BASICS

Vibrato

The two main factors of vibrato are speed and width. By varying these, without doing anything else, you can already produce a great variety of different colours. Then, once you add different degrees of finger pressure, different areas of the fingertip or pad, or different degrees of speed within the vibrato (the finger stays longer on the upper pitch of the vibrato than on the lower pitch), an infinite range of colour contrast then opens up.

How wide? How fast? Since no two vibratos are the same, you cannot say exactly how it should be. However, two common ingredients of the vibrato of most of the great players seems to be the ability to make 1) an extremely narrow vibrato, and 2) a very fast vibrato (when musically appropriate).

FOUR BASIC GROUPS

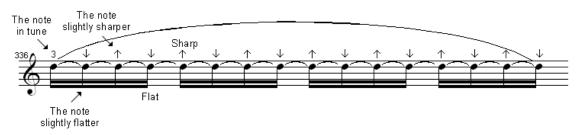
There are four basic groups that vibrato falls into. Elements of all the groups can be found in each player, of course, since nobody has only one vibrato that they use whatever the composer, the phrase, the notes, or the particular finger; but dividing into these groups does serve as a useful starting-point for understanding vibrato.

Each of the following examples represents one unbroken whole note (semibreve); the note-values represent the movement of the finger as it rocks backwards and forwards on the string in vibrato.

Group 1

This is a vibrato that you can rarely use because it makes you play out of tune.

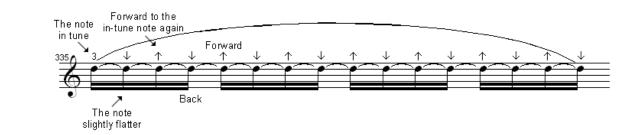
In this vibrato, the finger moves around the principal note, above and below it, i.e. moving between a pitch fractionally sharper, and one fractionally flatter, than the principal note:



The problem with this vibrato is that the audience's ear catches the upper pitch of the vibrato rather than the lower pitch, and thinks that it *is* the principal note – so it comes out sounding as though you are playing sharp, even if the finger actually stopping the note is exactly in tune. Therefore, the rocking movement of the finger should usually not go above the pitch of the principal note.

Group 2

In this vibrato, the finger rocks between the principal note, and the same note fractionally flattened:



Example 1

Example 2

While clearly better than vibrating too sharp, this is still not a vibrato that you can use very often. It may sound too 'wobbly' because the lower pitch of the rocking movement is as audible as the pitch of the principal note. This is because the rhythm of the forwards-and-backwards vibrato movement is even rather than a dotted movement – see Group 3.

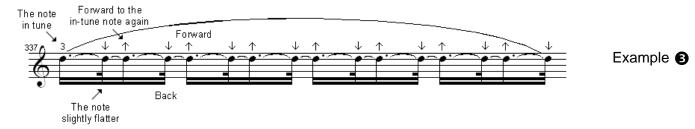
There is another reason why this 'even' vibrato may cause problems: if the rocking movement is equal up and down, it may be difficult to play a fast vibrato. Clapping provides a perfect model:

- With your hands staying quite close together, clap lightly and quickly. The movement is 'in-in-in-in'. It is easy to do this very fast.
- Again keeping your hands quite close together, move the hands away from each other in a sort of 'anticlapping' movement. The movement is 'out-out-out-out', which again is very easy to do fast.
- But it is very difficult to make both an active movement in, and an active movement out, i.e. 'in-out-inout', very fast.

In the same way, the feeling of the movement of vibrato is one of 'forward–forward–forward–forward, not one of 'forward–back–forward–back'. This is achieved with the dotted motion illustrated in the next group.

Group 3

In this vibrato, there is a dotted movement between the principal note, and the same note fractionally flattened. You can still hear the lower pitch clearly:

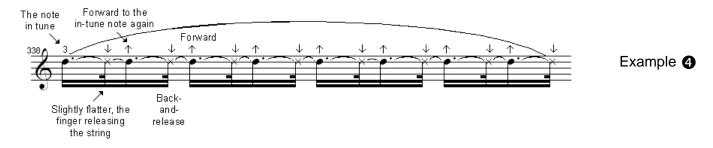


This type of vibrato 'throbs'. It 'pulses' clearly, and this gives it a lot of energy. However, you do not always want to hear these 'pings' in the vibrato. There are many vibrato shades of colour where all you want to hear is a general sweetness, rather than a quality of 'ping-ping-ping-ping'.

Because of the audible, lower pitch of the vibrato, this type of throbbing, dotted-rhythm vibrato may sometimes sound too thick, or too wide.

Group 4

In this vibrato there is also a dotted movement, but now the lower pitch is almost (or completely) inaudible, and is represented here by an x-note:



This ends up sounding like one note repeated, i.e. D–D–D–D–D–D–D–D, rather than the 'quarter-tone trill' illustrated in Example 1.