

## Leonard Bernstein: *Candide* (1989 Scottish Opera Edition) Study Score. Boosey & Hawkes HPS 1180

Leonard Bernstein worked on the scores of *Candide* and *West Side Story* simultaneously, setting the latter aside to complete the former, which opened on Broadway in 1956. From that point on the history of the musical (or operetta, if you prefer) was one of endless tweaking and revision. The music, everyone seemed to concede, was a work of genius; the book seemed intractable. It wasn't until 1989 that Bernstein knocked the piece into its final shape, recording it for Deutsche Grammophon in the process. Those are the performances preserved in this study score, which at only \$100 for a handsome, clothbound volume is a pretty good deal. Indeed, Boosey & Hawkes is also offering *West Side Story* for the same price, and anyone who cares about two of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest works for the musical theater will want both.

The score of *Candide* as printed here has been arranged for a more standard symphonic orchestra, at least as compared to that for *West Side Story*, which features limited strings, lots of percussion, and a "reed" section with multiple doubling of parts. That makes *Candide* suitable not just for opera house or theater productions, but also for the sort of highly enjoyable concert performances that we see in Bernstein's video of the complete work--with a stellar cast including Jerry Hadley, June Anderson, Adolf Green, Christa Ludwig, Nicolai Gedda, and the London Symphony Orchestra. There were some losses in arriving at this definitive version of the piece, including some particularly tart lyrics in the Auto-da-fé scene, but on the whole the work remains a miracle of melodic appeal, wit, and supreme craftsmanship.

In perusing the score, however, one passage stands out as particularly fascinating for the light that it sheds on a major musical controversy: the extent to which pitch vibrato was used in orchestral string sections in earlier times. Now you may well wonder what a score that achieved its final form only in 1989 has to say about this issue, but the answer is, "Quite a lot." Vibrato gives instrumental music that vocal, expressive quality that composers have expected, and assumed to be present whether notated or not, essentially since the dawn of civilization. Today's school of "authentic" performance practice claims that it was not used in former periods, defining these (according to how delusional the theory) as anywhere from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century right through the Second World War.

The reason these theories are proliferating is simple: musicians who claim to be experts in period performance practice need to make their music sound different from traditional norms, and withholding vibrato offers a convenient way to accomplish just that, albeit at the music's expense. There is no evidence from any historical sources to support the notion that vibrato was not used in orchestral music. Indeed, all of the most reputable sources say just the opposite (if they say anything at all about it), but that doesn't seem to matter to those convinced that

what was done in former times must necessarily be different from what we do today. And it is precisely this point that Bernstein's *Candide* shows to be total nonsense.

Consider the passage below, from Candide's song "It Must Be So." The words read, "My world is dust now, and all I loved is dead," and the accompanying strings are all marked *sempre vibrato* (always vibrato).

The image shows a musical score for a song by Candide. The score is written for Harp, Violin I (div.), Viola, and Violoncello. The lyrics are: "My world is dust now, And all I loved is dead. Oh, let me". The strings are marked "sempre vibrato" and "pp". The Harp part is marked "p". The Violin I part is marked "2. solo con sord. sempre vibrato" and "pp". The Viola part is marked "2. solo con sord. sempre vibrato" and "pp". The Violoncello part is marked "1. solo con sord. sempre vibrato" and "pp".

This is valuable evidence for the simple reason that in 1989, it is indisputable and uncontroversial that all traditionally trained string players use what is mistakenly called "continuous vibrato." This means that varying levels of vibrato will be employed wherever technically feasible and emotionally justified. In fact, there are many different kinds of vibrato: slow, fast, wide, and narrow, in various combinations. String players sensitive to the composer's notation and the expressive intensity of the music apply the appropriate type instinctively, and likely they always have. Even so, vibrato is rarely continuous because in quick music, or when note values are very short, there either isn't time for it, or it wouldn't be noticeable in any case.

Bernstein's calling for it here, when he really doesn't need to specify it at all because players would naturally use it anyway, tells us something critically important about orchestral vibrato: namely, that its presence as a natural, baseline expressive timbre does not preclude its being called for as a special effect. In fact, in orchestral music the only way vibrato can be used distinctly is if the composer specifically asks all of the players to use a very prominent type at the same time. That is what happens in the above passage, and it explains why Bernstein calls for something that everyone normally would be doing anyway: he wants the players to *exaggerate*. So if it is true in 1989 that a continuous vibrato timbre doesn't preclude composers asking for more of it, was this also true in 1889, or 1789? In fact, it probably was.

Throughout history, the evidence is indisputable that composers have asked orchestral string players to use additional vibrato, particularly in those areas where contemporary treatises unanimously recommend it: on sustained notes, or in

passionate passages. Indeed, violin virtuoso and famed pedagogue Francesco Geminiani described Bernstein's use of vibrato exactly in his 1751 treatise *The Art of Playing on the Violin*, noting that by "making it shorter, lower and softer, it may denote affliction, fear, etc." This is the specific type of vibrato that Bernstein requires in the above passage, and we find it used consistently in this manner from Geminiani's time right through to Bernstein's. But seeing is believing.

#### Strauss (*Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) Dover Edition)

Musical score for *Der Rosenkavalier*, Act 1, showing the Marschallin and Octavian. The Marschallin's part includes the lyrics "Jetzt sei Er gut und folg' Er mir." and "(leise) (Er geht ab) Wie Sie befiehlt, Bi- chet- te!". The Octavian's part includes the lyrics "(leise) (Er geht ab) Wie Sie befiehlt, Bi- chet- te!". The score features various instruments including Violin I, Violin II, Br., Pult, Cello, and C.B. with markings for vibrato and pizz.

Here's a piece of music that not only reveals the exact same handling of additional vibrato that we find in *Candide*, it comes from a score that Bernstein knew extremely well. He conducted *Der Rosenkavalier* in Vienna, and recorded it quite splendidly (for Sony). This is the moment where the Marschallin, knowing that her lover Octavian will soon leave her for a younger woman, gives vent to her sadness and longing and tells him to go away with the words, "Now be good, and do as I say."

#### Rossini (*La Donna del Lago* (1819) Critical Edition)

Musical score for *La Donna del Lago*, Act 1, showing the Dug. and Vni. The Dug. part includes the lyrics "Co- si al mio". The Vni. part includes markings for tremolo and [p] sotto voce.

In this example, from Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*, composed some 170 years before *Candide* achieved its final form and a century prior to *Der Rosenkavalier*, once again we see sustained string chords marked to be played with vibrato. The text certainly expresses "affliction and fear." The three characters involved (vocal parts omitted to save space) have just exclaimed, "Oh, how unhappy I am!" "What a fateful moment!" and "Now my cruel doubt is certain."

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, normal pitch vibrato on stringed instruments was often (but not always) called "tremolo," as for example in Ludwig Spohr's 1835 *Violin School*, where he says: "In old compositions the tremolo is indicated by [a row of] dots (.....), or by the word *tremolo*: in new compositions it is generally left to the performer." Of course, in orchestral music, if the composer wants listeners to notice the presence of extra vibrato at all it cannot be left to the individual performer, however much he or she may use it anyway, and must be specified entire sections at a time. That is exactly what Rossini does here, just as Strauss and Bernstein did.

Now jump back another ninety years or so, to the high Baroque period, when composers such as Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi were in their primes. The most famous German composer of Italian opera was Johann Adolph Hasse, who presided over the golden age of orchestral performance at the Dresden court. Hasse, like Rossini, frequently notated vibrato in his orchestral music, often using one of the more common vibrato symbols: ~~~~~~. However, in the case below he employs the identical method chosen by Bernstein, Strauss, and Rossini. Over the same texture of sustained string chords that we have just seen repeatedly, and a text that expresses the heroine's longing for her lover and includes such exclamations as: "Everything is horror, everything is pain, I can no longer withstand such troubles, etc," we find the following vibrato/tremolo indication:

Hasse: (*Cleofide* (1731), Carus Verlag Critical Edition, Act II)

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment and a vocal line. The piano part consists of three staves (treble, middle, and bass clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked "Poco adagio". The piano part features sustained chords with a "tremolo" marking above each staff. The vocal line is on a single staff with a key signature of one sharp. The lyrics are: "for - se dell' I - da - spe in su la spon-da tu m'at-ten - di, mio ben, in brac-cio all' on - da." The tempo marking "Poco adagio" is written above the piano part.

As you can plainly see, similar emotional circumstances call forth exactly the same notation, which would produce exactly the same response from the players. This doesn't prove the existence of a certain baseline level of expressive timbre in orchestral music hundreds of years old, but the identity of practice over more than

two and half centuries, culminating in the example of *Candide*, is very suggestive. For if the request to use ensemble vibrato as a special effect in heightened emotional circumstances is perfectly consistent with orchestral players also using it at will in 1989, then why should it be any different in 1789? We have no evidence that shows that it was—not a shred. There are some sources that note (indeed complain about) the fact that orchestral players actually used vibrato in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but none that celebrate its absence.

Nor should we assume for one minute that the use of vibrato at any of the periods covered by these examples was limited exclusively to accompaniment situations in which instruments are called on to give emotional weight to the feelings expressed by a sung text. Vibrato techniques exist because all instruments, as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart pointed out, attempt to imitate the expressive timbre of the human voice, and all voices have a natural level of pitch variation that increases in tandem with volume, intensity, and passion. This is a scientific and aesthetic fact. In other words, vibrato most commonly occurs as an enhancement to the principal melodic line, being displayed most prominently by whatever voice or instrument has the tune.

The fact that we do find vibrato so frequently elsewhere is a testament to just how ubiquitous it must have been throughout much of our modern musical history (meaning from roughly the 17<sup>th</sup> century on). Its use was not without controversy and a good deal of misunderstanding, not least because scientific studies have shown that some people are far more sensitive to minute pitch variations than others, and some of those most bothered were in a position to express their grievances in writing. But this doesn't mean that the rest of musical humanity wasn't perfectly happy with a healthy dose of vibrato much of the time, particularly in the instruments that played the main theme. In the orchestra as often as not, that means the strings--and the violins especially.

Consider, for example, Alfredo Casella's 1909 orchestral rhapsody *Italia*, the opening of which is marked "*Lento, grave, tragico. Con molta fantasia*," with all of the strings urged to play "*appassionatissimo vibrato*." Here, once again, we find Geminiani's "fear and affliction" albeit of a more abstract variety. Still, the emotions being expressed couldn't be clearer.

The image shows a page from a musical score for the opening of Alfredo Casella's 1909 orchestral rhapsody *Italia*. The score is for five string instruments: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The tempo and mood are marked "Lento, grave, tragico. Con molta fantasia". The strings are marked "appassionatissimo, vibrato allarg." and "sulla 4a corda". The music is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The Violino I and II parts have a melodic line with many slurs and accents, while the other instruments provide harmonic support with sustained notes and chords. The overall effect is one of intense emotion and drama.

Finally, to complete the story begun by *Candide*, we do in fact have compelling evidence from the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century showing, just as we saw in Bernstein's work, that composers were well aware of the fact that continuous vibrato textures do not preclude using even more for expressive emphasis.

Boccherini (String Quintet Op. 10 No. 2 (1771), Critical Edition ed. Carmirelli)

Minuetto  
Espressivo vibrato  
con sordini  
dolce  
con sordini  
dolce  
con sordini  
p  
con sordini  
p  
con sordini  
p

Here we find two different types of vibrato notation: a general *espressivo* that applies to the entire movement and consequently to all of the parts, and a specific accent in the form of the wavy line to emphasize the melody in the first violin. Again, there is no substantive difference between Boccherini's requirements here and the example from *Candide*, or indeed any piece of music where additional vibrato is specified beyond whatever the players normally would do.

So the story here is one of continuity over time, precisely the opposite of what today's school of authenticity preaches. Superseding any recently concocted theoretical "rules" of period style, what truly governs the use of vibrato is the emotional content of the music, and not pedagogical treatises or some trendy intellectual appeal to the *Zeitgeist* of an era. This does not mean that notational habits haven't changed, or that different musical styles do not require different applications of certain standard techniques. Vibrato, however, always has been defined as a means of enhancing the musical expression of human feeling, and so long as this remains the composer's intention then performers naturally will use vibrato in much the same way.

These examples serve to illustrate another very important point about just how unmusical and stylistically maladroit much of the historically informed performance movement really is. When confronted with the above examples, followers of the new paradigm will say (and have said, often, and in print), “Well yes, that may mean vibrato, but it’s not the same as modern *continuous* vibrato.” This argument is specious. The problem with so many of today’s historical performances is not that they use vibrato less than continuously; there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that since vibrato is seldom continuous in the first place, and small variations in gross quantity hardly matter.

No indeed, the real issue is that historically informed performances often don’t apply vibrato correctly in precisely those circumstances where every single authority that has ever opined on the subject agrees that it absolutely *must* be used: in expressive principal melodies, lyrical passages in slow movements, passionate episodes, or on sustained notes such as occur in the Bernstein, Strauss, Rossini, and Hasse extracts just cited. Thus, Spohr counsels: “In places where the tremolo is used by the singer, it may also advantageously be applied to the Violin. This tremolo is therefore properly used in passionate passages, and in strongly marking all the fz or > tones.” Leopold Mozart some eighty years previously observed that, “a closing note or any other sustained note may be decorated with a tremolo.”

So if the use of vibrato in earlier times was not “continuous” in the modern sense, it certainly was notably present. In practical terms, this means using it frequently enough to make a substantive difference in the way a particular passage feels to the listener. Otherwise, what would be the point in using it at all? On the other hand, omitting vibrato often is the only way for modern players to achieve an obviously different, “authentic” sound, even if this naturally results in their ignoring the basic notation, not to mention the emotional content of the music itself. Unsurprisingly this trend produces interpretations either expressively neutered and heartless, or perversely unbalanced, as the artists attempt to compensate for the lack of timbral intensity by wreaking havoc with tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and accent.

Ultimately, any claim that orchestral musicians in earlier periods avoided vibrato in their playing depends on a series of assumptions that are illogical where they aren’t simply ridiculous. Among them is the idea that the members of string sections were either unaware of the expressive potential of ensemble vibrato, a lacuna instantly remedied after about ten seconds of rehearsal, or that they found it distasteful. The examples just cited demonstrate that composers (and thus players) not only were fully cognizant of vibrato’s usefulness, they specifically prescribed more of it. A broader survey of the scores reveals that they did so quite often. Bear in mind that this discussion of *Candide* only concerns one very narrowly defined instance where vibrato is required. There are dozens of others, each wholly typical, accompanied by an equally large number of notational conventions--from symbols, to accents, to verbal directions—all calling for vibrato in addition to whatever expressive emphasis the players themselves bring to the music.

Even a supposedly conservative source regarding the use of vibrato in solo playing, the Joachim/Moser *Violinschule* of 1905, sings its praises in ensembles. "Vibrato appears remarkably mysterious and romantic when it is employed simultaneously by many instruments, particularly in chords," say the authors, going on to note that, "Vibrato also played a role in 18<sup>th</sup> century orchestral music." In short, orchestral players had no cause to fear it, no reason to avoid it, and every incentive to apply it with gusto in appropriate circumstances. As a question of taste, the sheer quantity of vibrato must have been, as it remains today, a personal choice for each musician, but in terms of performance practice and basic technique vibrato's presence in the orchestra safely can be assumed from as early a time as we care to imagine.

Today's musicology encourages the creation of micro-specializations, both in scholarship and in performance, resulting in the need to engineer extreme differences between periods, places, stylistic conventions, and then exaggerating their importance. In reality, two or three hundred years isn't a very long time in human history; that we are still playing and enjoying music composed in centuries past means that neither its notation nor its expressive meaning is incomprehensible to us. The fact that the representation of emotion through music has remained consistent since time immemorial eviscerates any theory of widely fluctuating levels of orchestral vibrato--from zero ages ago, to one hundred percent today. It is singularly satisfying that a lighthearted musical comedy by Leonard Bernstein holds one of the keys that unlocks this particular truth, and exposes this particular sham. He surely would have been amused.

David Hurwitz  
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