



*New Zealand Musicological Society Annual Conference
19-20 November 2016*

The Real Performer? Freddie Mercury's Vocal Styles

Nick Braae
The Illusion of Reality

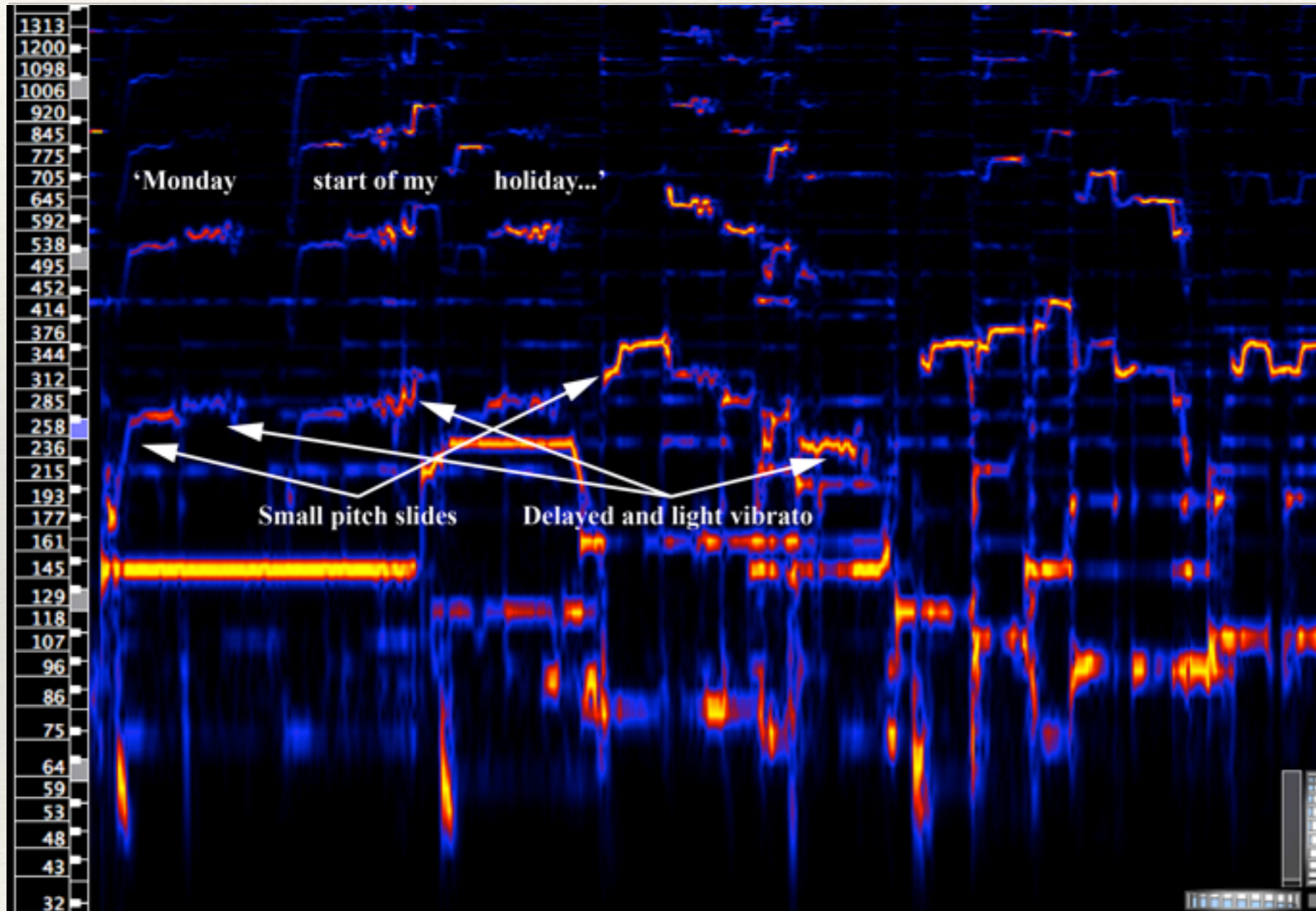
Queen, Illusions, and Reality

- ❖ “No Synthesizers!”—Queen’s trademark stamp on record covers, 1973-1978
- ❖ Dixieland band (“Good Company”), string sections (“Procession”) courtesy of Brian May
- ❖ Brian May: “The Trident sound was based on everything being damped down, so nothing interfered with anything else...That was completely not what we were about. We wanted to have the natural sounds and ambience” (interview with Braae, September 2014)
- ❖ Freddie Mercury’s singing: multiple “voices” and “inauthentic” rock styles

The “Gritty” and the “Powerful” Voice

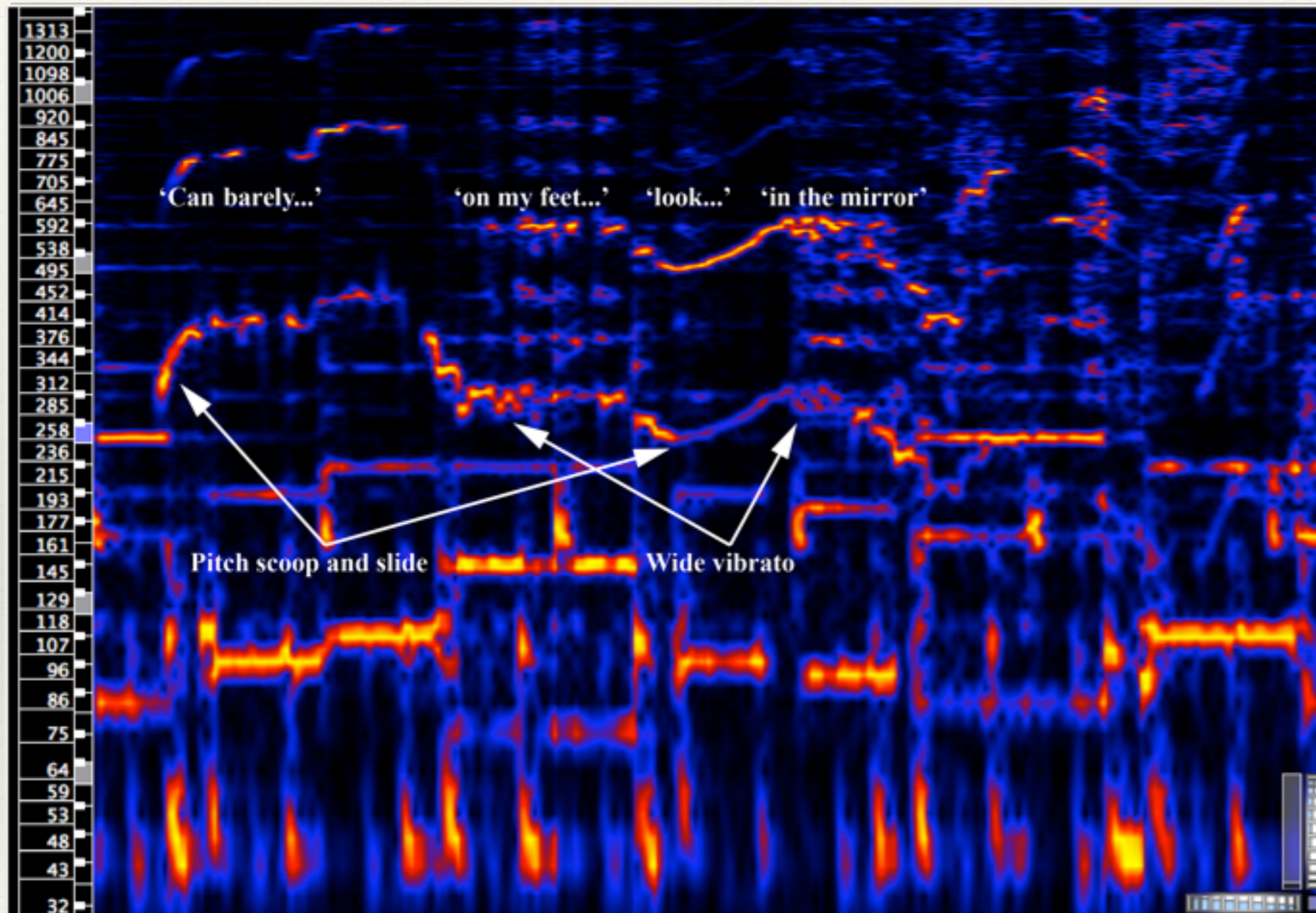
- ❖ “Seven Seas of Rhye” (first verse)
- ❖ Chest voice, gravelly tones, moderately loud; relaxed pitching, but precise rhythms
- ❖ “The Prophet’s Song” (pre-chorus)
- ❖ Chest voice; full volume; little use of overt vibrato; relatively direct attack on pitches

The “Sincere” Voice



- ❖ “In Only Seven Days” (first verse)
- ❖ Chest voice, lower volume; some stylised pitch slides, breathiness, and vibrato

The “Exaggerated” Voice



- ❖ “Somebody to Love” (first verse)
- ❖ Head voice; and / or overplayed breathiness, vibrato, scoops / slides

The “Real” Freddie Mercury?

- ❖ Correlation between lyrical content and voice type
- ❖ Deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting voice types (“Liar”)
- ❖ Correlation between song structure and voice type (“We are the Champions”: verse — pre-chorus; “Bohemian Rhapsody”: point of verse modulation)
- ❖ Mercury, the singer, serves the song (as opposed to the song serving the singer)

The “Real” Freddie Mercury?

- ❖ “Love of My Life” — tender tribute to long-term companion Mary Austin
- ❖ Light, breathy, “exaggerated” voice (cf. “authentic” male rock style of Plant, Hendrix, McCartney)
- ❖ “Inauthentic” mode of delivery to convey “authentic” emotions?