Continuous vibrato

Continuous vibrato is one of the single mostimportant qualities to have as part of your general tone. It produces a unique and classy quality of expressive singing, and when you urge a student to play a phrase with vibrato where before they did not, the difference it makes is always dramatic. What it means is two things. First, so long as the passage is not too fast each note in a melodic phrase can have vibrato, without some notes unintentionally played 'bare'. Second, the vibrato must begin at the absolute beginning of the note, without any momentary delay, and continue to the end of the note.

Yfrah Neaman, pupil of Carl Flesch and Max Rostal, suggested that it should feel as though the hand itself is vibrating continuously, the fingers are already 'vibrating' as they drop and touch the string, and not stopping vibrating as they lift off. Of course, like anything else continuous vibrato must be used judiciously. There are plenty of occasions – especially in passages that are more

than moderate in tempo – where a 'cleaner' sound without vibrato would be desirable anyway, or where vibrato would make an otherwise-simple passages more difficult.

However, until a passage is obviously too fast for anything you can often use 'background vibrato' - minimal width and speed of movement, but just enough vibrato to colour the notes slightly and give them life.

The following original exercise is an easy and effective way to build continuous vibrato.

- Simply sustain long notes on one string with a generous vibrato, and at the same time silently finger on an adjacent string.
- Do not allow the finger action to stop the vibrato on the bowed, sustained, even for an instant.
- Allow the silent fingers on the other string to take part in the vibrato too.
- Alternative: play both strings, with full, expressive, non-stop vibrato on every note.

