
BASICS

Vibrato

The two main aspects of vibrato are speed and width. Both vary constantly with the character and expression of each note. It is rare that even two consecutive notes have the same proportions of speed to width.

The most natural proportions are wide-and-slow, fast-and-narrow; but like an artist mixing primary colours to obtain an infinite range of different shades, the musician's range of different vibratos extends all the way to wide-and-fast and slow-and-narrow.

Vibrato accents

Vibrato accents are frequent and important elements of musical expression. The bow moves fast-slow and heavy-light (more, or less, depending on the example), and the vibrato on each note is fast-slow and wide-narrow. The following examples contain notes played with an accent or other sort of musical stress.

- Practising by exaggeration, play no accent with the bow at all. Keep the bow speed perfectly even, creating the accent with the vibrato not the bow.

Example ①

Sonata in F, K377, Mozart
First movement

Example ②

24 Caprices, Rode
No. 14

Example ③

Sonatina in D, op. 137 no. 1, Schubert
Third movement

Usually you have to guard against one hand being influenced by what the other hand is doing. In the following exercise, turn that problem into an advantage: let the left hand be affected by the right, so that the attack in the bow helps to give a 'kick' to the beginning of the vibrato:

Example ④

Bow: Fast-slow, heavy-light
Vibrato: Fast-slow, wide-narrow

As a warm-up exercise, play a few notes on each string with each finger, in low, middle and high positions.

BASICS

Varying speed and width

In performance you have to make everything obvious and larger-than-life, like stage makeup or the exaggerated articulation and enunciation that you need for public speaking. Dorothy DeLay used to say that 'you have to hit the audience over the head with your musical ideas', otherwise they will simply not hear what you are saying.

- Practising by exaggeration, enlarge the proportions of the vibrato. Make it slightly narrower and wider, faster and slower, than the vibrato you will eventually use.

Naturally there are endless different ways in which vibrato is used, and the suggestions below serve merely to illustrate the approach. 'Least' = slowest, narrowest vibrato:

Concerto no. 1 in G minor, op. 26, Bruch
Second movement

Example 5

- Play at a slow tempo, exaggerating the changes in colour so that they will still be there when you play at the normal tempo again:

Sonata in F, op. 24 ('Spring'), Beethoven
First movement

Example 6

Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, op. 28, Saint-Saëns

Example 7

Not using tone in place of vibrato

Practise a phrase or passage without any colour or expression in the bow, to check that the tone is not taking the place of musical expressiveness in the vibrato.

- Exaggerate the expressiveness in the vibrato to make up for the lack of expression in the bow.

Sonata in A, Franck
Second movement

Example 8