

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Violin Vibrato and its Application

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ABSTRACT

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Vibrato is often seen as a mysterious concept because of its individuality and inseparable relation to personal taste. Therefore, one can sometimes recognize a specific musical sound produced by a specific soloist from their unique vibrato having become much of their stylistic signature. From the perspective of violin learners, we ought to build a correct and solid foundation for basic vibrato technique and then add our own musical signature. It is important to avoid developing wrong habits in the first step of learning vibrato.

In this thesis, I will introduce the historical background of the violin vibrato; mention the controversial issue of where to play with vibrato; explain how it was popularized; and dissect the practice methods, as well as how to apply different types of vibrato to different styles of music. By examining different musical excerpts from certain genres, readers may gain a clear and intuitive understanding of the relationship between vibrato and different styles of music. This paper aims to summarize useful and historical information about violin vibrato. In the end, this paper may benefit violin learners and hobbyists by providing valuable violin practice strategies and practical instructions.

Introduction

Vibrato is an attempt to impersonate the emotion and character of the human voice. When one feels joy, pain, hatred, or any other affection, an unstable tone becomes apparent in one's voice, which is the human reaction to emotional excitement. As a result, people are unable to have complete control of their vocal cords. Consequently, different voice tremors will produce different emotional performances. In string instruments, it is the acoustic effect of the sound post that imparts a lively response and generates a singing tone, by coupling and coordinating the vibrations of the body as a whole, with the strings acting as main initiators.¹ Among various violin playing techniques, the vibrato is the most expressive, and the most effective approach for performers to express their feelings, emotions, and unique understanding of the music.

Inheriting the Franco-Belgian school of violin playing, Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931) is the first pioneer to apply the wide, intense vibrato on the violin, thus expanding the excitement of the music and strengthening the role of the violin as the main, melodic singing voice. In contrast, another legendary violinist of the Russian school, Jascha Heifetz, uses vibrato in such a subtle and delicate manner that others have praised his usage to nearing perfection.

Throughout the history of the development of the violin vibrato, from the Italian and Franco-Belgian to the German and Russian schools, the masters of each school did not stay static and maintain their style of vibrato, but instead continued to develop,

1. Eric Halfpenny and Theodore C. Grame, "Stringed instrument," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/art/stringed-instrument/The-violin-family>. Accessed on March 14, 2018.

influence, and learn from each other. Eventually, this cross-influence resulted in a vibrant and colorful method of violin vibrato.

The vibrato effect is produced from regular variations of the angle between the first knuckle of the left hand and the fingerboard, which causes regular changes of the effective length of the string. As the tension of the string changes regularly, the oscillatory sound effect is produced. It is widely known that the use of vibrato is considered the soul of violin playing, as it gives meaning to the artistic conception and interpretation of the music. This paper will give a brief analysis on the practice of violin vibrato and explain its significance.

What is vibrato?

Vibrato (Italian, from past participle of "*vibrare*," to vibrate) is a musical effect consisting of a regular, pulsating change of pitch and it is almost universally used to add expression to vocal and instrumental music. Vibrato can typically be categorized according to two factors: the amount of pitch variation ("the extent of vibrato") and the speed with which the pitch is varied ("rate of vibrato"). In singing, vibrato can occur spontaneously through variations in the larynx. The vibrato of a string and wind instrument is an imitation of this vocal function.

In string instruments, playing with “vibrato” generally refers to any intentional fluctuation or oscillation of a pitch less than a semitone (half-step), including tonal and timbre fluctuations that may or may not alter the pitch.

Under the chapter titled “Tone Production,” Leopold Auer describes vibrato as “the wavering effect of tone secured by rapid oscillation of a finger on the string which it stops, [and its purpose] is to lend more expressive quality to a musical phrase, and even to a single note of a phrase”.²

According to the scientists’ research on the physiological side of violin playing, only after the action of finger stopping has taken place, i.e. during the maintenance of the finger on the string, will vibrato start.³ It is the nail joint of the tone-producing finger that provides the fulcrum of stopping in order to perform a periodic stopping motion. The contact point between the string and fingertip is kept alternating during the stopping-

2. Leopold Auer, *Violin Playing as I Teach It* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), p. 22.

3. Ottó Szende and Mihály Nemessuri, *The Physiology of Violin Playing* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971), pp. 66-67.

raising finger motion, in which way the oscillation of the pitch is evoked.

There is also another way to deliver a vibrato effect on the violin without using the left hand technique. This is called “the vibrato stroke”, and it requires subtle control of the right hand. As described by the Austrian violinist Eugene Gruenberg, to bring about the desired effect, the (right-hand) fingers must perform a chain of pinching actions upon the stick in very rapid succession; at the same time, the hand must be trained into a condition of great suppleness and elasticity...⁴ Although this type of wavy bow stroke is an important component of producing the vibrato sound, this specific technique will not be focused on as the main research object of this thesis.

4. Eugene Gruenberg, *Violin Teaching and Violin Study: Rules and Hints for Teachers and Students* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1965), p. 90.

To use vibrato or not?

Vibrato was sometimes overdone in the early classical period. One of the most famous teachers of that era, Leopold Mozart, railed against players of his day for using too much vibrato, as if they had "the palsy."⁵ If Mozart, in all his fame and popularity, had to criticize it so vehemently, we can regard it as a sign that this unseemly habit had become widespread. Things got more intense in the early twentieth century: Leopold Auer wrote a book on violin technique and admonished to use vibrato sparingly. The late 19th and early 20th century Viennese violinist, Fritz Kreisler, is credited with popularizing the constant vibrato we now associate with classical (and pop) violin playing.

Regarded as an ornament in the Baroque, in principle, it was used on single notes like any trill or mordent. It was commonly denoted with wavy lines, and in tablatures, it was signified by a cross (×). Most of the signs used, appeared in French amateur music where a cross (+) often indicated unspecified ornaments. Less common ornaments, such as vibrato or glissandos, were used only by soloists. In the second half of the 18th century, there was a higher tendency for vibrato usage; in some circles, it may even have been used continuously.

By the mid-18th century, the vibrato was gradually associated with some of its more favorable connotations, especially that of the sweetness of sound quality. With many performers, it has been in near constant use – at least on all longer notes. Theorists such as Leopold Mozart, Simon Löhlein, and Johann Tromlitz warned against its overuse.

5. *When Did Vibrato Begin to Be Popular*, "Hangout Network Help," Fiddle Hangout, www.fiddlehangout.com/archive/27501, accessed on April 5th, 2018.

In Classical orchestral works there are many written-out forms of vibrato or similar effects: as a rule, these are measured (bow) vibrato, thus allowing small groups to be in time and in tune despite its use; vibrato, at that time also spread among amateur musicians from different types of instrument families; finger vibrato on woodwind instruments, which also became widely used because relatively little technical knowledge was needed to produce it (English and French sources of the late 17th and early 18th centuries). The early 19th century saw again a much more restricted use of this technique.

A famous violin pedagogue, Leopold Auer, once recalled that he had an unsatisfying memory with vibrato. During a meeting with the master, Henri Vieuxtemps, he played the “*Fantasia Caprice*” to Vieuxtemps and his wife. On that day, Auer was said to have played at his most emotional and vulnerable state. Depicted in his own words, he expressed: “I was in the midst of a cantabile phrase which I was playing all too sentimentally.” While he was pouring all his emotion into the music, Mme. Vieuxtemps started looking around the room, as if she was looking for something. “One or more cats must be hidden in this room,” said she, “meowing in every key!”⁶ The interview ended and both Auer and his father were said to have left feeling discouraged, frustrated, and upset. He recalls, “From that day on I hated all glissandos and vibratos, and to this very minute I can recall the anguish of my interview with Vieuxtemps.”⁷

6. Leopold Auer, *My Long Life in Music* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1923), p. 32.

7. Ibid.

Vibrato practice

In addition to pitch variation and speed, the types of vibrato can be further categorized into three ways in which the left hand is used: with primarily the fingers, the wrist, and the arm. This distinction might at first seem limiting and artificial, for the reason that musicians use many kinds and types of vibrato, and even mixtures in their playing. The decision of where to generate the impulse is however important, as it determines the color of the sound. In general, if the arm is used, a strong and deep sound is produced; if the wrist is used, it will sound gentler and warmer; and if the finger is used, it will sound intense and aggressive as it is the narrowest of all three.

No matter what kind of vibrato is used, the first knuckle of the vibrato finger should be active and not loose; it needs to feel relaxed. The wrist and the arm need to follow the general motion when using either wrist or arm vibrato. The key to producing a good vibrato is to combine the arm and wrist and finger motion. One can adjust the width and speed of the vibrato to display the unique style and character of each piece.

The essence of the arm vibrato is the bending and extension of the elbow joint. With the action of the elbow joint, the shoulder joint also produces small movements. This type of vibrato excels at showing fortitude, passion, and rugged emotion. The movement is large, and as a result, the speed is relatively slow. The fingers themselves are somewhat passive, while the force of the vibrato is derived directly from the left forearm.

The wrist vibrato is often ideally suited for narrative and lyrical music that is soft and beautiful in character. The key to achieve the wrist vibrato is the bending and straightening motion from the wrist and a rapid, but narrower motion from the fingers.

The finger vibrato is usually used only in the highest position of the violin. It is a very sensitive fingertip movement, produced by the rapid collapse of the knuckle and the alternating tightness and looseness of the finger. The process of finger vibrato is usually done very quickly in the middle of a phrase, at a moment when the two other parts – arm and wrist – have difficulty offering the needed support.

Galamian also suggested including breaks in the art of the fingertip vibrato. According to him, when using the tip of the finger, a brighter and more edged sound is created. Ivan Galamian describes fingertip vibrato in his famous treatise, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, in this way: “The illusion of vibrato can be created by flattening the fingers and letting them break slightly in their knuckles immediately after the note is sounded...The elbow is placed more to the left to flatten the fingers and the fingers themselves move in a lazy fashion, lifting but little and slowly, and dropping also slowly; after touching the string, the finger-knuckle gives in.”⁸

Vibrato is controlled oscillation. The fluctuation should always be heard from the original pitch to the flat side, and back to the original pitch. The finger should never be placed above the true pitch. The reason for this is that the human ear can readily pick up on the sharper frequencies of the oscillation, thus, the moment a note is overshot in intonation, it will sound sharp. Furthermore, if the finger goes above the correct pitch, it will create a rolling motion over the point of contact of the fingertip. This induces unnecessary tension, which is then harmful to the sound. Motion-wise, the vibrato should

8. Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Incorporation, 2013), p. 41.

be primarily a back-and-forth motion, instead of moving from side to side. Imagining the wrist motion of knocking on a door is helpful.

Vibrato exercises

Main properties to experiment with during the practice:

1. The speed and width of oscillation, combined with bow speed, pressures and contact points.

2. With the pad of finger, the fleshy area produces a warm and round sound.

Developing flexibility in the joints:

1. Releasing unnecessary tension in the thumb, knuckle and wrist – more fluent sound. Gripping the neck too hard – common error – tight sound.

2. For the arm and wrist vibrato, the finger should be relaxed and flexible, moving as a result of the endeavor of larger muscles. Rather than attempting to proactively move backwards, avoid producing unnecessary tension.

Exercises:

1. Wrist – Pretend to knock on someone's door, remember to move back and forth, rather than from side to side. Then transition to peg knocking -- use the back of first finger to knock the peg of E string gently, make sure the contact point on the thumb and index are feeling light and not gripping.

2. Arm – Sliding three points of contact (fingertip, inside of index and thumb). Put the finger on the string and go up and down softly. Then pick up a position to stabilize the thumb, the other two contact point should be still sliding and flexible. Lastly,

stabilize the vibrating finger, keeping the rest of the hand relaxed. Be careful not to turn or twist the hand.

3. Vibrato exercises in different positions

For beginners, the teacher would most commonly suggest to practice the wrist vibrato in fourth position – in this case, the student’s wrist can lean on the violin body, which gives them a supporting point and, at the same time, restrict the arm and wrist from moving in a wrong way. After the wrist vibrato is controlled, the student may practice the wrist vibrato in first position, applying the same drill.

Common problems of vibrato practice

Vibrato is not a substitute to good sound production. It is a way of “flavoring” or coloring the sound, and should not be used to cover up bad intonation or poor sound production. These essentials should be practiced separately.

The first common problem is often caused by one’s poor posture and incorrect ways of moving. The symptom is the wrist bulge: the finger is propped on the fingerboard, with tensed muscles and stiff movement. Visually, this position is awkward-looking, not to mention the less-than-ideal sound effects produced. To correct this problem, we need to start by adjusting the shape of the hand. For example, this problem could be remedied by shaking off the left hand to release tension and then placing it back on the fingerboard. The back of the hand, wrist, and elbow joint should be lined up. Then, according to the exercise, one should gradually accelerate until the proper sound is produced.

Some violin learners also find it difficult to apply vibrato on double-stops and chords. The primary cause for this is that their fingers are often gripping too tight. In this case, first of all, one should practice the vibrato with a loose motion of the arm and only on single notes at first. When all the joints find a relaxed, coordinated feeling, then move to drill the double-stop.

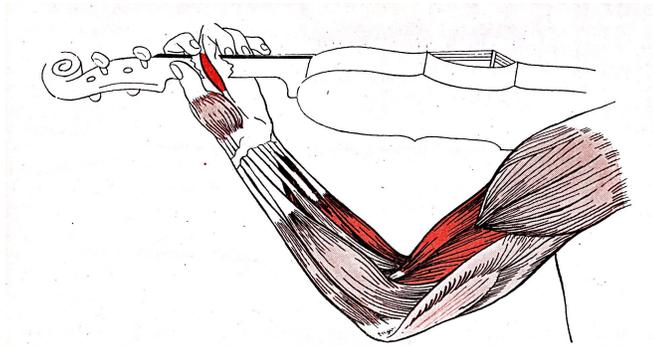


Fig. 1.⁹

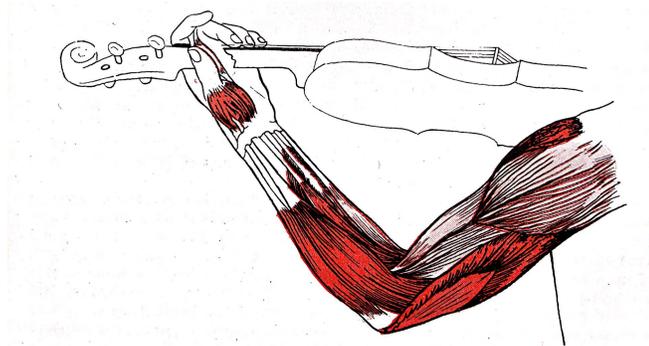


Fig. 2.¹⁰

9. Ottó Szende and Mihály Nemessuri, *The Physiology of Violin Playing* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971), p. 67.

10. Ibid.

The second common problem is the drastic shaking from the forearm during the vibrato, which sometimes even cause the violin trembling. In this case, it is due to the forearm twitches too fast and the finger contact point got out of control that makes a quivering sound. This kind of incorrect motion is mainly caused by the unstableness of the violin holding and stillness of the first joint of the finger. “Vibrato is a periodical muscular function involving the whole arm and all of its muscles. It is not merely a simple flexion and extension of the elbow...”¹¹

As shown in the Figure 1 and 2, we can tell that the person is applying his second finger to the vibrato. The first image demonstrates the phase of flexion, while the second picture shows the phase of extension. Comparing to the flexion, one’s first finger joint should be straightened up and the usage of the muscle of the forearm should be alternating from its previous motion. The solution is to reduce the arm movement and increase the impulse from wrist during the practice. The student can start practicing the vibrato in the fourth position, using primarily the wrist as the fulcrum, and minimizing the movement from the entire left arm. One should fully utilize the first knuckle of the finger to practice the slow and wide swinging motion. A more natural timbre of the vibrato will be brought out after a period time of practice.

Some other issue the beginners might be confront with is that using the vibrato while changing the positions. One may feel his/her vibrato is always late for the note after going up to the higher position or even losing his/her impetus for vibrato, which eventually lead up to a bad intonation. To make it sound better, one can pay attention to the following aspects: keep a more stable condition of the violin body; bring the

11. Ibid, p. 68.

scroll/violin towards the body and even lift the violin up a little bit when the fingers going up; feel the impulse of the vibrato from the finger-root and put less pressure onto the string; coordinate the right hand with the left, adjust the bow speed and bow pressure to project a beautiful vibrato sound.

The diversity of the vibrato

Although vibrato is personalized, it should always suit the style and period of the music being played. For instance, the vibrato used in Bach's music should be of a distinguishably different amount and type from that used in a work by Mozart, Beethoven, Debussy or Strauss. In Baroque music, there is generally much less vibrato, it is very rarely, if ever, used in ornaments, and mostly applied sparingly to melody notes. Compared to that of later composers, the vibrato should have a narrow, clean, and pure sound. On the other hand, for example for the works of Debussy, the vibrato should be less uniform and more color oriented, which can only be achieved in combination with the cooperation of the right hand bowing. In the following three paragraphs, I will explain more specifically in how different the vibrato should be applied in terms of the works by three representative composers of past epochs.

It is known that Bach's works inherit the choral and organ music tradition from his predecessors. He utilized polyphonic technique and developed his own unique compositional style – strictly structured, highly philosophical, along with a profound inner meaning. When we are playing his solo works, in order to showcase a spacious but clean tone for harmonic needs, we ought to avoid use the dense vibrato which will create an unstable sound. If there is a need in any case for vibrato, wrist/hand vibrato is recommended. To ensure precision of rhythm, we advise that almost non-vibrato be used in Bach's works, as integrating a vibrato into this composer's intricate rhythmic structures proves often to be very difficult.

Mozart's music contains elements from contrapuntal complexities from late Baroque to the "Galant" style from Classical period. The vivid beats and the crystal clear

melody makes his music's identity distinctive and outstanding. Therefore, when we play Mozart's works, we need to emphasize its bright, lively but restrained sound. In order to achieve a bright and transparent timbre, the player should avoid any extra pressure to be added on the string, as well as choosing a narrower contact point and a relatively faster finger vibrato.

When speaking of the music by Brahms, his own personality of seriousness and an introverted side is ubiquitous. The romanticism of Brahms is represented by the creativity in his music and his interest in folk music. "Though aware of popular musical trends, Brahms usually showed a conspicuous disregard of them, composing music that was characteristically introspective and intellectually profound."¹² His music displays a pursuit of magnificent and luxuriant sonority, purely reaching an enrichment from the fluid flow of textures and the change of harmonies. This stylistic composition technique delivers a contrasting effect between soft and solid, light and dense. To interpret the characteristics of Brahms' music, a lush, broad and slow type of vibrato is more suitable. In this context, the combination of the hand and arm vibrato will be indeed helpful to widen the contact surface of the finger on the string, at the same time provide a substantial support from left arm so that the sound gets deeper and stronger. The arm carries the strength while the hand/wrist joint embellishes the emotion. At the same time, the bowing hand ought to cooperate with the left hand. As the vibrato gets wider and

12. Jim Paterson, "If Brahms Had Lived... A Conjectural Obituary - by Jeffrey Dane," *What Is Music? How It Affects Moods & Emotions, Creating Atmosphere*, www.mfiles.co.uk/if-brahms-had-lived-a-conjectural-obituary.htm, accessed on April 5th, 2018.

more luscious, the right hand can itself contribute a warmer tone through a more flexible stroke.

In general, we can say that the use of vibrato depends on the need of the color, inner emotion and the characteristics of the music and needs to fit with the stylistic epoch. If the learner can use vibrato proficiently, he/she will be able to depict accurately the color of the music combined with his/her own feelings. The next chapter will cover some specific examples from different music eras for practice reference.

The distinctive vibrato application in a selection of Western and Chinese violin works

J. S. Bach: Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004, 3rd movement



Fig. 3.¹³

As being described in the previous chapter, vibrato is not often applied to the music in Baroque era. The third movement of Bach's Violin Partita No. 2 (see Figure 3) exhibits an extreme solemnity. Although the upper melody line has its shaping and direction, the use of too much vibrato would add an unnecessary fluctuation, not to mention the issue of accuracy of intonation. If we use any vibrato at all, the dotted quarter note in m. 6 would serve as a good example, as long as the performer makes sure to only use a small amount of wrist vibrato, in order to connect this note melodically to the next, rather than to add excitement to the overall tone.

13. Günter Haußwald edited, Bach Violin Partita No.2 in D minor, BWV 1004, Kassel: Bärenreiter Verlag, 1958, [http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Partita_No.2_in_D_minor,_BWV_1004_\(Bach,_Johann Sebastian\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Partita_No.2_in_D_minor,_BWV_1004_(Bach,_Johann_Sebastian)), accessed on May 5th, 2018.

Saint-Saëns: Violin Concerto No. 3 in D minor, 3rd movement



Fig. 4.¹⁴

In this passage, different speeds and widths of vibrato are utilized to enrich the color. With the marking of “*appassionato*”, a relatively fast but wide wrist vibrato would be best suggested. One should always be aware that the dynamic marking here is “*p*”, which means the bowing hand needs to produce a soft and sensitive tone, to be in coordination with the relaxed left hand. While practicing, a lot of students tend to hold the neck with extra tension after finishing the previous intense section. A way to free the left hand is to take full advantage of the two beats rest, letting go of tension both in the right hand and the mindset, and then run this passage with a fresh timbre of overall relaxation. There is also an exercise for relaxing the thumb when using the vibrato in such a context, which is to let go of the thumb when practicing the vibrato – and only to generate the impulse from wrist (use arm for additional support if needed). After having gone through the same section several times, one will feel more confident using the

14. David Oistrakh edited, Saint-Saëns Violin Concerto No.3, Op.61, Moscow: Muzyka (ca.1975), [http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No.3,_Op.61_\(Saint-Saëns,_Camille\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_No.3,_Op.61_(Saint-Saëns,_Camille)), accessed on May 5th, 2018.

vibrato with the thumb attached on the violin and releasing the unnecessary tension in the left hand.

Gang Chen: *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*, rehearsal number 25

The image shows a page of a musical score for the violin part of the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* by Gang Chen, rehearsal number 25. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a tempo marking of "Più mosso" with a quarter note equal to 63. The first staff begins with the dynamic marking "P dolce" and contains several measures with fingerings (1, 2, 3, 4) and slurs. The second staff starts with "pp" and includes vibrato markings (V) and accents (A). The third staff ends with "(乐队)" and "mp".

Fig. 5.¹⁵

Among the many Chinese works written for the violin, the application of vibrato is widely influenced by the performance technique of traditional instruments such as Hu-Qin, which is a “spiked” fiddle (the narrow cylindrical or hexagonal body being skewered by a tubular neck). Popular operatic Chinese songs are often performed on the violin or its related folk instruments with an alternation between vibrato and non-vibrato, delayed-vibrato, and vibrato with finger-sliding on the strings etc. With emphasis on a more horizontal music line, the accurate use of vibrato influences the musicality and ability of musical understanding to a certain extent.

15. Zhanhao He and Gang Chen. *The “Butterfly Lovers” Violin Concerto*. Shanghai: SMPH, 2007.

The Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto is an emblematic violin masterpiece exemplifying the Chinese musical culture and development in the 90s. A lot of melodic passages in this violin concerto embody how vibrato can beautify the music and make it sound more lyrical. Examining the excerpt showed in Figure 5 as an example, we find a slow melodic section being played by the violin in high positions. We advocate using a finger vibrato of moderate speed, in order to highlight a “*dolce*” and exceedingly smooth sound. In the second measure of the excerpt, using vibrato on the two eighth notes are also indispensable. A slide on the first finger between D and E in the second beat of the measure is recommended. A dense and fast finger vibrato on the high A in the third measure will help highlight the intense musical “story line” here. The same type of vibrato is also being used for the two “D”s after the up-bow trill. The application of vibrato on this two repeated spiccato notes will soften the melodic line and further depict the inner world of the main character’s emotions.

When we are in the process of recreation, and especially when performing this work on stage, we should carefully treat every phrase and every note, and add all colorations of vibrato appropriately. In addition, one should acquaint oneself with the similar techniques used on traditional Chinese instruments, in order to be able to imitate a widely known style in an artistic way. We feel strongly that vibrato is a very important subject that needs to be examined thoroughly when playing Chinese violin works.

John Cage: Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard

THESE MELODIES ARE WRITTEN IN THE
RHYTHMIC STRUCTURE: 3½, 3½, 4, 4, 3, 4
(WHEN THE TEMPO IS 92 (number 76-108)).
THE VIOLIN STRINGS TO BE PLAYED ARE
ALL INDICATED:



★ PLAY THE VIOLIN WITHOUT VIBRATO AND WITH
MINIMUM WEIGHT OF THE BOW.

THE PEDALS OF THE PIANO ARE INDICATED:

PEDAL = _____
UNA CORDA = - - - - -

ACCIDENTALS APPLY ONLY TO THOSE NOTES THEY
DIRECTLY PRECEDE.

Fig. 6.¹⁶

In the later parts of the 20th century, composers of Western music started to indicate at times very precisely their intention of how they wanted certain sounds to be produced. John Cage, though a pioneer of aleatory music and also in other ways a proponent of a certain indeterminacy in music, indicates in his introductory notes to his *Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard*: “Play the violin without vibrato and with minimum weight of the bow” (Figure 6). As instrumental music has today reached a peak of stylistic diversity and integration, it becomes increasingly difficult to set up performance criteria for the works of the 20th and 21st centuries. As a violinist myself, I find specific performance instructions such as Cage’s always very interesting and would personally rather be informed of them before starting to learn a new work.

16. John Cage, *Six Melodies for Violin and Keyboard*(Piano), Henmar Press Inc., 1950.

In the first movement of this work, all notes are to be performed precisely as listed in the composer's instructions. It is not hard to tell that he wanted to preserve a certain simplicity and work with rather minimal changes, if any at all, in the melodic and harmonic material. A lot of gentle left hand pizzicato is being used as an open string accompaniment, which also renders the use of vibrato virtually impossible. Sometimes, this style of express non-vibrato playing has its own special color, and the interspersing of the combination of these two elements (together with the left hand pizzicati) leads to a rich color and a certain artistic affect, at the same time shaping a vivid character for the musical story.

Conclusion

Vibrato is often seen as somewhat of a mysterious concept because of its individuality and inseparable relation to personal taste. Therefore, one can sometimes recognize a specific musical sound produced by a particular soloist from their unique vibrato having become much of their stylistic signature. Itzhak Perlman, for one, is known for his gorgeous fast wrist vibrato; Menuhin, Stern, Rabin, Zukerman, and perhaps most famously, Heifetz used most of the time an arm vibrato.

Most musicians would agree that vibrato is a powerful means of musical expression and a significant way to express thoughts and feelings in music. Vibrato is not definite nor unalterable, but must be mutable. Since each player has his or her own characteristics and perception and understanding of the music, the use of the vibrato will not be the same. Through perseverance and by correcting bad habits over time, learners can master the unique playing skill that is the vibrato. Then in performance, according to their understanding of the music, their own wishes, and the different methods of vibrato applied to the performance of the work, instrumentalists can develop their unique violin performance art.

As Galamian said on the different types of vibrato, each of the three kinds has its own characteristics, and I feel that because of their different color possibilities all three should be developed and used.¹⁷ The variety of timbre resulting from the combination of these three types gives the performer a far wider range of color, expressiveness, and a more personal tone quality. From the perspective of violin learners, we ought to build a

17. Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Incorporation, 2013.

correct and solid foundation for the basic vibrato technique, and then add our own musical understanding. It is imperative to be careful about not developing any wrong habits in the first step of learning vibrato. Besides, the importance of knowing what kind of vibrato will present the best interpretation of the piece should be realized by every violin player. This is undoubtedly a critical part of violin performance technique.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it is arguable that the vibrato is a primary and fundamental skill of violin playing, not only as a means of technicality, but as a vehicle for fostering a deeper understanding of music. The discussion of this paper stems from research of documents of decades of professional teaching and performance practice, as well as my own experience and struggles with this subject matter. The study of its technical theory here is a mere preliminary attempt. As a trained violinist and professional violin teacher, one may wish to master all types of vibrato to be able to interpret various styles and genres of music, and also to be capable of demonstrating it in the vast teaching field of our art.

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