during the eighth notes as if there were a rallentando indicated (Example 2.14). Koussevitzky increases and decreases the tempo within the eighth note patterns, creating an ambiguous sense of time. This concept of temporal ambiguity is something that permeates Koussevitzky’s performance of the A section. Karr’s performance, while using a significant amount of rubato with equally dramatic results, maintains an overall sense of the beat that does not exist in Koussevitzky’s performance.

The B section begins at m. 20 after a repeat of the A section and ends before a short cadenza at m. 35. *Più mosso* is indicated in both the accompaniment and solo parts at m. 20. Koussevitzky increases the tempo in m. 20 to approximately 75 beats per minute, only to relax slightly in m. 21. This increase and relaxation of the tempo is repeated in mm. 22-23 as well. The accompaniment mirrors the added motion with sixteenth notes on the first two beats of each or these measures. Koussevitzky stays very close to the 75 beats per minute established at m. 20 for the first half of the B section holding back slightly at the end of mm. 24, 25, and 26. At m. 27 there is a descending eighth note pattern that leads to m. 28. Koussevitzky increases the overall tempo again, accelerating as the pitch descends and slowing slightly as the pitch ascends through m. 31 (Example 2.15).

**Example 2.15.** mm. 27-31. *Chanson Triste.*

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38 Koussevitzky, Reverse image copyist’s score, *Chanson Triste.*
At m. 32 an *accelerando* is indicated. Koussevitzky, who has accelerated the tempo from m. 28, stays steady, waiting until m. 33 to deliberately increase the tempo until the fermata at m. 35 that marks the end of the B section. Throughout the B section Koussevitzky increases and decreases the tempo, but in mm. 28-35 there is an overall acceleration that culminates by reaching a tempo of 138 beats per minute in m. 34 (Example 2.16).

**Example 2.16.** mm. 32-35. *Chanson Triste.*

Throughout the B section Karr’s tempo becomes more ambiguous. He also creates a sense of more motion, as indicated, when he gets to m. 20; however, he sets this up in a different way than Koussevitzky. In the repeat of the A section he slows significantly, to less than 38 beats per minute, before the sustained note and subsequent silence that precedes the B section. This ritardando helps Karr convey forward motion at m. 20, even though his tempo does not increase significantly. For Karr, it is the long notes in the first half of the B section that are elongated and the shorter notes that accelerate. The dotted quarter note in mm. 20 and 22, as well as the quarter notes in m. 21 are at a tempo of approximately 54 beats per minute, while the eighth notes in the same measures are significantly faster. The increasing and decreasing tempo that Koussevitzky used in his rendition is also used by Karr, but in a different way. Karr’s

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39 Ibid.
tempo fluctuations occur within the measure and exaggerate the rhythm. The short notes (eighth notes) are faster and the long notes (dotted quarter notes and quarter notes) are slower (Example 2.17).

**Example 2.17.** mm. 20-23. *Chanson Triste.*

Karr also increases the tempo at m. 27. The tempo becomes relatively steady at approximately 73 beats per minute, although he does stretch the third beat of each measure (Example 2.15). As he approaches the *accelerando* indicated in m. 32 he slows the tempo. Instead of increasing the speed from mm. 32-35 Karr stays close to 70 beats per minute and adds a ritardando at m. 34 which leads to the fermata in m. 35 (Example 2.16).

Both performers treat the cadenza in a slightly different manner. Both of them are playing the same notes, but the speed at which they play is different. Koussevitzky holds the fermata at the beginning of the cadenza for only a second, and then takes a total of 17 seconds to get from the end of the sustained note at the beginning of the cadenza to the last fermata before the transitional material that begins with a pick up to m. 36. Karr holds the fermata at the beginning of the cadenza for four seconds, and 25 seconds pass before he releases the last fermata and begins the pickup to m. 36. The length of time it takes each performer to play the cadenza reflects his overall approach to the work. Karr
tends to be more concerned with the clarity of each individual note and is more deliberate in many ways than Koussevitzky.

A three-measure transition separates the end of the cadenza from the final statement of the A section, which begins at m. 39. This statement of the A section is identical to the first statement, with the exception of the last measure. A dotted half note is written to fill the last measure of the final statement, where a quarter note followed by two quarter rests was written at end of the first statement. The only indication of tempo given in the score is *Tempo I.*

Koussevitzky treats the final statement of the A section in much the same way he treated the first statement, although he maintains a comparatively steady pace when not deliberately altering the written rhythm. The tempo is consistent when he enters in m. 39 at 43 beats per minute. He still uses a significant amount of rubato; however, throughout this final statement of A he stays very close to his established tempo. The rubato during this section is reserved for specific rhythmic events such as the triplet figure in m. 40 (which corresponds to m. 5, Example 2.13). He still ignores the rests that happen after the first phrase, entering as the last note of the phrase decays, but the majority of the second phrase is steady. He adds a ritardando at the end of the piece and holds the last note until it dies away.

Karr performs the last statement of the A section in a manner similar to his first statement. His tempo is close to Koussevitzky’s at m. 39; however, he does increase and decrease the tempo more than Koussevitzky did. He slightly exaggerates the rubato used at the beginning of the piece, elongating the faster rhythmic events and adding slight

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40 Ibid.
hesitations between phrases. As Koussevitzky did, he adds a ritardando at the end and lets the final note decay.

Karr’s performance of *Chanson Triste* takes five minutes and thirty-four seconds; almost a full minute longer than Koussevitzky’s which takes four minutes and thirty-five seconds. As mentioned in Chapter One, the advances in recording technology could have an influence on the differences in performance time. The playback speed of Koussevitzky’s recordings may be faster than his actual performance. The fact that his pitch in *Chanson Triste* is approximately fifteen cents higher than Karr’s supports this hypothesis. However, this conclusion assumes that both performers used the same exact tuning pitch, which is impossible to determine. In addition, the tempo at the beginning of both the Karr and Koussevitzky recordings is almost identical. Regardless of whether or not the playback speed of Koussevitzky’s recording has been altered, the relative changes in tempo would be proportional. The exact tempo he used may not be what is indicated in this chapter, but the relative flexibility of tempo, and the comparison to Karr’s tempo manipulation, is still accurate.
Chapter Three

Vibrato in *Valse Miniature* and *Chanson Triste*

**Vibrato**

One of the most significant changes in performance practice that occurred during Koussevitzky’s life was the use of vibrato. There is not much written concerning the use of vibrato as it applies to the solo bassist during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but there are several sources that discuss its use by the solo violinist. Between 1750 and 1900 vibrato, in a variety of forms, was used almost entirely as an ornament.\(^\text{41}\) The accepted ruling tone of the period was steady and without oscillation. The use of vibrato at the end of the nineteenth century was controversial and its acceptance can be summed up by Cecil Forsyth (1914):

> The Strings had to fight for centuries before they were allowed to use vibrato without question. It was regarded as a disreputable way that bad fiddlers had of *making music sound emotional*. Everybody protested against it, tooth and nail, as a circus-clown’s way of playing. Leopold Mozart, Spohr, and Courvoisier all took this view…Clear bowing was the thing they wanted, and a nice variety in dynamics. Vibrato was taboo.\(^\text{42}\)

It should be noted that Forsyth’s *Orchestration* does not include a discussion of vibrato in the chapter on string technique. Rather, it is included in the addenda near the end of the

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\(^\text{41}\) Brown, 521.

treatise.\textsuperscript{43} It was during the 1920s that vibrato became more widely accepted, although there were still teachers who regarded it as an effect, such as Leopold Auer (1921):

\begin{quote}
violinists…those who are convinced that an eternal \textit{vibrato} is the secret of soulful playing, of piquancy in performance-are pitifully misguided in their belief…No, the \textit{vibrato} is an effect, an embellishment…\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

During the same decade there were others who began to argue that the \textit{absence} of vibrato had become the embellishment instead of the norm. It was during the 1920s and 30s that the continuous vibrato to which modern audiences are accustomed to became fundamental to the technique of string playing.\textsuperscript{45}

The effect this had on Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato and his interpretation of his own works is impossible to surmise. Koussevitzky was a double bass student of the late nineteenth century, and one can assume that he was taught to use vibrato very sparingly and only as an embellishment. When Koussevitzky made the recordings in 1929, the accepted use of vibrato had clearly changed from the time he composed the pieces during the 1890s. As a conductor and player, Koussevitzky had to have been aware of these changes. This is demonstrated by his frequent use of vibrato during his performance of both \textit{Chanson Triste} and \textit{Valse Miniature}. Vibrato had moved from being an embellishment of the tone to an expected attribute of string playing.

To explore performance practice in terms of vibrato, the first comparison made will be Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato in the slow, lyrical \textit{Chanson Triste} to his use of the technique in his performance of the faster, more technical \textit{Valse Miniature}. Then a direct

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[43]{Ibid, 493.}
\footnotetext[44]{Leopold Auer, \textit{Violin Playing As I Teach It} (New York: 1921), 22-3.}
\end{footnotes}
comparison can be made between how Koussevitzky employed the technique in 1929 to Karr’s use of the technique in 1989.

**Koussevitzky and Chanson Triste**

Koussevitzky’s approach to vibrato during his recording of *Chanson Triste* is evident during the A section. Throughout the A section, and its repeat, he employs an almost constant vibrato on notes that are a beat or more in length. In general, oscillations are the same from note to note with regard to the speed (how fast the oscillations occur) and depth (the amount of deviation from the original pitch). The speed of the oscillations is consistently fast and does not alter based on the length of the note. The depth does not move a great deal from the primary pitch; however, it does vary enough for the listener to notice the vibrato. Two factors that effect Koussevitzky’s choice to apply vibrato to a given note are: 1) the length of the note in real time (i.e. how long does the note sound regardless of its’ rhythmic value); 2) the application of portamento. Koussevitzky generally applies vibrato to those notes which are longer and omits vibrato from those notes on which he employs portamento.

This application of vibrato can be heard throughout the A section (mm. 4-19), and is evident during the first note he plays on beat one of m. 4 (Example 3.1). The tone begins soft and steady without vibrato, as the volume increases during the beat Koussevitzky adds vibrato. This quarter note is approximately 2.7 seconds in length with the vibrato beginning almost a full second after the note sounds. Koussevitzky does not gradually increase the speed or depth of the oscillation to introduce vibrato to the note, rather the vibrato begins after the pitch has been given enough time to solidify in the
listener’s ear. The next note, which occurs on beat three of the same measure, also includes vibrato, but it is not as prominent. This quarter note is shorter in length (approximately 1.5 seconds long) and not as loud. Beat one of the following measure is a quarter note that is similar to beat one of m. 4. This quarter note is approximately 2.1 seconds in length. During the triplet pattern that follows in m. 5 there is an absence of vibrato. As Chapters Two and Four discuss, there is a very prominent use of portamento and rubato during this pattern. While the first eighth note triplet of the pattern is rhythmically shorter than the preceding quarter notes, Koussevitzky’s use of rubato makes it long enough (approximately .8 seconds) to use vibrato. He chooses not to though, instead employing portamento to emphasize the note. He does not use vibrato again until the dotted half note in m. 6 (tied to a quarter note in m. 7). The vibrato on this pitch begins almost as the pitch sounds and is similar in speed and depth to the previous quarter notes. This note, the longest in terms of rhythmic value (four beats) and real time (3.7 seconds) to this point, demonstrates the even manner in which Koussevitzky utilizes this technique. Even though there is ample time to vary the speed of the oscillations, Koussevitzky does not.

**Example 3.1.** mm. 4-7. *Chanson Triste.*
The consequent to example 3.1 occurs in mm. 8-11 (Example 3.2) and Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato is very similar to the antecedent. The first quarter note is approximately 2.3 seconds long (it sounds through the notated rest) and the vibrato is similar, at this point, to that of the antecedent. Throughout the consequent, as well as the following antecedent-consequent phrase (mm. 12-19), vibrato occurs on the longer notes, as well as some of the eighth notes, with a consistent speed and depth.

Example 3.2. mm. 8-11. *Chanson Triste.*

It should be noted that in the A section there are instances of vibrato that occur at the beginning of notes which are later embellished by portamento. This does not happen often and occurs in situations such as m. 14 (Example 3.3). The half note in m. 14 has a steady vibrato which ceases as Koussevitzky uses portamento to ascend to the next note.

Example 3.3. mm. 12-15. *Chanson Triste.*

The B section of Koussevitzky’s rendition also is somewhat predictable when it comes to his use of vibrato (mm. 20-35). As in the A section, it is the longer notes on
which Koussevitzky vibrates. However, this section increases in tempo and has a faster written rhythmic pattern, thus decreasing the number of notes to which the technique is applied. Koussevitzky also vibrates the highest notes in most phrases regardless of their rhythmic value. The notes which are circled in example 3.4 indicate where Koussevitzky applies vibrato during the B section.

Example 3.4. mm. 20-35. B section. *Chanson Triste.*

It is notable that all of the dotted quarter notes are emphasized with vibrato as well as most of the highest notes in each passage. Koussevitzky creates time to apply vibrato to these higher notes (the circled notes in mm. 28, 30, 32, and 33 in example 3.4) by combining the technique with rubato.
The cadenza is performed without vibrato with the exception of the three half notes which occur in the transitional material near the end (Example 3.5). This is notable since Koussevitzky has used vibrato throughout the performance on longer notes and elects not to apply it to the longer notes in the cadenza.

Example 3.5. Transitional material at the end of the cadenza. *Chanson Triste.*

Koussevitzky used vibrato during the last statement of the A section as he did in the first. The speed and depth of the vibrato remain consistent, even throughout the ritardando that leads to the final note.

Robert Philip notes in his book, *Early Recordings and Musical Style,* that the limited use of vibrato in early recordings by string players gives an impression of inexpressive playing. He cites that, of the string players who lived through the transition of vibrato from its use exclusively as an ornament (the traditional approach) to that of an almost constant expressive tool (the modern approach), cellist Pablo Casals succeeded the most in combining both styles. He indicates that Casals’ approach was to use vibrato most of the time, but to vary its speed and depth based on the musical situation.46 Koussevitzky’s performance of *Chanson Triste* can be classified as transitional, based on

46 Philip, 105.
that statement. He does use vibrato frequently during the recording, but does not vary its speed or depth.

**Koussevitzky and Valse Miniature**

Many similarities exist between Koussevitzky’s recordings of *Chanson Triste* and *Valse Miniature* when considering his use of vibrato. While both pieces are different in overall style, Koussevitzky’s approach to vibrato is the same. The B section of the *Chanson* can be compared directly to the A section of the *Valse* (mm. 5-20). Both sections have a fast rhythmic motion and Koussevitzky reserves his use of vibrato for notes that are of longer rhythmic value or that are emphasized with tempo manipulation. As presented in Chapter Two, the *Valse* begins with a four measure introduction, which is followed by two antecedent-consequent phrases. Koussevitzky uses vibrato, often in conjunction with a slight rubato, on most of the sustained notes that occur in the third and fourth measures of each antecedent and consequent (Example 3.6). Vibrato is absent from the final note of the first consequent, possibly because Koussevitzky fingered this note as a harmonic instead of a stopped note (Example 3.6, b). This is particularly noticeable during both the first iteration of the section, as well as the repeat, because the previous dotted quarter note was embellished with vibrato.

**Example 3.6 (a)-(d).** Antecedent-consequent pattern, section A, *Valse Miniature.*

(a) Antecedent 1: mm. 5-8 (also mm. 43-46, 91-94).
(b) Consequent 1: mm. 9-12 (also mm. 47-50, 95-98).

(c) Antecedent 2: mm. 13-16 (also mm. 51-54, 99-102).

(d) Consequent 2: mm. 17-20.

Koussevtzky’s use of vibrato in the following section (mm. 23-42) is less frequent, due to the increased tempo and faster rhythmic motion. Based on his previous use of vibrato, the listener would expect to hear the half notes in mm. 24, 26, and 28 performed with this embellishment; however, this is not the case. Koussevitzky does not use vibrato in this section until he reaches m. 30. The half note in this measure is embellished not only with vibrato, but rubato and a portamento to the following quarter note (Example 3.7).
Example 3.7. mm. 22-30. *Valse Miniature*

![Musical notation example 3.7](image)

Vibrato is used throughout the remainder of this section on most sustained notes, such as the dotted quarter note that is tied across the bar line in m. 33. There are notes of shorter rhythmic value in this section which are embellished with vibrato as well, such as the quarter notes on beat three of mm. 34, 36, and 38. Koussevitzky emphasizes the eighth note on beat two of measure 40 by using vibrato and rubato. Circles around the notes in example 3.8 indicate instances of vibrato during the last phrase of the section, mm. 39-42.

Example 3.8. mm. 39-42. *Valse Miniature.*

![Musical notation example 3.8](image)

Koussevitzky uses vibrato in the restatement of the A section, mm 43-58, as he did during the first statement. A syncopated pattern begins in m. 59 with repeated pitches (Example 2.6). This pattern returns again in mm. 63, 67, 75, 79, and 83. As mentioned
in Chapter Two, the rhythm during this syncopation is obscured; however, Koussevitzky does use vibrato constantly during these repeated notes. While he uses his bow to convey the rhythm, the vibrato produced by his left arm is the same, as if there were only one long sustained note for two measures. Also discussed in Chapter Two is the significant slowing of the tempo in mm. 71-72 (Example 2.8). These notes are also embellished with vibrato to emphasize their importance.

Measures 91 through the end of the piece consist of another statement of the A section and closing material. As with previous statements of the A section, Koussevitzky does not change his use of vibrato. The rhythmic intensity and acceleration during the closing material does not leave time for vibrato, and the technique is absent after measure 104 for the remainder of the piece.

Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato during performances of both *Chanson Triste* and *Valse Miniature* is frequent but not constant. In addition, it does not vary significantly in speed and depth. These attributes mark Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato as transitional between the old style and the modern style. In 1924 Carl Flesch discusses the use of vibrato during this time in his method, *The Art of Violin Playing."

There are harsh differences of opinion as to whether vibrato should be used in a continuous or intermittent manner. Purely theoretically, the vibrato being a means of heightened expression should be used only when the musical, expressive feeling justifies it. If we take a survey of well-known violinists of our time, we realize however that practically all of them use vibrato constantly.47

He also discusses the depth and speed of vibrato.

The opposite [of a satisfying vibrato] is a vibrato that appears grafted onto the sound and gives the impression that sound and vibrato don’t belong together. In the last few years, with the increasing

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47 Flesch, 20.
“industrialization” of musical life, this shallow manner has found its home in places of entertainment of a lower order, so that one can, with good cause, speak of a “coffee-house” or “movie-house” vibrato. The tone becomes syrupy mush which through its continuous, unvaried use of vibrato lacks all diversity and deeper, meaningful expressive ability. This type of vibrato is too slow and too wide, and becomes quite unbearable within a short time. In a general sense a rapid vibrato is preferable to a slow one because it produces less deviation from the original pitch and therefore the tone seems firmer and more stable.48

This quote supports Koussevitzky’s use of a fast vibrato that does not deviate far from the original pitch. While any performance in any era can be classified as transitional in one aspect or another, Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato is indicative of the trend away from the old style and moving toward what is now thought of as the modern style.

Karr and Chanson Triste

The Oxford Companion to Music defines vibrato as:

A wavering of pitch used to enrich and intensify the tone of a voice or instrument; it is practiced in particular by wind players, string players, and singers. At present the technique is used frequently, and is commonly held to be an important constituent of a competent player’s or singer’s tone. In this form (often described as ‘continuous vibrato’) the device has been in currency since the beginning of the 20th century, having been made popular by such players as Kreisler. In consequence, the senza vibrato tone has become a special effect in contemporary music.49

Karr’s use of vibrato during his 1989 recording of Chanson Triste is representative of the modern style. It is constant and varies in intensity, depending on the expressiveness of the music. The oscillations are slightly slower, which allows greater deviation from the original pitch. There are instances in which Karr begins a note with a steady tone then adds vibrato gradually. Throughout the performance there are very few notes during the recording that do not have vibrato. When analyzing Karr’s performance

it is more prudent to point out those instances that Karr does not use vibrato and to highlight the differences in particular phrases and sections between his recording and Koussevitzky’s.

Both performers make frequent use of vibrato throughout the A section of *Chanson Triste*. Unlike Koussevitzky, Karr’s vibrato is not effected as much by the length of the notes in real time. The first note Karr plays on beat one of m. 4 (Example 3.1) is approximately 1.7 seconds in length, and vibrato is in use from the initial attack of the note. Koussevitzky’s first note was a full second longer than Karr’s and the vibrato was not used until a full second after the pitch began. The next two quarter notes (beat three of m. 4 and beat one of m. 5) are treated equally by Karr with the same intense vibrato he used on the first note. Karr’s note on beat three of m. 4 is approximately 1.1 seconds in length, and there is no break between that pitch and the following quarter note on beat one of m. 5. His vibrato does not stop, but sounds consistently throughout both notes. Koussevitzky’s vibrato on beat three of m. 4 was considerably less intense than the surrounding notes. The triplet pattern that follows is another point of significant difference between the two performers use of vibrato. Koussevitzky omits vibrato entirely until the dotted quarter note in m. 6. Karr, on the other hand, omits vibrato for only the first three notes of the triplet pattern. The remainder of the pattern includes vibrato. This demonstrates early in the performance that Karr will use vibrato on notes of shorter rhythmic value.

The first time through the A section Karr follows the pattern established in the first phrase. Generally, the vibrato is constant; however, there are some pitches on which Karr does not vibrate. Beat three of m. 8 is one example. This pitch (concert E) can be
played as a harmonic instead of a stopped note. Generally, bassists do not use vibrato when they play harmonics. The omission of vibrato on this particular note stands out because m. 8 functions as the consequent to m. 4 and Karr used vibrato at this point during the antecedent.

Unlike Koussevitzky, the repeat of Karr’s A section is significantly different than his first iteration. Both performers change to a softer dynamic, but Karr takes this farther by using *flautando*. He adjusts his use of vibrato to compliment the effect during the first two phrases of the section, which results in a much softer, transparent sound. Karr does use vibrato throughout the repeated section, but it is on the sustained note in m. 11 that he first changes the speed of the oscillations during the note (Example 3.2). This note marks the point of transition from the *flautando* to his original bowing style and begins without vibrato. Karr gradually adds vibrato; the first oscillations are slow and speed up along with the dynamic level. This is a style of vibrato that Koussevitzky did not use in either his recording of *Chanson Triste* or *Valse Miniature*.

The B section of *Chanson Triste* demonstrates Karr’s use of vibrato on notes of shorter rhythmic value. As shown in example 3.4, Koussevitzky used vibrato during this section very sparingly. Karr used the technique continuously throughout the section with the exception of the eighth notes in m. 22 and the faster notes in mm. 28-30. The circled notes in example 3.9 indicate those notes on which Karr *does not* use vibrato during the B section.

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50 Flautando is a flute-like effect usually produce by bowing over the fingerboard. It is generally used in soft, sustained passages.
Example 3.9. mm. 20-35. *Chanson Triste*

The omission of vibrato in mm. 28-29 is related to the accelerando Karr uses at this point in the performance.\(^{51}\) The tempo does not allow every note to last long enough to use vibrato.

During the cadenza that follows, Karr omits vibrato at certain points, as an effect (Example 3.10). Karr gradually speeds up during the first few quarter notes of the cadenza and uses vibrato on all of them. As he reaches the bottom octave he slows down (even though the written rhythm indicates eighth notes and sixteenth notes) but omits vibrato. He does use vibrato on the lowest note of the passage (the whole note), but the oscillations are slower than has been previously heard. Vibrato is absent during the rest of the cadenza until the final note, which is sustained and marked with a fermata.

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\(^{51}\) See Chapter Two, page 28-31.
Example 3.10. mm. 35, cadenza. *Chanson Triste*

The following three measures are transitional material, followed by the final statement of the A section. This section is treated in almost an identical manner to the first statement of the A section. Karr’s vibrato is almost continuous throughout. There are a few instances where it is left out that were discussed earlier in this chapter. For the final two notes of the piece (the leading tone resolving to tonic), Karr varies the speed of the vibrato. The oscillations slow on the leading tone and vibrato is added gradually to the resolution. This functions with the concluding ritardando to create a sense of finality and ending to the piece.

It should be noted that in the most recent edition of *Chanson Triste* the indication *sempre e senza vibrato* occurs at the beginning of the final statement of the A section.\(^{52}\) While neither Koussevitzky or Karr omit vibrato during this section, the fact that the indication exists in a modern edition further supports the changing role of vibrato. It is now the absence of vibrato that is the embellishment or special effect, as opposed to the beginning of the twentieth century when the presence of vibrato was the embellishment.

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**Karr and Valse Miniature**

*Valse Miniature*, with its faster tempo and greater rhythmic motion than the *Chanson*, leaves little opportunity for either performer to use vibrato. Both performers use vibrato consistently on sustained notes, which in turn highlights moments of rhythmic flexibility.\(^{53}\) This is evident in the A sections of both performances. Both Karr and Koussevitzky use vibrato during the last two measures of each antecedent and consequent throughout the A sections (Example 3.6, a-d). The most significant difference in their use of this technique during this section happens at the initial attack of each of the long notes (such as mm. 7-8, 11-12, 15-16, and 19-20). Koussevitzky’s vibrato, when used, begins almost immediately as the note sounds. Karr often chooses to let the note sound for an instance before the vibrato begins. As a result, when Karr’s vibrato starts it is slightly slower near the beginning of the note than at the end. This variation in speed is not something that was apparent in Koussevitzky’s performance and is a trait of the modern style. There are instances in which both performers allow the sustained notes to sound briefly without vibrato, but in Koussevitzky’s rendition the ensuing vibrato begins and remains at a constant speed throughout the note. There is one point during the A section where Koussevitzky uses vibrato and Karr does not. This occurs at the end of the second antecedent which is the highest note of the section (written G, Example 3.6, c, m. 16). This note is generally played as a harmonic rather than a stopped note when it is approached by intervallic leap. Since harmonics usually do not respond well to vibrato, this is most likely the reason Karr chose not to vibrate. He plays the same note in m. 40, only this time as a stopped note with vibrato.

\(^{53}\) See Chapter Two
A significant difference in the following section (mm. 23-42) is each performer’s decision to apply vibrato to certain notes. As mentioned earlier, Koussevitzky does not use vibrato in this section until m. 30. Karr chooses to apply vibrato to all notes that have greater rhythmic value than an eighth note (Example 3.7 and 3.8). He uses vibrato consistently throughout the section and it does not vary greatly in speed and depth. There are two instances where the performer is required to make a leap of an octave, once in m. 30 and again in m. 40. Karr does not use vibrato on the high quarter note on beat three of m. 30. As he did in the A section, he plays this note as a harmonic. In m. 40, however, he uses a portamento to get to the top note, which is performed as a stopped note. The note is held due to the tempo slowing during this measure, and vibrato is used. The combination of rubato, portamento and vibrato at this point in the piece creates a very dramatic effect.

After a restatement of the A section, the syncopated portion discussed earlier in this chapter begins in m. 59. Again, Karr uses vibrato throughout this section as well on notes that are greater than an eighth note in rhythmic value, with the exception of the anacrusis to each phrase. In each instance that an upbeat is followed by a measure of syncopation, Karr plays the note *senza vibrato*. By doing this the emphasis is removed from the upbeat and placed on the syncopation. Circles around the notes in example 3.11 indicate the upbeats that are played without vibrato.
Example 3.11. mm. 58-90. *Valse Miniature.*

Measure 91 marks the final statement of the A section before the closing material.

The sustained notes in the last two measures of the second antecedent (mm. 101-102) are
the last time during the piece that vibrato is used by Karr. This is followed by closing material during which the rhythmic motion is too fast for vibrato.

The comparison of each performer’s use of vibrato allows us to follow the change in attitude toward vibrato throughout the twentieth century. Koussevitzky, a student of the late nineteenth century, employs vibrato too frequently for it to be classified as an occasional embellishment. The nineteenth-century attitude of restraint and selective use is not evident in Koussevitzky’s performance; however, the idea of the continuous vibrato heard in Karr’s performances is not present either. Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato is transitional; it bridges the gap between vibrato as an ornament and continuous vibrato. Karr’s use of continuous vibrato is an excellent representation of the late twentieth-century’s evolution of vibrato.
Chapter Four

Portamento in *Chanson Triste*

**Portamento**

One of the most striking differences, when comparing the recordings of Koussevitzky and Karr, is their use of portamento. In regards to bowed stringed instruments, this audible sliding between notes probably began in the early eighteenth century when violinists started shifting on a regular basis.\(^{54}\) It is generally agreed that there are three types of portamento: 1) a continuous slide on one finger from note to note with all intermediate pitches being audible; 2) a slide in which one finger slides from the starting note to an intermediate note, followed by the final note being played by a different finger; 3) one finger plays the starting note, another finger is placed on an intermediate note and then slides to the final note (Example 4.1).\(^{55}\)

**Example 4.1.** Three types of portamento.

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\(^{54}\) Brown, 560.

\(^{55}\) Philip, 144.
The New Harvard Dictionary of Music defines portamento as:

A continuous movement from one pitch to another through all of the intervening pitches, without, however, sounding these discretely. It is principally an effect in singing and string playing, though for the latter and for other instruments capable of such an effect, the term glissando is often used.\(^{56}\)

For purposes of this document the term portamento will refer to any audible sliding between two notes.

**Chanson Triste: A Section**

A comparison of Koussevitzky’s and Karr’s *Chanson Triste* recordings demonstrate many examples of portamento, although they often use this technique in different ways. Koussevitzky uses a very obvious portamento, often combining it with rubato to further intensify the effect. The bass enters in m. 4 after a three bar introduction.\(^{57}\) Koussevitzky uses three portamentos in the first phrase, with one of them manipulating the tempo. The first occurs at a point where a shift is needed, between the B on beat three of m. 4 down to the G on beat one of m. 5. This portamento is somewhat restrained; however, the portamento that happens between the E and F sharp in beat two of m. 5 is very obvious and is emphasized by a dramatic rubato. The third is extremely subtle and leads up to the final note, a sustained C in m. 6. Koussevitzky’s use of portamento is indicated in example 4.2 with a line above the staff.

Karr’s use of portamento in the opening A section of this piece is less frequent and obvious than that of Koussevitzky. Within the first phrase there are two very subtle

\(^{56}\) Randel, ed., 649.
\(^{57}\) The International Edition (1949) and the copyist’s score (1896) both have a three measure introduction. The David Walter edition (2001) indicates a four measure introduction. Measure numbers for this discussion are taken from the International edition (see example 2.12).
instances: the first occurs at the same place as Koussevitzky’s first portamento, between the B in m. 4 and the G in m. 5, and the second occurs in m. 5 during beat three between the G and A. Both instances by Karr are barely perceptible. These are also shown in example 4.2, indicated by a line below the staff. The line enclosed in parenthesis indicates a very restrained use of portamento.

Example 4.2. mm. 4-7. Chanson Triste.

Koussevitzky’s use of portamento is indicated by a line above the staff. Karr’s use of portamento is indicated by a line below the staff. Parenthesis indicate a very subtle use of portamento.

During the second phrase of the A section, mm. 8-11, both performers make use of noticeable portamentos. Koussevitzky’s first use happens on beat one of m. 9 descending from F-sharp to E. In mm. 10-11 there are two in a row, the first between E and G and the next crossing the bar line to the final sustained note of the phrase (Example 4.3). This phrase shows Karr’s first clear use of portamento. There is an obvious slide between beats two and three in m. 9. This deliberate slide emphasizes the descent in pitch to the lowest note of the phrase. There is another between the eighth notes on beat three of m. 10 which is combined with rubato. This combination assists with the expressive nature of the phrase ending (Example 4.3).
Example 4.3. mm. 8-11. *Chanson Triste.*

Koussevitzky approaches the opening note of the third phrase with a portamento. This is a vehicle not only to recover the tempo rubato from the end of the previous phrase, but a means to connect the last note of the second phrase to the first note of the third. There are three more instances of portamento in this phrase and each becomes more pronounced, with the most dramatic use in m. 14. The slide between the F-natural and C emphasizes the perfect fifth and could have been written by Koussevitzky for the purpose of using a very pronounced portamento. He stays on the half note F-natural long enough for the listener to realize that this is outside the key, and then moves slowly to the C. This emphasis takes advantage of the physical distance between the two notes on the fingerboard of the double bass (Example 4.4).

Karr uses three instances of portamento in this phrase. While not as prominent as Koussevitzky’s, the first matches the transition from phrase to phrase by connecting the sustained final note of phrase two to the first note of phrase three with a subtle portamento. The second is also not very obvious and occurs between beat three of m. 12 and beat one of m. 13. In m. 14 Karr emphasizes the same interval as Koussevitzky; however, Karr adds rubato to the arrival note on beat three for added aesthetic effect (Example 4.4).
Koussevitzky again takes advantage of the physical distance between notes on the fingerboard of the double bass during the final phrase of the A section, although in a different manner than he did in m. 14. Since the distance between half steps is comparatively greater on the double bass than it is on other stringed instruments, Koussevitzky can stress passages that contain consecutive half steps. He does this in m. 16. The portamentos that occur in this measure convey a sense of falling away and are more dramatic because of the close intervallic relationship of the notes, as well as the time taken during the slide. This chromatic passage begins on the B-flat in m. 16 and continues to the downbeat of m. 17. He further emphasizes the end of the phrase by using portamento as a means to slow the tempo. In m. 17 Koussevitzky takes time to slide between the F-sharp and E as well as between the C-sharp and the final note of the phrase on the downbeat of m. 18 (Example 4.5).

Karr’s rendition of the final phrase of section A differs from Koussevitzky’s. He does not highlight the descending chromatic passages with prominent portamento. The only portamento used in the phrase occurs in m. 17 between the F-sharp and E. Karr does slow the tempo at the end of the phrase, but does not use portamento as a vehicle to do this (Example 4.5).
Example 4.5. mm. 16-19. *Chanson Triste.*

Both performers utilize portamento throughout the A section, although those used by Karr are much more subtle than those of Koussevitzky, and not as frequent. Koussevitzky uses a total of fifteen portamentos during the sixteen-measure A section where Karr uses only eight; and of those eight, only three are obvious. In addition, the portamentos that Karr uses are shorter in length and do not manipulate the beat as much as those Koussevitzky employs. While there is some slight variation in the use of portamento during the repeat of the A section, both Karr and Koussevitzky are consistent in their overall approach.

*Chanson Triste: B Section*

Koussevitzky continues to use a more prominent and frequent portamento than Karr throughout the B section. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this section (mm. 20-35), is a section in which the tempo changes significantly. Koussevitzky uses the portamento as a tool to emphasize the changes in tempo.

As seen in example 4.6, the first use of portamento in the B section by Koussevitzky occurs in m. 20. After playing the dotted quarter note, he slides to the following F-sharp. The next portamento occurs at the beginning of m. 22. The last note of m. 21 is a B and the downbeat of m. 22 is an F-natural. The portamento engages the
listener by bringing added attention to the tritone leap in the melody as well as emphasizing the dissonance between soloist and accompanist. The F-natural on the downbeat is sustained over an arpeggiated E major seven chord. Measure 23 contains two instances: the first occurring from D down to C between the two eighth notes on the first beat, and the second returning to C on beat three from the B on beat two. In this measure Koussevitzky brackets the chord tone C with nonharmonic tones, and uses portamentos to travel from each of those nonharmonic tones to the chord tone (Example 4.6).

During the first four measures of the B section Karr only utilizes the portamento twice. Both happen at places as Koussevitzky used it and have a similar effect. The first occurs when moving from the B on beat three of m. 21 to the F-natural on beat one of m. 22. As Koussevitzky did, Karr uses portamento in this instance to emphasize the dissonance and the melodic leap of a tritone. The second happens in m. 23. Karr slides from the nonharmonic D on the downbeat to the third of the chord (Example 4.6).

Example 4.6. mm. 20-23. Chanson Triste.

Koussevitzky’s interpretation of mm. 24-27 conveys a deceptive sense of calm before the upcoming accelerando that begins in m. 28. There is a portamento that connects the last note of m. 23 to the first note of m. 24, and another that connects the
dotted quarter note in m. 24 to the following eighth note. Measure 25 is a repeat of m. 24 and he uses the same portamento again to slide from the dotted quarter note to the following eighth note. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Koussevitzky holds back the tempo at the end of each of these measures, which along with the connectivity created by the use of portamento, creates a very smooth and continuous melodic line (Example 4.7).

Example 4.7 shows that Karr also uses portamento in mm. 24-25 at the same place as Koussevitzky. That said, Karr does not connect the dotted quarter note to the eighth note in the same manner. Karr crescendos slightly during the dotted quarter note in m. 24, then clearly separates it from the following eighth note. The first eighth note in m. 24 has a negligible portamento attached to it. This, combined with the accented articulation placed on this note, exhibits a different interpretation than that of Koussevitzky. In m. 25 Karr again uses portamento, but this time the dotted quarter note is connected to the following eighth note. There is another instance of portamento on the downbeat of m. 26. This portamento is also very slight in comparison to Koussevitzky’s method. Even though Karr uses portamento in two of the same places as Koussevitzky during these four measures, the effect is notably different. Koussevitzky deceives the listener by creating a false sense of calm, but Karr foreshadows the upcoming increase in intensity by using some of the same tools as Koussevitzky in a considerably different way.

Example 4.7. mm. 24-27. Chanson Triste.
Each performer’s use of portamento throughout the remainder of the B section is an excellent representation of the change in this aspect of performance practice between the early and late twentieth century. Koussevitzky uses portamento in several instances, from m. 28 until the fermata at the downbeat of m. 35, to embellish the melody (Example 4.8). This begins with a very obvious portamento on the C-sharp downbeat of m. 28. To place added emphasis Koussevitzky does not simply slide down from the E in m. 27 (Example 4.7) to the C-sharp. Instead he leaves the E, lands on the C-natural below the C-sharp, and scoops up to the downbeat. An argument could be made that Koussevitzky missed the shift in hand position from the E to C-sharp and that the slide from below the C-sharp was included for pitch correction. The musical effect and emphasis this slide places on the C-sharp indicates otherwise. It appears to be a deliberate embellishment included to draw extra attention to the note and to signify that something different is about to happen.

With the exception of one instance, Koussevitzky’s use of portamento during the rest of the B section is used to accentuate intervallic leaps in the melody. There are no examples of portamento in mm. 28-29 other than the downbeat of m. 28. During mm. 30-31, which are a sequence of mm. 28-29, Koussevitzky uses portamento twice. In m. 30 he slides the distance of a minor third between D and F-natural. This is followed by an E, which is tied over the bar line to m. 31. The portamento that occurs after the tie, between the E and D, highlights the brief syncopation that happens during this iteration of the sequence. Koussevitzky varies the second instance of this sequence by including the portamentos. Measures 33-34 are sequences of m. 32. A portamento is included
before each intervallic leap during these measures, as well as into the fermata at m. 35 (Example 4.8).

**Example 4.8.** mm. 28-35. *Chanson Triste.*

As shown in example 4.8 and in Chapter Two, Karr takes a different approach than Koussevitzky. Not only does he slow the tempo where Koussevitzky increases it, but this passage is performed very cleanly and deliberately. Measures 28-31 are devoid of portamento. During these four measures Karr plays each note in a very precise manner. The few instances of portamento that occur in mm. 32-35 are not as obvious as those of Koussevitzky’s. Karr does use portamento in the same places as Koussevitzky as a means to accentuate the sequence, but he does not stretch the tempo as Koussevitzky did. Karr’s alteration of the tempo is not related to his use of portamento during these measures.
Chanson Triste: Cadenza and Transition

Both performers play the short cadenza as it is written. As shown during the last eight measures of the B section, the cadenza is also a good representation of the change in the use of portamento during the twentieth century. Koussevitzky performs the cadenza, making frequent use of portamento. This is especially evident as the note speed increases near the end of the cadenza. Example 4.9 shows the second half of the cadenza which includes a series of minor thirds in three-note groupings (some written as augmented seconds). Koussevitzky uses portamento as a means of transitioning from group to group, highlighting the overall direction of the passage. All of the notes are audible, but by using portamento in this way some are obscured. Koussevitzky sacrifices clarity to emphasize the effect of the ascending minor thirds.

Example 4.9. Second half of the cadenza, mm. 35. Chanson Triste.

Karr, on the other hand, only uses portamento once, leading to the final sustained note. His rendition of the cadenza is precise and each note is audible and deliberately placed. This is a good example of the later twentieth-century concept that each note must be clear, in tune and clean. Where Koussevitzky lost some clarity to emphasize the musical effect, all of the notes Karr plays are exactly where they should be according to

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58 Koussevitzky, Reverse image copyist’s score, Chanson Triste.
the music. Both performances are equally effective, but demonstrate a significant change in performance practice.

Measures 36-38 make up a three measure transition between the cadenza and the final A section. Both performers use this as a brief interlude to set up the final A section. Koussevitzky uses portamento and Karr does not.

**Chanson Triste: Final A Section**

Measures 39-54 are the final statement of the A section. With the exception of the accompaniment in mm. 53-54 and the length of the final note in the solo part, this is an exact repeat of the first A section. Koussevitzky uses portamento in much the same way during this iteration of the A section as he did previously, although he does change where he uses it in some instances. One case of portamento by Koussevitzky does warrant notice. Example 4.10 shows how m. 52 is written compared to Koussevitzky’s interpretation. In this measure he re-articulates the G briefly after he changes bow directions instead of moving directly to the F-sharp on the second half of beat two. This results in the eighth rest being omitted and a portamento occurring after the change in bow direction. While it is impossible to know for sure which direction Koussevitzky’s bow was traveling when he played this measure, one can assume that he used a down bow on beat one and an up bow for the eighth notes.
**Example 4.10.** mm. 52. *Chanson Triste.*

a) as written  

![Example 4.10a](image1)

b) as played by Koussevitzky  

![Example 4.10b](image2)

Karr almost eliminates the use of portamento completely during his performance of the final A section, using it in only two instances, both of which are restrained.

Example 4.11 shows each performer’s use of portamento in the final A section.

**Example 4.11.** mm. 39-54. *Chanson Triste.*

Koussevitzky’s frequent use of portamento is a trait of the nineteenth century.

While the use of portamento was in a state of transition at the time Koussevitzky
recorded *Chanson Triste*, the prominence and variation of the portamentos in his
performance lean toward the accepted practice of the nineteenth century. The selective
use of portamento by Karr is indicative of the late twentieth century.
Chapter Five

Suggestions for an Historically Informed Performance of *Andante* and *Humoresque*

The information gained from the comparison of the Karr and Koussevitzky recordings of the *Valse* and *Chanson* can be applied to performance of the *Andante* and *Humoresque*. The purpose of this comparison is not produce an historically authentic performance of these pieces, but rather as a guide to an historically informed performance. What aspects of Koussevitzky’s performance are acceptable to the twenty-first century listener? The application of portamento, rubato, and vibrato mentioned in this chapter are suggestions based on a synthesis of modern and early twentieth-century performance practice. They are hypothetical scenarios that could be applied completely, or in part, to performances of these pieces. Potential performers should not implement these suggestions without applying their own interpretations and modifications.

It is evident, when comparing this recording of Karr to his other recordings, that he is attempting to include enough Koussevitzky era performance practice to present an historically informed rendition of the composer’s works without straying too far away from acceptable modern performance practice. This, along with the ghost (discussed in Chapter One), could have influenced the title of his album, *The Spirit of Koussevitzky*. It must be mentioned that a comparison of the two artists performing the second movement of Koussevitzky’s Concerto for Double Bass indicates an even wider gap in the use of
vibrato, portamento and rubato. On his 1979 recording of the concerto, Karr uses very little portamento, and when it is used it is very light. Koussevitzky’s 1929 recording employs the same style of vibrato discussed in Chapter Three and a wide use of both rubato and portamento that has been observed in the *Valse* and *Chanson*. ⁵⁹

When deciding what aspects of Koussevitzky’s style to apply to a modern performance, the first consideration is vibrato. It is impossible to know for certain how Koussevitzky’s use of vibrato changed between the time he wrote the four pieces in the 1890s and his recording of *Chanson* and *Valse* in 1929. However, it is possible to speculate, based on the methods and recordings of that era, that the use of vibrato was changing significantly. As discussed in Chapter Three this was a transitional time for vibrato. It had changed from an ornament, used very sparingly, to an expected aspect of a string player’s tone. Even during this time the use of frequent vibrato was controversial; it had not yet evolved into the continuous vibrato that is characteristic of the modern string player. Karr’s recordings of all four pieces employ the continuous vibrato that has become familiar to modern audiences. Today’s audience expects to hear a continuous vibrato that varies in speed and depth; and because of this, employing the Koussevitzky era vibrato in a modern performance would not be acceptable.

**Andante, Op. 1**

Several places in *Andante* seem to ask for either or both the use of portamento and rubato. The challenge to the modern performer is to add enough of these devices to respect the composer’s intent without alienating him or herself from the modern

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Karr’s recording of *Andante* includes the use of both rubato and portamento, but not to the extent that would be expected of Koussevitzky. During the A section (Example 5.1) Karr uses portamento and rubato to varying degrees.

**Example 5.1.** mm. 1-22. *Andante.*

Karr uses portamento four times during the A section. The first is slight, and occurs between the first two notes he plays in m. 2. The second occurs in m. 5 and is considerably more obvious. Karr uses portamento to travel between the last two eighth notes of the measure which are an interval of an octave. This is combined with rubato to add emphasis to the interval, and happens again in m. 19. In m. 21 Karr slows the tempo
considerably between the quarter note and following eighth note and includes a slight portamento. Koussevitzky often used rubato to end a phrase or to set up a sustained note in this manner. Karr uses a great deal of rubato throughout the section. The anacrusis to m. 3 is out of tempo, and it is slower than the tempo established by the accompanist during the brief introduction. From this point forward, during the first phrase, Karr plays the first half of each measure slightly faster than the established tempo and the second half of each measure slower. This movement around the established tempo is similar to Karr’s use of rubato in *Valse Miniature*.

Portamento could be applied to other portions of the A section beyond Karr’s use. His use of rubato during the A section is constant; he manipulates the tempo in almost every measure the way one would expect of Koussevitzky. Based on Koussevitzky’s recording of *Chanson Triste* he may have used both rubato and portamento almost anywhere throughout this section. He certainly would have applied portamento not only more frequently, but with more emphasis than Karr. The choice modern performers have to make is how often to use these devices. Using portamento in the manner that Koussevitzky did would not be acceptable by twenty-first century standards, but Karr’s use of this device during the A section is well within what is acceptable to the modern audience.

Other points in the A section to which portamento could be applied are the remaining upbeats to mm. 11 and 17. Karr combined rubato and portamento the first time the anacrusis is heard in m. 2; however, it could be applied all three times the pattern is heard or just the first and last time. By playing the same pattern with varying degrees of portamento, rubato or vibrato the performance becomes less predictable. For instance,
the opening anacrusis could be played very softly, with a slower vibrato and out of tempo (as Karr did). Instead of putting a portamento between the first two notes of the piece, a slight portamento could be used to approach the sustained note on beat one of m. 3. This is similar to the way Koussevitzky handles the opening of the first movement of Eccles’ Sonata in G Minor, which he also recorded. During this piece Koussevitzky uses portamento and rubato to get from the anacrusis to the first downbeat of the solo line, which is a sustained note. The accompanist could then reestablish the original tempo as the soloist applied a crescendo to the sustained note, increasing the speed of the vibrato, along with the volume. By applying these techniques to the first three notes of the piece the performer has used attributes of both the modern and Koussevitzky era performance practice during the opening statement. The performer must be careful at this point not to use these devices in exactly the same manner every time the statement occurs. Both Karr and Koussevitzky varied their use of these techniques throughout their performances, with Karr employing a wider variation of these techniques.

The pattern is heard for the second time in mm. 10-11. To add variety the dynamic level could be increased for this statement since the highest point of the section occurs in m. 12. Portamento could be omitted completely, vibrato applied in a more forceful and slightly faster manner than the opening statement, and the tempo could push slightly forward until the sixteenth notes in m. 12, where the tempo should slow to emphasize the approach to the highest note of the section. It should be noted that the high G in m. 12 is marked with a fermata in the David Walter edition.  

60 Koussevitzky, The Complete Recordings. Track 1 and 2.  
61 Walter, Four Pieces.
The third statement of the opening motive occurs in mm. 16-17. Since the previous statement was performed at a loud volume this statement should be soft to create contrast. There are two approaches to this statement that are appropriate. The first approach is to play the anacrusis as harmonics without vibrato or portamento, but slightly slower than the tempo of the previous phrase. The sustained note that follows in m. 17 could crescendo as it did during the opening statement and vibrato could be added along with the increase in volume. The second approach is to add a very deliberate portamento between the two eighth notes in the second half of m. 16.

Another place in the A section to apply rubato and portamento is the octave leap that occurs in mm. 5 and 19. During Karr’s recording, these are the points at which his portamento is the most deliberate. As mentioned earlier, Koussevitzky often used rubato to prepare or embellish a sustained note. The last three eighth notes of m. 4 set up the C that follows in m. 5 and would be an appropriate place for rubato. The octave leap that happens in m. 5, and again in m. 19, seems to have been written for the express purpose of utilizing portamento. Again, as both Koussevitzky and Karr have demonstrated, it is not necessary to play the phrases with the same application of these techniques each time they appear. By employing these techniques in varying degrees, the performer is allowed to utilize a greater mix between modern performance practice and that of the Koussevitzky era.

As an example, the octave leaps in mm. 5 and 19 also occur in mm. 42 and 56, a total of four times throughout the piece. The intensity of the portamento and the tempo manipulation should change depending on what is happening in the structure of the piece. The second time this passage is heard is mm. 18-19, which leads to the B section. If the
phrase preceding the B section is played soft, then a stretching of the time is appropriate in m. 18. This enables the octave leap in m. 19 to be more drawn, allowing the portamento to be emphasized more than it was the first time this passage was played. Furthermore, this gives the illusion of even more contrast between the A and B sections. The third iteration of this passage happens after a short cadenza in mm. 41-42. Since this is a restatement of A after a contrasting section and cadenza, it should mirror the beginning. The final time this statement is heard occurs at the end of the work in mm. 55-56. When the rubato happens this time it becomes the ritardando that continues to the end of the piece. To further emphasize the end of the work, an obvious portamento should be placed in m. 58 when the A descends to G (Example 5.2).

**Example 5.2.** mm. 53-59. *Andante.*

During the 2005 *International Society of Bassists* convention in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Dennis Trembly performed Koussevitzky’s *Andante* as a tribute to David Walter. For this performance he used the Amati double bass used by both Koussevitzky and Karr. His interpretation of *Andante* includes limited use of portamento; however, he does use rubato at the beginning and end of most phrases. One technique he uses to add variety occurs in the last phrase of the piece (Example 5.2). He performs this

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statement of the phrase entirely on the D string (E string in solo tuning). This changes the timbre of the instrument making this final statement much darker than previous statements of the same material, and is a significant contrast to the preceding phrase which was performed loud and on the G string (A string in solo tuning). He does use portamento in m. 56 as the point to begin the final ritardando of the piece.

Although short, the B section (mm. 23-39) of Andante offers several opportunities to merge the conventions of the Koussevitzky era with those of the modern era, especially when considering rubato. As seen in example 5.3 on the following page there are two measures which include repeated chromatic passages. These occur in m. 25 and 29. Karr does not use portamento for these measures, but he does hesitate slightly before the second half of each measure, putting an emphasis on the fourth eighth note of the measure. Measures 31, 33, 34, and 35 also include chromatic eighth notes for which Karr does not use portamento. One could speculate that Koussevitzky might have used portamento during the chromatic measures, based on his use of the device during the chromatic eighth notes in Chanson Triste. An appropriate place to include portamento in mm. 31 and 33 would be between the fifth and sixth eighth notes. The tendency at this point of the music is to speed up, and the David Walter edition includes markings to that effect. Overall, the acceleration is necessary; however, a brief slowing of the tempo within the overall acceleration between the fifth and sixth eighth notes in mm. 31 and 33 would be appropriate. This, accompanied by the portamento mentioned above, would eliminate the predictability of the accelerando.

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63 Walter, Four Pieces.
Example 5.3. mm. 23-39. *Andante.*

Humoresque, Op. 4

The *Oxford Companion to Music* defines *humoresque* as:

A name used as a title in the 19th century for a lively instrumental composition, often ‘good-humoured’ rather than ‘humorous’…
Humoresques are generally short and in one movement…

The tempo and the arpeggiated A section melody of the *Humoresque* do not allow the use of portamento; however, the use of a push-and-pull rubato is easily applied. The two-measure statements of the A section can all be approached by starting the three sixteenth note pick-ups slowly, accelerating to a quick tempo for the sixteenth notes of the first beat and slowing during the eighth notes in the second beat (Example 5.4). Each phrase in the A section can follow this procedure. Since the A section is repeated often throughout the piece, variations on this approach are needed to avoid predictability.

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64 Latham, 596.
Karr’s recording of *Humoresque* offers several ideas to avoid repetition. In addition to varying the rubato in this section, the arpeggiated nature of the melody is easily transposed from octave to octave. The *International* edition of this piece shows the A section placed in the octave seen in example 5.4. The Walter edition notates m. 7 through the down beat of m. 15 in the bass clef, an octave below example 5.4. In the second half of m. 15 it returns to the octave notated in example 5.4. Karr chooses to play the first statement of the A section as it is printed in the *International* edition, without displacing the octave.

The final statement of the A section, beginning in m. 52, also includes this discrepancy. For this statement of the A section Karr uses the instrument’s natural harmonics to add variety. He plays each two measure statement in a different octave, alternating between the octave indicated in example 5.5 and an octave higher. When playing the upper octave he uses harmonics. All of the notes of the A section are

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65 Serge Koussevitzky, *Humoresque* (New York: International Music Co.)
playable using the harmonics in the third octave of the D and G strings (E and A strings in solo tuning). He begins in the written octave, and moves up an octave after the sixteenth rest in m. 53, then back to the written octave after the sixteenth rest in m. 56. This pattern continues until the end of the piece, when he plays in the upper octave beginning after the sixteenth rest in m. 62 until the sixteenth rest in m. 66. The final two-and-a-half measures are played as written. Example 5.5 shows Karr’s approach to alternating octaves as it would be written for double bass.

Example 5.5. mm. 52-68. *Humoresque.*

Since the title of this piece is *Humoresque,* the octave displacement approach to the A sections is ideal. The performer can relate a sense of irony to the audience by moving from the usual tessitura of the double bass to the extreme high range. The visual effect of moving the left hand approximately three feet, from the nut to the end of the fingerboard and back again in quick succession, is also an entertaining benefit of this approach. Several variations to the octave displacement approach are possible. As
mentioned earlier, the first half of each A section is written in the bass clef, an octave lower than examples 5.4 and 5.5. If this were combined with Karr’s use of octave displacement in the final A section, a third octave could be used. It is also possible to add a fourth octave by playing one portion of the section in the lowest octave of the instrument. It should also be noted that there are discrepancies between the International edition, the Walter edition and Karr’s performance for certain notes. These occur on the down beats of mm. 13 and 58 in which the quarter note is the next higher B instead of the D indicated. These variations in octave displacement enable the performer to create a great deal of variety by moving throughout the full range of the instrument. This approach coincides with the humor intended for a piece titled *Humoresque*. In addition, there is precedent for this in the recordings of Koussevitzky. In his recording of the second movement of his concerto, Koussevitzky performs the last statement of the theme an octave higher than written and uses harmonics.67

The repeated section in mm. 24-34 provides a significant contrast to the opening A section (Example 5.6). Karr’s interpretation is very legato and he plays the entire section an octave higher than indicated in both the International and Walter editions. He also continues to use rubato during this section. The section begins with an upbeat sixteenth note to m. 24, on which Karr takes extra time to set up the new section. He then accelerates through the sixteenth notes in mm. 24-25, only to slow again in the second half of m. 25. This tempo pattern repeats again in mm. 26-27. Karr plays mm. 28-29 with a somewhat steady beat after slowing as the melody descends in the second half of m. 27. There is a moment of hesitation between mm. 29-30 and a more pronounced rallentando during mm. 30-31. The second iteration of this passage is performed in the

67 Koussevitzky, *Complete Recordings.*
same manner; however, when he reaches the second ending he gradually slows the tempo throughout mm. 32-34.

**Example 5.6.** mm. 24-34. *Humoresque.*

The use of portamento would be appropriate at are several instances in this section. Koussevitzky often used portamento to emphasize a change in harmonic or rhythmic motion. In this section, mm. 28-29 as well as mm. 33-34 contain rhythmic motion that is new to the composition. A portamento between the last two sixteenth notes of m. 27, combined with a slight rubato, would highlight the upcoming rhythmic alteration. In addition, a portamento could be included after any of the eighth notes in the syncopated measures. It would not be necessary to add a portamento after every eighth note, but a selective use of this device would add nineteenth-century characteristics to the passage. Measures 32-34 require a more exaggerated use of both rubato and portamento. These measures provide an opportunity to again remind the audience that it is supposed to be a humorous performance. A steady and significant ritardando throughout these
measures, in conjunction with an obvious portamento after each eighth note, is one vehicle to accomplish this. The portamentos that occur should increase in length each time. That is, the portamento from the D to B in m. 32 should be restrained with each of the ensuing portamentos becoming longer and more blatant until the final slide between the F-sharp and C-sharp in m. 34. It should take a significant amount of time to travel between these notes, with the resolution to D being delayed as well.

After a two-measure interlude by the accompanist the rhythmic motion slows significantly in mm. 37-52 (Example 5.7). Koussevitzky creates a lyrical passage as a final point of contrasting humor, before returning to the A section and ending the piece.

Example 5.7. mm. 37-52. *Humoresque.*

This section should be performed as legato as possible with a rich, modern vibrato. The Koussevitkzy era vibrato would not be acceptable to the twenty-first century audience. While there are several places in the music to which portamento could be applied, there are two points that are reminiscent of Koussevitzky’s performance of *Chanson Triste.* Throughout *Chanson,* he applied portamento not only to large intervals, but to short chromatic intervals. The minor second from mm. 39-40 as well as
mm. 43-44 are points in the music which a modern performer might not consider adding a portamento, but that would be acceptable based on Koussevitzky’s recording of *Chanson*. 
Chapter Six

Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Research

Conclusion

Many facets of Koussevitzky’s four short pieces for double bass could be discussed with regard to performance practice and the use of portamento, vibrato and rubato. The examples mentioned are vehicles chosen to help bassists achieve a more historically informed performance. Many of the characteristics of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century performance practice are acceptable to the modern audience, however, not to the extent to which they were used during Koussevitzky’s life.

Nevertheless, the most overwhelming question when considering these works is the question of authenticity. Gary Karr did not ignore Koussevitzky’s rendition, but he did not try to precisely imitate Koussevitzky either. One could surmise he included enough of the techniques and practices from the Koussevitzky era to let the listener know that he was aware of, and had considered the primary source--the Koussevitzky recordings. His performance appears to be a synthesis of both modern and Koussevitzky era performance practice.

The wide use of portamento and rubato, evident in Koussevitzky’s recordings, has been toned down significantly since the beginning of the twentieth century. This is understandable when the work is from a different era. Koussevitzky employs the same
practice during his performance of Eccles’ Sonata in G Minor as well as Beethoven’s Minuet in G. The difference between these pieces and the Koussevitzky compositions is that for the first time in the history of the double bass as a solo instrument there is undisputable primary source material that conveys without a doubt the composer’s intent. These are period pieces, written and recorded by the composer himself. It is difficult to debate Koussevitzky’s intent in face of this evidence.

There are other issues that must be considered when considering how much Koussevitzky’s recording should influence modern performances of his works. The early twentieth century was a transitional time for performance practice. As discussed in Chapter Three, Koussevitzky himself probably changed his use of vibrato significantly between the time he composed these works in the 1890s and recorded them in 1929. This would indicate that the composer himself was not opposed to altering the way his music was performed based on current trends in performance practice. Another consideration is recording technology. The twenty-first century audience is used to hearing every note played to perfection due to the ease of recording and mass production. This was not the case during Koussevitzky’s life.

As this document has demonstrated, it is possible to present a performance that is somewhat true to the Koussevitzky era without completely offending the twenty-first century audience. The main consideration is what aspects of Koussevitzky era performance practice to use, and the frequency of their use. The modern continuous vibrato has become so inherent in the expected sound of string instruments that the absence of it is considered an embellishment. For this reason, using a Koussevitzky-style vibrato would not be acceptable to the modern audience. In considering portamento and
rubato, however, it is frequency that would determine acceptance by the modern listener. These devices are in use in modern performance practice, but not to the extent that Koussevitzky used them. Because of this it is possible, as Gary Karr did, to create a synthesis between the two styles. This compromise respects the intent of the composer and the expectations of the modern audience. The goal of an historically informed performance is to incorporate enough of the idiosyncrasies of the era to tell the educated listener that one’s performance was influenced by that period.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

This topic has presented many avenues for further research surrounding performance practice issues for the double bass, as well as topics concerning Koussevitzky himself.

A new biography of Koussevitzky is overdue. There is a considerable quantity of information contained in the Koussevitzky Collection housed in the Library of Congress that could contribute to this topic. Much of the information published about Koussevitzky centers around his life as a conductor; however, there is comparatively small amount of information about Koussevitzky the bassist. A biography that placed some emphasis on his contribution to the double bass, with regard to composition, transcription and performance, would be a significant addition to literature surrounding the instrument.

Pertaining to performance practice, a survey of various recordings of Koussevitzky’s concerto would be valuable. His recording of the second movement of his concerto would be a good place to start. By comparing it to subsequent recordings,
the subtle changes in performance practice throughout the twentieth century could be traced.
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