

## **Orchestral Vibrato Part One**

### **Historical Context and the Evidence of the Printed Page**

#### Introduction

There is a fraud being foisted on the music-loving public today by certain members of the “historically informed performance practice” lunatic fringe (let us call them the HIPPLF for short). This consists of the notion that the modern orchestral “continuous vibrato,” a misnomer for reasons to be considered shortly, was a post-War invention that composers of the late Romantic period would have found alien, and in fact did not call for in their scores. Proponents of this theory would have us believe that prior to World War II, vibrato in orchestral string sections was a scarce commodity, and then all of a sudden, the same players, conductors, and composers who lived in vibrato-less bliss decided to apply the technique with a trowel.

Stated this way, the foolishness of this point of view ought to be self-evident, if only because of its utter lack of grounding in the reality of how people behave and the pace at which historical change logically occurs. It has arisen out of the fact that certain early music specialist conductors have broken into the mainstream, and now lead conventional symphony orchestras. Some simply loathe vibrato, but lack the personal courage to come out and say, “I like it this way.” Instead, they seek historical justification for their peculiar prejudices, and such is the state of affairs in the world of the performing arts today that it is in the interests of players, managers, and audiences to indulge these fantasies.

One result of this lamentable trend has been the creation of HIPPLF member Roger Norrington’s “Stuttgart sound.” His hypothesis, succinctly articulated in the notes to his recording of Mahler’s First Symphony, states categorically that, “Brahms, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Bruckner, Mahler, and Berg never heard an orchestra with vibrato; it simply wasn’t a part of their experience.” Needless to say, this assertion is purely rhetorical, designed to shock rather than to enlighten. Norrington is a fundamentalist. Accordingly, his position is a matter of blind faith, and not one of reason supported by actual evidence. I am not suggesting that Norrington isn’t aware of the historical record; but his use of it, and that of the HIPPLF generally, is selective, biased, lacking in context, and opportunistic.

As an example of the latter, consider the notion of an orchestra’s unique “sound.” This has a highly respectable historical precedent, to the extent a conductor can be credited with creating it, as a career-enhancing device. After all, the more personal and artist-specific the ensemble sonority, the theoretically “greater” and more compelling must be its leader’s interpretive personality. Remember the “Philadelphia Sound” under Stokowski, or the “Berlin Sound” under Karajan. Both of these phenomena were based primarily on the conductor’s treatment of the orchestral string section, and both were noteworthy for their ensemble virtuosity and fullness of tone.

Conductors as different in interpretive philosophy as Celibidache and Mravinsky also cultivated a very distinctive timbral profile, working with the same orchestras over many years. However, unlike Norrington, neither Stokowski nor Karajan ever claimed that what they were doing was “right” in a historical sense, and they never needed to. The results that they obtained spoke for themselves. Seeking interpretive validation in the allegedly objective findings of scholarly research into performance practice is a uniquely modern phenomenon and, I would suggest, a dangerous precedent. It means that an interpretation is only as legitimate as the research on which it depends, and as we shall see, what sometimes passes for scholarship on the vibrato issue is, to put it mildly, pitiful.

Indeed, the very existence of the rich “Philadelphia Sound,” a product of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is the first piece of hard evidence that reveals the anti-vibrato historical perspective as nonsense. Stokowski’s approach to string sonority was not that of a violinist, but rather than of an organist. This is significant. It reveals that the ultimate determinant of orchestral string tone may not in fact be string pedagogy at all. One of the weakest elements of the anti-vibrato argument arises from the unwillingness to consider all of the factors acting on the way musicians produce sound--and in particular to look at the music itself. The HIPPLF would have us believe that pedagogical treatises, and a few other miscellaneous statements and violinist memoirs, constitute all of the evidence that we have about when orchestral vibrato was actually used. This approach ignores the most important and critical evidence of all: that of the scores.

You may wonder why this rich font of information has been neglected. In this area, as in so many others regarding the vibrato question, the HIPPLF is guilty of unpardonably rigid thinking. The period performance movement began with the study of Baroque music, and has been advancing the time-frame of its mandate ever since. Baroque scores are very sparsely marked; composers expected performers to improvise and add ornamentation liberally, according to certain stylistic parameters. Useful information on how best to realize a given piece thus will be found outside of the score itself, in a distinct body of material that describes general style in performance.

This mentality has carried over to the treatment of 19<sup>th</sup> century music, even though by this time most composers were quite detailed in their requirements, and expected interpreters to remain relatively faithful to the printed text. The scores may not tell us what individual players did on any given day, but they certainly tell us what the composers wanted and expected them to do, which is without question the next best thing. Furthermore, many of the so-called “discoveries” of the historical performance movement are only news because of the some very striking feats of collective amnesia on the part of the performing arts community, a function of its need to find ever new ways to justify playing the same repertoire over and over.

For example, way back in 1965, Leonard Bernstein did a televised “Young People’s Concert” broadcast called “The Sound of an Orchestra.” It begins with the Largo of Haydn’s 88<sup>th</sup> Symphony played in an exaggerated Romantic manner. Bernstein then proceeds to describe exactly why the performance was hideous, and one of the principle

reasons is the excessive vibrato, of a kind more appropriate to much later music. Indeed, Bernstein waxes quite eloquently on the subject. And yet, to hear the HIPPLF talk, you would think that the idea of minimal vibrato in music of the Baroque and Classical periods was their discovery. Obviously, it was not.

The point of this demonstration, and those that follow in Bernstein's talk, is to show that the modern symphony orchestra, not to mention the conductor who leads it, must be able to master a variety of interpretive styles and aesthetics, depending of the music actually being played. Understanding the proper idiom, and being able to move freely from one to another over several centuries of repertoire, is one of the acid tests of good musicianship. The "non-vibrato fits all" theory enunciated by the HIPPLF constitutes nothing less than an affront to history, to a centuries-old performance tradition, and to the reality of what fine musicians have always known and done. It is a travesty of logic, scholarship, artistic responsibility, and taste.

In attempting to address these various issues, then, my intention in writing this essay is five-fold:

First, to follow the evidence trail wherever it legitimately leads. I propose to examine this evidence in detail--with the proviso that this discussion can only touch on a small fraction of the available sources--secure in the belief that a substantial body of dispositive information is in fact available to those interested in looking for it. You will learn that the printed page actually tells us quite a bit about orchestral vibrato—the how, when, and why of its use from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present;

Second, to demonstrate that the use of string vibrato in orchestral music (especially) is understood to be inherent in a consistently employed expressive terminology centuries old. This isn't a matter of oral tradition or speculation, but a fact routinely embodied and clearly notated in the printed scores themselves, and even supported by the same pedagogical treatises used to substantiate the anti-vibrato position;

Third, to explore the historical relationship of vocal music to purely instrumental performance, and based on this aesthetic viewpoint--which remains the foundation and goal of instrumental technique to this day--to suggest the likelihood that a vibrato-enriched, "blank canvas" orchestral string texture existed at a comparatively early date. Accordingly, taking the pedantic position to eliminate vibrato to the extent possible in performance not only violates the clear intent of the composers and the spirit of their music, it results in emotionally neutered, expressively inhibited interpretations;

Fourth, to emphasize the distinctions between solo and orchestral practice, and in particular to establish that (a) the term "continuous vibrato," as defined in terms of solo playing and then applied to orchestral music is sheer nonsense, and (b) that the use of the actual term "vibrato" in orchestral music is necessary not because the "blank canvas" variety is not already in place, but because a large group cannot approximate the expressive immediacy of a solo voice without practice and cooperation, and so must be told specifically when and where to do so;

Fifth, to set the bar as high as possible in challenging those who seek to rewrite history in order to indulge their musical whims, prejudices, or other personal agendas. Much of the confusion fomented by the HIPPLF is imagined rather than real. With the help of the scores, a touch of logic, and a little straightforward common sense, a much clearer and more rational picture of the true situation emerges.

### The Vibrato Question

Let us begin by framing the main issue more clearly. The battle between pro- and anti-vibrato forces is as old as string playing itself. Everyone agrees that vibrato has existed for centuries and that soloists and treatise-writers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and before) had widely differing views on how frequently the specifically left-hand, modern variety should be used. Much controversy concerns the degree to which the audible reality, which we obviously cannot know, conformed to the various theories extant at any given time. Furthermore, it appears that that historical source material most often cited in the vibrato debate is silent on the subject of what should happen when large groups of string players come together, and fails utterly to address the very important differences between vibrato used ornamentally by a soloist, and its practical value and purpose in the orchestral string section.

While I freely confess that I am not qualified to wade into the scholarly debate on the meaning of the more arcane technical terms used in the various violin treatises that have come down to us, even a cursory glance through the extant literature makes a few important and interesting points very clear:

There is no agreement, in considering the written statements of past ages, that the term “vibrato” (or “tremolo” as it was sometimes called) meant the same thing at all times--or even invariably referred to the actual technique under consideration here: the slight variation in pitch produced by the rocking of the player’s left hand on the fingerboard while stopping the string. What we do know is that some loved vibrato (Geminiani, for example), and others professed to dislike it when employed to excess (Ludwig Spohr). Leopold Mozart, the most important historical source of all, is often grouped with the anti-vibrato crowd, erroneously in my view, as will be explained later. No one disagrees that vibrato is one of the fundamental techniques for coloring melodic lines expressively, or that it should be considered a standard weapon in the string player’s technical arsenal. All of the fuss concerns the issues of “when” and “how much.”

Interestingly, many of the historical naysayers present their arguments as a protest against a pernicious trend already rampant, indeed out of control. This fact alone tends to favor the pro-vibrato faction as evidence that, irrespective of what various musical eminences may have said, the free use of vibrato has always been the rule rather than the exception when it comes to what players actually did. Another point in favor of vibrato comes from the contention, often voiced among the “antis,” that the technique was regarded as an expressive ornament in Baroque music, and was therefore employed only infrequently. I

hope you can see that this conclusion hardly flows from the initial premise, and its illogic is really quite striking.

Baroque musicians, we know for fact, did not always ornament their music “tastefully” and abstemiously. They often went crazy, producing strikingly dense agglomerations of musical clutter--witness various examples of written-out ornamentation that have come down to us. The idea that ornaments should be used sparingly is a wholly modern concept utterly at odds with the Baroque aesthetic, in music, architecture, painting, and just about everything else. “Good taste” has not been synonymous with “less” at all times in human history, and we can be sure that if vibrato was indeed considered an ornament in baroque music, it was used to the hilt. The modern conception of correct style in such pieces as the famous “Air” from Bach’s *Orchestral Suite No. 3*, which permits it to be decorated with assorted musical doodads but with little or no vibrato, is an unmusical atrocity that must have the Leipzig master spinning (or vibrating) in his grave.

We do, in any case, have a way to give a bit of concrete musical substance to all of this speculation, or at least to put these initial suppositions on a firmer historical footing--by turning to the music itself. Fascinatingly, the debate about vibrato in the popular literature<sup>1</sup> seldom if ever involves reference to actual musical scores, for the simple reason that in the solo repertoire composers for the most part left the issue to the whim of the individual player and seldom mention the term at all. How odd then, that the vibrato question still has been almost exclusively framed in terms of the technique of the soloist. Few commentators, if any, bother to consider orchestral music as a thing apart, deserving of separate consideration. As you will see, this failure has been a huge mistake for the simple reason that groups need more specific instructions than individuals, and so orchestral scores, particularly as the 19<sup>th</sup> century went on, offer plenty of useful information to fill out the vibrato picture.

Until recently, the question of when to use vibrato was not an issue: everyone knew that if a composer wrote “*espressivo*” over a string part he generally meant, among other things, “use more vibrato than usual to highlight the musical line.” That orchestral strings would do whatever was necessary absent specific instructions, including using vibrato, to achieve a warm, singing tone, accurate intonation, and fine ensemble blend<sup>2</sup>, was

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<sup>1</sup> Here comes the apologia! But seriously, I freely confess not to have surveyed all of the extent academic work on this subject; I am not in a position to do so, and in any case the inspiration for this essay is not the desire to do battle with the many fine scholars who understand how properly to use and present historical evidence to their audiences of colleagues and early music experts. On the contrary, I am attempting to address what I regard as the HIPPLF’s gross oversimplification of an admittedly complex issue so as to validate its various interpretive views in actual performance--or to put it even more crudely, to stay employed. Accordingly, this is a popular issue (or one that has been popularized by the vibrato naysayers), so I have framed my answer in terms that ordinary music lovers can read and understand. Also, I truly believe that, as presented to the public, the position of the radical “authenticists” is so ridiculous as to require few if any of the rigors of the academic method to refute.

<sup>2</sup> The question of matching vibrato, both within the string section and with other sections of the orchestra, is an issue that the HIPPLF seems to avoid altogether, obsessed as it is with strings to the virtual exclusion of all other instruments, and given that the historical sources speak of strings almost exclusively. Nevertheless, we know for a fact that woodwinds and brass also employ vibrato expressively, that  
[footnote continued on next page]

something to be taken for granted. To this extent, and in a very real sense, the entire “vibrato question” in 19<sup>th</sup> century music as formulated by the HIPPLF is a fiction, an opportunistic means of justifying playing the same repertoire in a different way. Perversely, it requires denying established traditions and practices dating back at least a couple of centuries, and all under the banner of “authenticity.”

Another reason that reference to musical scores is seldom attempted is that it’s simply too time-consuming. Plowing through hundreds, indeed thousands of pieces for hints as to what the composer’s intentions might have been with respect to vibrato seems like a thankless task--and it would be, save for one significant fact: the evidence actually is there, waiting to be uncovered. So for the remainder of this discussion I propose for the most part to set aside the theoretical, and look at the printed page to see what the scores themselves tell us. In considering the vibrato question, we are very, very lucky in that one piece of music exists that can serve as a sort of “Rosetta Stone,” a key to understanding the issue, and one to which we will refer very often. The work in question is Georges Enescu’s Third Violin Sonata “In the Popular Romanian Style.”

Enescu wrote his Third Sonata in 1926, and in it he attempts to capture every subtle nuance employed by Romanian folk fiddlers. As part of this effort, he very frequently indicates when, and when not, to use vibrato, as well as including all of the other descriptive/expressive designations that apply to its presence or absence. From this work alone, it is possible to infer with near absolute certainty a critical point that will be bolstered by many other examples: that beyond the use of vibrato “ornamentally,” as a special expressive effect, there is a basic, continuous vibrato that is seldom absent. But this work also has important implications in finding a balanced historical perspective on the vibrato question.

Although Enescu composed his sonata in 1926, it professes to capture a style of playing that is centuries old, and it does so in terms of modern technique, simultaneously telling us how early 20<sup>th</sup> century musicians actually performed. Why is this important in considering the music of the Baroque and Classical periods? For the simple reason that the folk tradition was far closer to the way that string players behaved in centuries past than it is today.

Remember, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were few conservatories in the modern sense, and no uniform schools of pedagogy. People made music at home; their teachers were their parents, the local priest, or other musicians in the area. The most talented few

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composers ask for it (consider, to take just one example, the “vibrato linguale” for the flute in Falla’s chamber opera *Master Peter’s Puppet Show*), and that the techniques for producing it are very old and well understood. You will see several further instances in the discussion to follow.

So to consider the “vibrato question” in terms of the orchestral strings exclusively is patently ridiculous; it ignores a major aspect of the matter, and raises an extremely interesting question, namely, if everyone else has an intrinsic vibrato because this best captures an expressive vocal timbre, why don’t the strings? The uncomfortable implications of this question for the HIPPLF doubtless explains why they tend to disregard the larger picture. You can find a succinct summary of the technical side of wind instrument vibrato in Samuel Adler’s “The Study of Orchestration” (Norton, 1982, p. 146).

out of a pool of amateurs that included just about everyone might become professional musicians--a trade more often than not considered disreputable, and decidedly low class. Musicians were servants, if they were lucky. Only the best of the best were rewarded with steady jobs, usually allied to a noble house, the church, or a "free" municipality. Vivaldi's "conservatoire," let us not forget, was a girl's orphanage. Freelancers dwelt at or near the bottom of the social ladder.

To this extent, the reference to elite pedagogical treatises on violin playing must necessarily be taken with a big grain of salt. This was not how most musicians were trained, and it was not how they played. They were not highly educated, upper middle class kids with graduate degrees from major institutions of higher learning. Enescu's Third Sonata of 1926, then, actually helps to explain how and why the anti-vibrato faction of centuries past claimed that the problem was so widespread. The need to achieve respectability, job security, and to demonstrate the difference between professional artists of elevated taste, and mere street or village players, surely left its mark on the vibrato debate. Much of the argument against the use of vibrato today thus adopts the same perspective, without a shred of awareness (or with a consciously cynical dismissal) of the actual historical context.

Again, I am not in a position to investigate this issue with scholarly thoroughness, but I suspect, both as a trained historian and as an exercise in reasonable thinking, that closer scrutiny will support the above contentions. They are not new, or original, and the social history of the arts in the past few centuries is well known. But as so often happens in discussions of highly technical issues (and vibrato certainly is one of those), the narrow focus entails a loss of the wider perspective. That said, I do not suggest that Baroque string players should use the same continuous vibrato as would be appropriate to a Strauss tone poem, for the simple reason that the music doesn't require it, and this is pretty clear from the notation itself--even the limited Baroque kind.

The critical point that needs to be made, however, is that the history of vibrato is not one in which it went from being hardly used at all, and then gradually seeped into the technical accoutrements of string players until its use became constant. It was always there, always used with relative frequency, and as we shall see, the difference between the modern age and prior eras stems not so much from changes in schooling, or in the purely mechanical business of tone production, but in the demands that composers made on the players themselves. The vibrato question cannot be considered as some might wish, independently of the actual music.

The late Romantic period also charted the rise of the virtuoso conductor. Mahler and Toscanini, for example, were two of the most famous music directors of their day. The former conducted his own music (as did Strauss). All three men inaugurated their own interpretive traditions as they interacted with, inspired, and trained a whole generation of very strong-willed maestros, including such names as Walter, Klemperer, Szell, Mengelberg, Reiner, Kleiber, Böhm, as well as many others less well known. The members of this next generation in turn enjoyed careers both pre- and post-War. They heard music of all sorts conducted by their mentors. And yet, none of them uttered a

significant word about the rise of vibrato; they accepted this hugely significant “paradigm shift,” one allegedly inimical to the very repertoire which they had grown up hearing performed “correctly,” without demur.

Outside of the above, specifically German orbit of conductors, the list grows larger still. Leaving aside Stokowski, that paragon of vibrato from his earliest days, consider Pierre Monteux, who actually performed for Brahms, led the premiers of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring and Ravel’s Daphnis et Chloé, and made numerous modern stereo recordings with a choice assortment of orchestras ranging from London to Amsterdam, Chicago, and Boston, with nary a quip about excessive vibrato or evidence in his own performances of a noteworthy aversion to it. The pre- and post-War careers of artists like Beecham, Ansermet, and Boult are similarly well-documented, and evidently also silent on the subject.

How fascinating that the conductors who lived through the momentous transition to continuous orchestral vibrato either never noticed it, or were perfectly happy with it, while those conveniently unable to have witnessed and heard the process in real life are positive that it must have taken place and convinced of its significance. Indeed, one could hardly be blamed for feeling, in light of these facts, that either the continuous vibrato revolution never happened at all; or if it did, that it was much less important than its proponents claim; or that it was what musicians and composers of the period really wanted to happen because it best suited the music that they were writing and playing. All of these propositions, I suggest, are far more reasonable than the alternative.

### Orchestral Vibrato

The vibrato question is further complicated by the different functions and purpose the device has when used in the orchestra, as opposed to in solo performance. The nature of the problem eludes simplistic answers. Robert Philip, in his book “Early Recordings and Musical Style,” offers persuasive evidence of a very gradual change of habit among virtuoso violin soloists: away from the use of vibrato only in expressive or melodic passages, to the use of it more generally. The effect on sonority of this change is subtle; but in order to exaggerate its importance Philip, citing Carl Flesch, adduces from this fact the notion that the actual use of vibrato went from relatively *infrequent* through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to constant. This contention is not supported by his evidence.

For example, here is what Flesch actually says: “*Joachim’s* medium of expression, for instance, consisted of a very quick and close tremolo. This same holds good for *Thomson*. *Sarasate* started to use broader oscillations, while *Ysaÿe’s* vibrato, which followed closely every mood of his admirable personality, became the ideal of the generation around 1900. But it was *Kreisler* who forty years ago, driven by an irresistible inner urge, started a revolutionary change in this regard, by vibrating not only continually in cantilenas, like *Ysaÿe*, but even in technical passages.” From this Philip erroneously concludes: “This distinction between expressive themes, which might have a little vibrato, and ‘neutral’ passages, which would not, is a fundamental feature of violin-playing in the early years of the century...” (p. 99).



This is basically just a rehash of the “ornaments should be infrequently used” theory already discussed. “Less” doesn’t always mean “rarely,” nor is there any evidence that expressive passages only had “a little” vibrato. As a proposition, it begs the question: What is an “expressive” passage? Is it one so marked by the composer? Does the player decide? If so, when and by what criteria? Can otherwise “inexpressive” or “technical” passages be made “expressive?” And what about Romantic scores, or even Beethoven’s last quartets in which, judging from the composer’s markings, virtually *everything* is supposed to be expressive? Whatever the theory may be, isn’t it a fact that in practical terms the Romantic demand for continuous expression will basically result in a continuous vibrato?

The artistic ideals of a select few, or the theory on paper, are seldom the reality of the working many. Flesch’s recollections are in fact a less-than-precise mish-mash of “how much” (Joachim, Thomson, Sarasate) and “how often” (Kreisler, Ysaÿe). Of course, it goes without saying that having thus described what he expects to hear, Philip accordingly is able to find a few examples from old recordings that support his thesis. I am not questioning Philip’s motives, or suggesting that he is entirely wrong; but this is still not a scientifically reliable method of determining what was really going on *in the orchestra*. Moreover, the question of orchestral vibrato is not definable on the basis of the behavior of one or two supreme virtuosos of the day.

Nor does it justify using Philip’s evidence--Flesch’s suggestion that Fritz Kreisler was the apostle of modern vibrato, for example--for quite a different purpose: to validate the inexpressive, passionless performance of melodic lines that even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be considered fair game for a healthy dose of emotional nuance. There is a fundamental difference between the question Philip is trying to answer (“What did string soloists actually do?”) and the broader issue of what the scores tell us that composers expected and required. Philip, in any case, wisely and perhaps for the reasons just noted, hardly deals with the question of orchestral vibrato at all. Indeed, no one does, with perhaps one exception. Cecil Forsyth, in his book “Orchestration” (1914 rev. 1935), says the following:

“In the orchestra vibrato is left to chance. If a player feels like making it on a note, he does; if not, he doesn’t. The conductor as a rule does not interfere.” (p. 404)

This statement highlights one of the contradictions at the heart of anti-vibrato version of “authenticity,” the fact that any conductor’s attempt to impose a uniform treatment of vibrato on his players is, on its face, unhistorical and inauthentic. Beyond that, Forsyth introduces his discussion of vibrato in a singularly vivid and historically appropriate way: as a battle between what the majority of players have always done and wish to do, versus the diatribes of pedagogues and tastemakers. In Forsyth’s view, this battle, which raged for centuries, had been won (and not necessarily recently) by the pro-vibrato faction to the extent that its regular use no longer excites controversy.

Further evidence for this “laissez-faire” attitude with respect to orchestral musicians can be found in Richard Strauss’s edition of Berlioz’s orchestration treatise (which, interestingly, is totally silent on the vibrato question). Strauss writes, on the subject of free versus unison bowing within a section:

“To curb the different temperaments in bowing means to destroy the soulful expression in the rendering of a melody. One violinist, in accordance with his feelings and technical skill, may need four strokes of the bow to play a melody expressively; another violinist, only two. If the first one is forced to play this melody also with two strokes, his performance will obviously lose its intensity and become poor and dull.... In such cases it is my principle to follow strictly the composer’s phrase-marks (breathing-marks) only at the beginning and end of a phrase; within the phrase I let each violinist change the bow as he wishes.” (p. 20)

While not directly concerned with vibrato, I would offer this paragraph as *prima facie* evidence of its unrestricted use in orchestras in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. After all, any conductor who permits free bowing (and Stokowski is another famous example) on the theory that each player should be allowed personal freedom of expression is hardly going to complain about the same player’s use of vibrato to realize this very goal. And it doesn’t matter what “schools” the musicians in question come from. All accept the presence of vibrato to a greater or lesser extent, and as long as a certain percentage of string players in an orchestra are using it at any given time, you have *de facto* “continuous” sectional vibrato. It’s a completely natural, logical, and spontaneous occurrence.

Furthermore, no two players have exactly the same vibrato to begin with, and its function in the orchestra is quite different than as used by a soloist—or I should say, *additional* to what a soloist achieves. Simply put, vibrato facilitates blend both within a section, and with other orchestral sections. Far from creating a sound that is woolly or “impure,” proper sectional vibrato creates the same effect as a white light: all of the colors of the individual players fuse to create a single warm, focused, and accurately pitched tone. The avoidance of vibrato, in contrast, creates a sound that is thin, weak, and often perceived as intonationally challenged<sup>3</sup>.

Accordingly, sectional vibrato as such can’t really be heard in the sense that solo vibrato can (as a distinct departure from and return to a single note), nor can it be used “ornamentally,” that is, played with particularity (slow, fast, accelerating) as an expressive conceit, except in very special circumstances<sup>4</sup>. This explains why the study of old recordings is so much puffery when it comes to questions of orchestral practice.

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<sup>3</sup> These observations are also true of much chamber music as well, particularly the all-string groupings (quartets, quintets, etc). So the broader distinction might more properly be defined as “solo” versus “ensemble” playing. For this reason some of the examples used further on, where applicable, will draw from the contemporaneous chamber music repertoire as well.

<sup>4</sup> I address this issue in terms of a more detailed critique of current scholarship, with specific reference to the use of historical recordings as evidence, in Part Two of this essay.

Certainly one can hear a richer or leaner string tone generally, but the extent to which this is attributable solely to the amount of vibrato employed, absent all other consideration, remains a matter of speculation.

Nevertheless, vibrato remains a far more important and necessary tool to a string *section* than it is to a string *soloist*, and this fact in turn justifies its more regular presence in orchestral music. It may also explain why the continuous sort was a relatively late development on the virtuoso violin circuit. Soloists have access to a wide range of expressive subtleties; they simply don't need vibrato in the same way as do orchestral musicians, who are comparatively limited in what they can use to enhance the intimacy and communicative immediacy of their parts without making a garbled mess of the actual melodic line, or disrupting clean rhythm and good ensemble.

Orchestral vibrato thus can and should be regarded as a category apart. Its very lack of obtrusiveness means that it may be used far more frequently and heavily than the solo kind, without raising aesthetic eyebrows in matters of taste.

### Vibrato in Romantic Music

One of the more egregious ways in which the HIPPLF abuses the term “continuous vibrato” with respect to solo playing is in giving the impression that all vibrato is the same. Of course, it isn't. There is fast and slow vibrato, wide and narrow, produced by the finger, the wrist, and the arm, the bow--alone and in combination--one-fingered and two-fingered, all of which are influenced by such variables as attack on the string, bow pressure, bow speed, and other factors. In the orchestra, naturally, and as just suggested, much of this subtlety is lost. What remains, for the most part, is simply the quantity of vibrato that may be used, and the degree to which it can be exaggerated (or minimized).

Still, one reason the issue has been so hard to pin down is because vibrato has no independent existence as such; it is an enhancement, an adjective rather than a noun, one that supports and amplifies the intensity of everything else that the player does. This isn't necessarily the same thing as an “ornament,” which usually means a quantitative alteration of some kind in the music's melodic surface. As you will see, orchestral vibrato is just as likely to found in inconspicuous or subsidiary voices, and in different proportions simultaneously in multiple parts. While sometimes used to heighten expression “ornamentally,” it just as often functions in a more passive, timbral sense, giving life to the tone and creating a warm overall atmosphere.

Nor is “continuous vibrato” in fact all that continuous. Vibrato can only be applied to notes sustained for a certain length of time. Rapid passages in allegros, tremolos, certain pizzicato effects, special bowing techniques (on the bridge, *col legno*, flautato), sustained tones on open (unstopped) strings, short note values in slow tempos—all of these instances offer examples of situations in which vibrato often will not or cannot be used expressively at all. It is worth pointing out, then, that the period in which continuous vibrato evolved is the same period in which orchestral string sections incorporated such a

vast range of new tone colors and playing techniques that the very term “continuous anything” is ridiculous.

To this extent, then, and as the scores themselves will show, it is far more accurate to describe vibrato in 19<sup>th</sup> century and modern orchestras as “continuously available” or “continuously variable.” Orchestral strings sometimes take center stage, but just as often merely accompany. Frequently they play a subordinate role. For this reason, “continuous vibrato” in the orchestra has a very different meaning that it does in speaking of a solo, where the word “continuous” obviously needs to be understood in light of the fact that a solo is always, by definition, the focus and center of attention whenever it plays, and so both can and should display a much greater timbral variety.

Similarly, the difference in purely orchestral string writing between, say, the baroque or classical and Romantic eras, lies to some extent in the earlier periods’ tendency to treat timbre in large, unvarying chunks--whole movements even. Later periods, on the other hand, demand constantly varying tone colors and lyrical, vibrato-friendly passages that pop up at more frequent intervals. A Mozart symphony will offer the strings the chance to show off their vibrato for the most part in its slow movement. A Rachmaninov symphony employs lyrical string cantilenas everywhere. Music in free forms, whether balletic, operatic, theatrical, or a symphonic poem, will usually be even more texturally varied. Vibrato may be appropriate at any given point, and so will indeed be used “continuously,” as long as it is understood that, unlike solo writing, this means “used where possible,” and not “plainly audible to some degree whenever the instrument is playing.”

In sum, the presence of comparatively more vibrato than in ages past, if true, logically stems from the kind of things composers were telling players to do, and not from a pre-established set of rules drummed into string students in their conservatory classes. As Philip notes above, it was accepted throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that some sort of vibrato was appropriate whenever the player had ‘the tune.’ Composers did not even need to ask for it; it was understood. In a purely orchestral context, however, certain markings reasonably may be seen both as granting license to use vibrato, as well as regulating its intensity. The point to understand is that “continuous (if varied) vibrato” arises as a consequence of continuously varied expression. Lets look at a few practical examples.

#### 1. Brahms: Symphony No. 2 (1877), First Movement (exposition)

Brahms offers a good place to start, because as the most “classical” of the great Romantic composers he might be expected to be the most restrained in his expressive indications. And compared, say, to Liszt or Mahler, he is restrained; but a glance at the first movement exposition of his Second Symphony reveals that every single melodic entrance is given some sort of verbal guidance. The first subject is marked “dolce” (Brahms’ favorite indication). The second subject has the violins “sempre dolce,” and the cellos, which have the tune, get “cantando.”

Note the subtle distinction here between “cantabile” (“song-like”) and “cantando” (“singing”); one is an adjective, the other a verb, and the Brahms is calling for the physical act of giving the melody a vocal quality. I hope I need not stress the point that singing invariably entails a natural quantity of vibrato. Finally, the exposition closes with the cadence theme in the violins, marked “espressivo.” The emotional trajectory that Brahms intends involves variations in intensity to which a degree of vibrato (but not necessarily the same degree!) can contribute virtually at every point.

One of the hallmarks of the Romantic style, and this first movement offers a perfect example, is the use of lyrical, song-like melodies in sonata-form first movements and quick finales, where earlier periods would have preferred short, pithy themes and brief, rhythmically punchy motives. The illusion of “continuous” vibrato arises, therefore, not from the violation of some rule that says “you can only use vibrato X% of the time, and any more than that is tacky and vulgar,” but rather from the reaction of string players to the nature of the material that composers in the Romantic period often choose to give them.

The “vibrato question” thus cannot, by definition, be answered by looking to older violin treatises or theoretical discussions of stylistic parameters independently of the music that the musicians were actually being asked to play. It is the music, after all, that gives rise to the pedagogy, and not the other way around.

## 2. Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4 (1878) (Second Movement)

You might think that Tchaikovsky, one of the most overtly emotional and “vibrato prone” of composers (at least in modern performances), would be far more demonstrative than Brahms in his expressive markings. Surprisingly he often is not, preferring to characterize whole movements, or broad sections of them, when it comes to the details of string timbre. It’s one aspect of his “classicism,” his love of Mozart and the early Romantics like Schumann (consider the “Adagio espressivo” slow movement of the latter’s Second Symphony), and it tends to be underplayed in discussions of his music.

This second movement gives most players all the information that they need to know from its opening designation: “Andantino in modo di canzone” (in the style of a [Italian] song). From this global indication of expression, Tchaikovsky continues marking his string parts as follows:

Cellos: *grazioso*, becoming *espressivo* (from bar 20)

Cellos: *cantabile* (before bar 80)

Violins: *cantabile* (bar 85)

Violins: *cantabile* (bar 200)

The need for the players to adopt a healthy, singing vibrato here couldn’t be more clear, but if this movement should be played with a generous amount of vibrato, the next movement, the famous pizzicato scherzo, effectively has none at all in the lyrical sense. And this is one of those examples, once again, that gives lie to the concept of “continuous

vibrato” as audible reality in the context of the work as a whole. A soloist obviously has the opportunity to use vibrato continuously whenever the part consists of a dominating melody, which, moments of pure bravura aside, will be just about whenever it plays. But orchestral strings, obviously, spend a great deal of time merely accompanying, and doing so with textures that either preclude the use of vibrato entirely, or reduce it’s audible significance as a function of performance style to near zero.

The fact is that because of the increasing size, virtuosity, flexibility, and prominence of the woodwind and brass sections in the Romantic orchestra, and however busy the strings otherwise may be, in any symphonic composition of the period they often have less *thematic* prominence than in many classical or baroque pieces (where they naturally will get the lion’s share of the material). This is true even though opportunities for lyricism may be liberally sprinkled *within* movements, rather than naturally segregated *between* them.

In both the scherzo and the finale of this very symphony, the opportunities for the strings to display vibrato for expressive purposes are, for all practical purposes, almost nonexistent. The slow movement, on the other hand, is entirely lyrical, and the long first movement varies. Its great length (as long as many Classical or Baroque symphonies or concertos) assures the presence of numerous vibrato-laden string passages, far more than you will find in earlier music, but appearing in alteration with different types of thematic material. This, in essence, is one of the fundamental principles of the Romantic style. The only way a conductor can make the avoidance of vibrato really noticeable in performance, then, is to remove it from those string cantilenas where it likely would have been entirely appropriate at any period whatsoever.

### 3. Liszt: Faust Symphony (1854-7) Second Movement (Gretchen)

This movement is a character sketch, and Liszt’s indications are (in a literal sense) characteristically detailed. When the strings first enter (a solo quartet), the principal marking is “dolce,” then “dolcissimo” at the first tutti. Next comes “dolce amoroso,” then a “marcato ed un poco agitato” (with tremolos) interlude. Lyricism reasserts itself “appassionato,” followed by “dolente” (sadly), then only a few bars later by “espressivo con intimo sentimento.” A bit more “agitato” (again with tremolos) leads to a lovely “soave con amore.” This goes on for several pages, climaxing “rinforzando ed appassionato,” and relaxing into “dolce espressivo” second violins (with the tune) under the “sempre legato e dolce” firsts, who soon take over the melody, and the “espressivo.” First violins, “sempre dolcissimo, con grazia” lead through a brief island of “molto tranquillo” to the “dolce amoroso” conclusion.

With all due respect to the HIPPLF, it is impossible to play this music properly, with its constantly changing tone colors and range of expression, without the full supply of available vibrato. And although the word “vibrato” itself does not appear in the Faust Symphony, it does appear elsewhere in Liszt, frequently and fascinating in his piano music, in such works the Cantique d’amour from Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses (1852), the Chapelle de Guillaume Tell from the first “year” of *Années de pèlerinage*

(1855), Petrarch Sonnet No. 104 from the second “year” of the same work (1858), and perhaps most interestingly in the *Fantasie sur une valse de Francois Schubert* from *Apparitions* (1834).

Now the piano, of course, doesn’t have a real vibrato at all, certainly not of the type that can be controlled to expressive effect by the player. Rather, it has resonance, and a wealth of overtones that give a distinctive shimmer to the sound. Sensitive use of the pedals combined with aptly nuanced touch can certainly approximate something very similar in its effect to a string player’s *espressivo*. There’s no question that some instances of Liszt’s use of the term have more to do with creating bell-like sonorities than imitating a true vocal *cantabile*. However, what makes these examples so interesting is the fact that Liszt uses the term “vibrato” in association with the piano rather than with the strings in his symphonic works; this in turn suggests the possibility that when it comes to the orchestra, no additional urging is necessary because the timbre is already present.

This intriguing albeit speculative theory adds further fuel to the notion that as the 19<sup>th</sup> century went on, and composers marked their scores with increasing specificity, orchestras naturally adapted to their demands by making some type of “continuous vibrato” a sort of timbral “blank canvas.” There were simply many more passages that required *espressivo* phrasing than there were moments that did not. The scores cited above couldn’t be plainer in this regard. At this point in musical history it hardly mattered if vibrato was or was not self-consciously “continuous;” the audible result as far as the orchestra was concerned, if the composer’s directions were followed, would be much the same either way.

This fact, if true, leads to a startling conclusion, one supported by the actual evidence of the scores: continuous vibrato in the orchestra likely *preceded* its adoption by solo virtuosos. And why not? The “top down” theory of diffusion is tacitly accepted by just about everyone, but for no good reason other than pure elitism and intellectual convenience. There is no clear causal link, nor, when you think about it, does it follow logically that there should be. For the same reason, discussion of the “vibrato question” seldom ranges beyond the narrow sphere of violin treatises by a tiny handful of famous pedagogues and virtuosos. Yet the example of Liszt, if it means anything, proves that parts of the answer may lie much farther afield, not just in orchestral and chamber music scores, but in works entirely outside of the string literature.

Even more telling, there’s something distinctly odd in suggesting that the greatest virtuosos of the day, the ones whose work most occasioned comment and had the good fortune to be documented at the dawn of the age of recordings, played in a manner “typical” of the average pit orchestra hack, or strictly by the (text) book. All major string soloists cultivate a distinctive approach to, and use of, vibrato. It’s a primary stylistic fingerprint, a personal calling card. If the employment of continuous vibrato raises issues of taste, then an ostentatious avoidance of it could come to be associated with an elevated or aristocratic temperament, or at least a certain artistic fastidiousness which some virtuosos no doubt cultivated. But if so, the principal rationale for playing in such a manner lies in the fact that it would be viewed as unique.

Thus, the very factors which distinguished turn-of-the-century virtuosi from the violin-playing crowd, make what they did of very limited value in considering the vibrato question. This is particularly true in the case of early recordings, where the same artists would likely have been on their “best,” or at all events most cautious, behavior (to the extent that one can hear it and judge--for even here, and particularly in pre-electrical sources, the degree of vibrato actually used is often all but impossible to measure with a consistent degree of certainty). All we know is that some violinists used more vibrato, some less, just as happens today. And you can be damn sure that none prided themselves on playing strictly according to anyone’s textbook, no matter how famous or widely respected. This is all that the scattered recorded evidence reveals. To say more is to pass beyond the realm of demonstrable fact.

So there is no basis whatsoever for the contention that orchestral string players acquired vibrato by copying the style and habits of one or two famous virtuosos, nor did they need some putative seal of approval from the era’s most aristocratic musical tastemakers before taking the plunge. I have already noted that the “overuse” of vibrato was widely viewed as a plague centuries old, and where else would its effects be most telling than in orchestras, which consist largely of players drawn from, to use Szigeti’s felicitous expression, the musical “middle class”? And even if this were not the case, it probably took about ten seconds for orchestral musicians, some of whom (as Forsyth suggests) might use vibrato frequently and some of whom might not, to realize that the section as a whole benefited in terms of sonority and blend by its presence.

If this is true, then the written evidence cited by Robert Philip and others is all but useless in considering orchestral practice. When you think about it, this actually makes sense. Orchestras as we understand them today--full-time ensembles playing a lengthy season of concerts on a regular basis--did not really exist until the 1840s. Prior to then, symphony concerts consisted of a series of events arranged by an impresario, using a specially hired ensemble--a “pickup” orchestra, if you will. Most orchestral musicians worked in theaters and opera houses, itself a fact that may have had an important impact on the use of vibrato (consider that the acknowledged ideal of instrumental technique was and remains to capture a singing, vocal timbre, it being a given that all adult voices have a natural level of vibrato).

Leaving aside the question of talent, experience, and pedigree, there is a major difference in the demands made on a player’s technique between working in a group, and playing solo. The former requires that the performer “fit in,” adapting to the presence of his colleagues. At the same time, the section as a whole needs to have a wide dynamic range, genuine character, and the ability to balance other orchestral groups of both similar and totally distinct timbres. All of these qualities are greatly facilitated by the extensive use of vibrato. So the real question that needs considering is: When did orchestral string sections cease to be loose aggregations of free-lancers doing more or less as they pleased, and become a coherent professional ensemble with a genuine corporate identity? Both kinds of string section probably featured some kind of continuous vibrato, the only issue being whether it happened by chance or by design.



This view, then, is certainly consistent with Forsyth's observation that players in the orchestra used vibrato as they pleased. There's little question that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century some kind of general, continuous vibrato had become something of a necessity. At the same time, however, there is no need to claim that orchestral players laid it on indiscriminately. Adopting vibrato as a "blank canvas" timbre, rather than purely as expressive enhancement, presupposes (1) that it can be used discreetly, while (2) still leaving ample opportunity for passages requiring additional emotional embellishment. This is precisely what the scores themselves suggest happened.

### The Expressive Terminology of Vibrato, Ornamental and Otherwise

Of course, none of this qualifies as hard proof. The above examples do not actually call for vibrato specifically, but as you will see there are several very valid reasons why composers generally don't mark string parts so obviously:

First, directives such as "dolce," "espressivo," "grazioso" and so on, often apply to different instruments (or groups of instruments) simultaneously, each of which has its own technique for realizing the music's expressive demands. It is much easier, and more logical, for a composer simply to write "dolce" over parts that call for that quality, and let the players realize it in their own way. You won't find clarinetists told to "use a number two reed" for a particular passage either.

Second, the whole point of altering or modifying instrumental timbre is (usually) to achieve a specific expressive effect. Composers prefer telling the players what the emotional end result should be, rather than simply giving technical advice and leaving them to guess why it's needed in the first place. Indeed, lacking perfect and equal knowledge of every instrument, many are in a much safer position doing so, and this also gives the players insight and involves them more deeply in the feelings that they are supposed to evoke.

Finally, terms such as "espressivo" have meanings beyond their merely timbral effect. They suggest a certain freedom of rhythm, of phrasing, and their method of application will vary according to the character of the passage, its tempo and volume. Composers need above all to be practical; musicians are trained to read notes and follow a generally accepted, but limited, repertoire of signs, symbols, and verbal cues. Too much verbiage wastes time, and ultimately risks hurting the chances of a composer's work being played regularly and well. The extensively marked scores of the late Romantic period only became possible in association with the rise of full-time, professional orchestras in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with players who were trained to respond to ever more detailed individual parts.

The only reason terminology specifically applicable to the string section sometimes appears is because strings are the most numerous, most important, and most well-understood members of the orchestra from the composer's point of view. Most who were not keyboard players were violinists (or violists), and many were proficient in both

categories of instruments. Even so, and as we will see, it's important to understand that the word "vibrato," when it appears in a score, is often used less as a technical term than in association with other exhortations to heightened expressivity, and in this sense it is used quite often<sup>5</sup>.

What evidence do we have, then, that associates a specific expressive terminology with string vibrato? Enescu's Third Violin Sonata provides a useful place to start, for it contains an entire catalog of such terms, actually used in connection with the word "vibrato" as the technical equivalent of the following emotional descriptors:

#### Vibrato Indicated

appassionato sostenuto  
piangendo [weeping]  
[molto] espressivo  
con slancio [with dash or élan]  
con calore sostenuto [with sustained warmth]  
dolce espressivo  
dolcissimo  
con intimissimo sentimento  
estatico legatissimo  
nostalgico  
cantabile  
sempre con suono [always sonorously]

As you can see, all of the expressive terms (or their close relatives) cited in the previous section are included here. And lest you think that Enescu's use of explicit string vibrato in connection with these terms was a new development in 1926, here are a few more examples:

1. Sibelius: Serenade No. 1 (1912) At letter F in solo violin: "Espressivo, dolce, vibrato"  
Symphony No. 4, finale, last bars, all strings mf and "dolce"

The first example, from the Serenade No. 1, makes very clear the relationship between the three expressive terms that Sibelius uses. I include the reference to the Fourth Symphony because it provides what you might call the "emotional" argument for the presence of continuous vibrato. In other words, it's not hard proof, but it nevertheless makes the case from the purely expressive point of view. The end of this symphony is universally regarded as one of the most grim, abrupt, unsentimental, even tragic in all of music. And yet Sibelius marks all of the string parts "dolce," which presumably means he wants the players to add a touch of additional vibrato to this conclusion. Surely he isn't trying to sweeten this particular bitter pill!

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<sup>5</sup> In this connection, and with reference to the specific expressive terminology of vibrato generally, refer also to conductor Norman Del Mar's comments in his book *Anatomy of the Orchestra*, cited in Part Two.

What this passage reveals is that the expressive terminology of music has a meaning somewhat different than what the words may suggest in everyday language. In this case, the (presumed) use of vibrato to achieve a “dolce” tone quality lends a heightened expressive impact generally, even if the message is a dark one: the ending becomes even more grim, unsentimental, and abrupt than it would otherwise sound because those qualities communicate more readily to the listener. Without any vibrato it would sound merely dead and inexpressive. It’s also worth keeping in mind Mozart’s famous stricture that no matter how horrifying the situation the music attempts to describe, the sounds themselves must never offend the ear. In other words, beauty of tone is a paramount consideration at all times, and with very few exceptions, for almost all composers until the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In beginning this survey, then, it’s important to recognize the value of continuous vibrato in the orchestra as a counterbalance to a large string section’s inherent anonymity and lack of intimacy, at least as compared to a solo violin. It need not be, as some members of the HIPPLF would contend, a goad to expressive excess, or a sign of perpetual, saccharine, sentimentality. Rather, it is like the proper use of salt in a recipe, an addition that boosts the flavor of all of the other ingredients while ideally remaining discreetly in the background itself. It is, above all, a means of enhancing communication. For this reason, the assumption that vibrato will generally be present makes greater sense than the belief that it will not.

## 2. Elgar: Symphony No. 2 (1910)

Second Movement, figure 86: “molto espressivo, vibrato”

This example is particularly useful, because Elgar’s indication here modifies the preceding expressive direction at figure 85: “Nobilmente e semplice,” and this tells us that “semplice” can mean “less vibrato” as well. That *Nobilmente* does not preclude vibrato is evident from the climax, at figure 39, of the *Cockaigne Overture* (1901), which Elgar marks “Nobilmente. Con molto espress.,” and additionally “vibrante” over all of the string parts individually. “Semplice,” on the other hand, is a more ambiguous case. At figure 7 in the same piece, we find “semplice” and also “espressivo” in the first violin part.

You find something quite similar in the second movement of Sibelius’ *First Symphony*, with the main theme marked “semplice” on its first appearance, and “espressivo semplice” at its final return. Remember that in many of these cases the terminology has implications both for phrasing as well as tone color. Sorting out the precise meaning depends on the larger musical context in which the instructions appear.<sup>6</sup> The situation

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<sup>6</sup> “Semplice” is an interesting term whose meaning has changed over time. Originally it meant “do not ornament the melody.” In later Romantic music, written after the period in which improvised embellishments were the norm (and in orchestral music of all periods), it means “phrase with directness and don’t emote excessively.” Both meanings would naturally suggest limiting the use of vibrato, except in such places as the *Andante sostenuto* of Viotti’s 24<sup>th</sup> Violin Concerto (ca.1797), where the (already pretty fully embellished) main theme is marked “semplice con espressione.” In this interesting case, the soloist might well eliminate all ornaments *except* vibrato (as would be consistent with the examples proposed by [footnote continued on next page])

with respect to vibrato is not an all or nothing proposition, even though the HIPPLF likes to frame it that way because this is how their sources discuss it. But there's a big difference between an anti-vibrato polemic and the reality of what performers do, and the terminology just cited offers a taste of the rich range of possibilities.

3. Strauss: Elektra (1908)

Figure 82a-89a

“alle Streicher sehr seelenvoll, mit sehr viel vibrato, daher keine leeren Saiten benutzen!”  
[All strings very soulfully, with very much vibrato, thus using no open strings!"]

4. Bloch: Symphony in C sharp minor (1903)

First Movement: Figure 35, “dolce espressivo” and “vibrato” in ppp solo violin

Third Movement (Scherzo): Figure 29, violas “espressivo”; Figure 30, bassoon “vibrato”

5. Mahler: Symphony No. 5 (1902)

Adagietto, Figure 4: “vibrato, mit innigster Empfindung” (“with the most inward feeling”)

6. Strauss: Macbeth (1890)

P. 60 (Edition Eulenberg): “espressivo/molto espressivo, vibrato”

7. Tchaikovsky: Queen of Spades (1889)

Act 1, Scene 2, figures 260-270, cellos: “molto espressivo, piangendo [“weeping”], vibrato”

8. Wagner:

Tristan und Isolde (1859)

Act III: Tristan “mit leidest du, wenn ich leide: nur was ich leide...”

Violins, Violas, Cellos marked “vibrato” against “sehr ausdrucksvoll” in the trumpet and “sehr gehalten” (“very sustained”) everywhere else

Act III: Kurwenal: Wie ist's um dich getan!

Violins marked “vibrato” and “sehr gedehnt” (lit. “stretched” but practically, “prolonged,” or “sustained”)

Act III: Tristan: “All mein Hab und Gut vererb' ich noch heute.”

Violins marked “vibrato”

Act III: Isolde: “...ewig kurze letzte Weltenglück?”

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Spohr; see below). Falla makes basically the same point over a century later: “dolce vibrato, ma semplice,” he writes for the violin at figure 2 in his *Psyché* (1924). The examples below do not begin to catalog the extremely frequent use of terms such as “semplice” and “tranquillo,” throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century--directions that of themselves suggest the existence of a “blank canvas” vibrato texture.

The fact is, composers have always been aware of intrinsic vibrato, and have had the descriptive tools at hand to instruct players when *not* to use it. Even as far back as 1774, in his “Schoolmaster” Symphony (No. 55), Haydn marks the slow movement “Adagio, ma semplicemente,” and then goes on to mark the violin parts “semplice” and “dolce” in regular alternation, always at same piano dynamic. Can anyone seriously maintain that his players did not vary their degree of vibrato in realizing these instructions?

Violins marked “vibrato” and “ausdrucksvoll”  
Götterdämmerung (1874)  
Act I: Siegfried: “Gunther, wie heisst deine Schwester?”  
Violins marked “vibrato”  
Die Mestersinger (1868)  
Act III: Walter’s “Prize Song” and one other place (see below)

9. Rossini:

Mosè in Egitto (1818)  
Act I finale, measure 229, clarinet “vibrato” (dynamics: piano, “dolce” in preceding wind parts)  
Act I finale, measure 355, all strings Largo, ff, “vibrato”  
Act I finale, measure 399, all strings, Allegro, ff, “vibrato”  
Appendix: Additional aria for Faroane by Michele Carafa: measure 87 in the voice part  
“vibrato con molta forza”  
Armida (1817)  
Act III, No. 13, solo violin, andante grazioso, “vibrato”  
Otello (1816)  
Act I, No. 3: Violins, allegro, ff “vibrato”

10. Glinka: Ruslan and Ludmila Overture (1842)

Ludmila’s Aria (Act IV, No. 18), obbligato violin solo marked “vibrato” multiple times

The Glinka offers a useful starting point for detailed discussion of the remaining examples, as well as their wider ramifications. It confirms the notion that words like “vibrato” and “cantabile” are, for all intents and purposes, interchangeable. The overture’s lyrical second subject, first announced by cellos and violas, is marked “cantabile.” In the recapitulation it appears on the cellos alone, “vibrato.” Passages such as this not only support the correspondences between technical and expressive terms established in the Enescu Third Sonata, they demonstrate the consistent meaning and usage of such descriptions over a period of many decades (between this work and the Enescu, for example, we are talking about 84 years)<sup>7</sup>.

Ludmila’s Act IV aria (a gorgeous Adagio) proves this beyond any shadow of doubt. It features a solo violin obbligato in duet with the voice, initially marked “cantabile vibrato,” and at the solo’s next entrance, “vibrato” on the G string (*sulla 4 corda*), and at the entrance following that one “con espressione” with “vibrato” on the G string yet again two bars later. Next comes a series of rapid, purely accompanimental arpeggios, then a return to the tempo and texture of the opening with no additional expressive indications (the “cantabile vibrato” would by this point be understood, unless the soloist were an idiot or a member of the HIPPLF). This leads to the coda, and the aria’s lyrical climax

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<sup>7</sup> There is an exactly analogous example in Glinka’s Capriccio brillante (Spanish Overture No. 1), at figure 11, where the main theme in the violins, “dolcissimo” on the A-string and mezzo-forte is immediately repeated by the cellos in their upper register, forte, and “vibrato.”

over tremolo strings featuring Ludmila and the solo violin, as equal partners, with the latter marked forte and “vibrato” once again, all the way to the aria’s “dolce” conclusion.

This example is particularly useful because the solo violin literature tends to be less liberally spiked with expressive indications than the orchestral. Why? First, because many famous solos were written either by their composer/performers, who knew what they wanted to do, or for (and in consultation with) famous virtuosos, who hardly needed someone else’s suggestions. Second, composers tend to respect soloists, at least to the extent of encouraging them to find personal expressive solutions. Finally, as previously noted, orchestral players operate collectively and so need group instruction.

A very different, modern example illustrates this point. Polish composer Karol Szymanowski’s *Violin Concerto No. 1* (1916) represents the last word in lush, superheated, Romantic decadence. Its solo part cries out for as much intensity and range of vibrato as the player feels able to provide at any given movement, and that is how it is invariably played. But for all of its extremes of emotion, running the gamut from high passion to dreamy reverie, expressive markings over the solo line are comparatively sparse, at least as compared with the orchestral strings, whose parts teem with verbal directions that seem to change almost from one bar to the next. Szymanowski does use “vibrato,” a few bars after figure 91, and in a manner very similar to Glinka (it’s also marked “*espressivo* on the G string”).

Significantly, however, this direction applies to the orchestral violins only, highlighting another interesting phenomenon suggested by the above examples: that the injunction to play on the violin’s lowest string almost invariably assumes the presence of vibrato. This is not just because this instruction, among the commonest in string writing generally, usually involves lyrical passages where the violins have the tune. The fact is that the G string has a strong, earthy tone that becomes wonderfully rich and warm when vibrato is used. That composers automatically expect the presence of vibrato in expressive passages on the G string also can be inferred from the slow movement of Tchaikovsky’s *Second String Quartet* (1874).

The climax of the movement begins with the first violin “*sul G*” (one bar before measure 160), rising to a passionately intense fortissimo in double stops. After a quarter rest, the violin continues forte, and Tchaikovsky marks the part “vibrato.” Why here? He is clearly telling the player to maintain the g-string intensity even though the dynamic highpoint of the climax has passed (and perhaps to warn against the upcoming potentially open E-natural as well). This in turn suggests that an additional helping of vibrato must have been present from the point at which the “*sul G*” directive first appeared. The alternative, that Tchaikovsky really wants the first violin to start his extra vibrato for the very first time on a dying diminuendo, is a musical and expressive non-sequitur in this context.

Finally, one last example drives the point home. Joseph Joachim is often erroneously cited as an artist who belonged to the “non vibrato” camp. However, his *Concerto in the Hungarian Style* (1861) does call for it, in one spot in the first movement; and before the

HIPPLF asserts that this is the only place in the entire work that the composer must have wanted it, let us look at the passage in question (14 bars before letter D). First, it is played fortissimo, on the D and G strings, in quick tempo, and in double stops. Second, it actually contains an inherently vibrato-less open G, the lowest note on the violin. The rest, after some brilliant passage work in double stops, is a typically Romantic melody still marked to be played on the G string, leading to an “appassionato” climax. The “vibrato” injunction, in this case, tells the player to use it *despite* the double stops, the open G, and the rapid tempo.

In other words, while Joachim could count on the player’s vibrato for the purely melodic material on the G string, and particularly at the appassionato climax, he obviously wanted an “ornamental” vibrato earlier, where most soloists would be more concerned about brilliance of technique than with emotional expression. So rather than being an argument for the rarity of vibrato, this passage in fact offers evidence of its use in unconventional or unexpected places, and surely suggests the possibility of its presence “even in technical passages,” a phenomenon that Flesch ascribes to Kreisler some forty years later. In any event, “Sul G” and “vibrato” appear in tandem often enough (figure 57 in the finale of Debussy’s *La Mer* [1905] offers another instance) to suggest that the former often presupposes the latter.

Leaving aside this interesting digression, consider one more very practical reason why you find many fewer expressive markings in the solo violin with orchestra repertoire generally. Violin Concertos are very difficult to write, particularly when it comes to questions of balance. The solo must be brilliant, and must seem to dominate the orchestra, and creating this effect will always be something of a tour-de-force given the inherently superior resources of the orchestra in terms of both color and power. Expressive markings aren’t just indications for the way something should be played emotionally; they give the performers information about a musical line’s importance in the texture, and in particular they almost invariably mean “bring it out” or “make it more prominent.” After all, there’s little point in telling someone to color a musical line in a special way, and then not permit the audience to hear the intended effect.

However, when the composer’s principal concern is to keep from drowning out a string soloist, one simple and logical way to dampen excessive orchestral enthusiasm is to be very sparing in the use of expression marks. Does this mean that the accompaniment should be inexpressively played? Of course not, but it must be performed discreetly, sensitively, leaving center stage to the solo voice. Even Szymanowski’s hyper-detailed markings are almost all on the soft side of the dynamic spectrum, and concern such things as tremolo effects alongside constant exhortations to gentle, diaphanous, and dolce tone colors.

Compare, for example, the orchestral string writing in three concertos by Brahms, a particularly fastidious composer to begin with. The Second Piano Concerto (1881) is full of detailed “*espressivo*” indications for the strings; the Violin Concerto (1878) and Double Concerto for Violin and Cello (1887) have far fewer. But the piano concerto could hardly be called more “expressive” in absolute terms. This, by the way, is another

piece of circumstantial evidence in favor of the presence of “blank canvas” vibrato. A composer should be able to make allowances for the special circumstances inherent in performance of a given work, such as a violin concerto, without having to worry that the players will behave like corpses expressively speaking, merely because they don’t receive constant verbal direction.

Glinka’s example, happily, does preserve in print what Brahms merely suggests by inference: that a solo functions as a “singer” (in the former case in a duet with a real one) through the nearly constant employment of vibrato to some degree. The Russian’s explicit performance indications, we might reasonably assume, are fully consistent with the approved performance practice of the day. Glinka, after all, acquired much of his serious musical training in Italy and Germany in the 1830s, and combined this with a remarkable gift for orchestration that set the tone for much of the entire Russian nationalist school that followed him. Aside from the solo violin’s central section in rapid arpeggios, Glinka demands vibrato at every single significant entrance. In this aria, his use of the device is as “continuous” as in any 20<sup>th</sup> century work.

All well and good, I hear the HIPPLF say. This is only one solo violin obbligato in one aria. What do the orchestral strings do the rest of the time? The answer, of course, is that it depends on what their function is at any given moment. Aside from the term “vibrato” used elsewhere, as we have already seen, the score is replete with expressive indications in lyrical passages, including those (*dolce*, *cantabile*) that the composer specifically associates with its use. More to the point, if vibrato can be found even in a context in which instruments act primarily in a subordinate, accompanimental role to vocalists, then how much more likely will its employment be in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century symphony orchestra, composed largely of musicians otherwise working full time in the opera house or theater?

Imagine the temptation to use vibrato when playing “abstract” music where the instruments *are* the actual singers--called upon to take center stage and to capture the inherent expressivity of the human voice. I can’t stress this point strongly enough. Just recall Berlioz’ hilarious series of essays “Evenings with the Orchestra.” The orchestra in question was found, not in a concert hall, but in an opera house. One of the oldest and most famous of all modern symphonic orchestras, The Vienna Philharmonic, maintains its original function to this day, doing double duty as the pit ensemble of the Vienna State Opera. This makes it doubly ironic, and trebly ridiculous given the evidence of the scores, that the HIPPLF could suggest that vibrato was seldom used by this of all orchestras until the after World War II.

For Berlioz, then, as for most people right up until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the very idea of an orchestra was effectively synonymous with the theater, and the use of instruments as expressive tools was essentially vocal in nature. This in turn explains why the actual use of the term “vibrato” in orchestral music means “use more than usual” or “exaggerate it,” rather than “use some where ordinarily there would be none.” Voices all have a basic level of vibrato, but composers often ask for it anyway. So if the writing for voices and instruments in these cases is essentially identical, then it’s perfectly



reasonable to assume that instruments, in their most basic function as stylized voices, have an intrinsic vibrato too.

Glinka, for example, asks for vocal vibrato in Ruslan's Act Two aria, but to see how this works even more specifically, let's take a moment to examine a brief passage from the end of the first act of Boito's *Mefistofele* (1868). Faust (at letter E) is singing "If you can give me an hour's repose...." ("Se tu mi done un'ora di riposo..."). The tempo for the entire ensemble is "Moderato cantabile" (as in "singing"). Both voice and first violins are marked "con espressione." As the temperature mounts, Boito writes "con emozione crescente" over the vocal line, and "rinforzando" with accents over the violins; at the climax of the phrase, we find, once again over both strings and voice, "vibratissimo con anima," then "con molta passione" for Faust, and a big crescendo with accents for the violins.

Obviously there was already plenty of "vibrato" going on before reaching that climactic "vibratissimo." But because the expressive language for instruments is the same as that for the voice--albeit with some extra technical instruction thrown in as applicable to the various instrumental families--you can easily understand why composers seldom felt the necessity to speak of "blank canvas" vibrato at all. In any style grounded in the realities and expressive norms of vocal music, a base-level of vibrato in *all* instruments (including the winds and brass) would have been taken for granted, and the failure to acknowledge this very basic reality is one of the really fundamental places where the argument of the anti-vibrato HIPPLF goes astray.

Having said this, there are occasions in quite a few of the above examples where use of the term "vibrato" conveys *both* expressive as well as practical performance information. This is not an unusual aspect of string notation. For example, the placement of a slur marking over groups of notes can signify both a legato articulation as well as the actual length of each bow-stroke. "Vibrato," then, also serves as one of these dual purpose indications. *Mefistofele* offers just such a case: the "vibratissimo" phrase in the violins actually begins on an e-natural--potentially an open string--but not when vibrato is required. Boito thus prefigures Strauss' above-cited, more extensive and detailed instructions in *Elektra*, and you can find the German composer doing exactly the same thing in *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) at figure 327, where he writes "all strings always very soulful and vibrato" ("alle Streicher stets sehr seelenvoll und vibrato").

In the Mahler Adagietto from the Fifth Symphony, the dynamic is pianissimo, with a hairpin over a single whole note; obviously there is no other way to achieve an espressivo effect on the initial note that begins the phrase. In other words, the sense of the passage is not "use vibrato here and nowhere else," but "make sure to maintain vibrato throughout." This also raises a fine point about string technique. If you observe orchestral players at work, you will notice that in many instances, particularly in slow tempos on sustained notes, vibrato is introduced gradually. Karajan famously asked his string players to use vibrato before actually bowing the note to ensure a smooth attack and an extra warm tone from the start, but this approach isn't typical. Mahler then, with characteristic subtlety, is

asking that the vibrato coincide with the moment that the sound begins, so that the entire phrase is sustained with the necessary quiet intensity.

Unfortunately, it has been suggested that these and other examples in Mahler “prove” that he only wanted vibrato in a single place, or over a single note, in an entire work. The notion is almost too stupid to bear refuting, particularly as you can now plainly see that there are good reasons to use the technical term “vibrato” for clarity’s sake, in addition to the more common descriptors. The Adagietto of Mahler’s Fifth contains 103 bars, and in this brief span we also find the following indications of the music’s emotional climate: *espressivo* (bar 2), *seelenvoll* [soulful] (bar 3), *espressivo* (bar 6), *espressivo/seelenvoll* (bars 11/12), *espressivo* (bars 19/20), *mit Empfindung* [with emotion] (bar 23), *espressivo* (bar 22), *mit Wärme* [with warmth] (bar 38), *grosser Ton* [big sonority] (bars 38/39), *espressivo* (bar 41), *espressivo* (bar 64), *molto espressivo* (bar 73), *espressivo* (bar 79), and *viel Ton* [lots of sonority] (bar 95). Enough said.

Now consider the Wagner examples, which are similarly sensitive to sonority in context, albeit at the other end of the dynamic scale. The extracts from *Tristan* mostly occur at loud, emotionally clinching passages. In the first and last of the four cases cited, the clear sense of the exhortation is to use vibrato to heighten expressivity by, among other things, avoiding open strings. This is particularly evident in the last instance (Isolde’s), where only the first violins receive the “vibrato” directive, possibly because they have an *e-natural* in their primary melodic line. In the second and third examples, the violins have sustained, lyrical passages amid a quantity of rapid fiddling in which no vibrato (then or now) would be used or detectable to any significant extent. Here the sense is to remind the players to keep up a heightened degree of expressivity regardless (much as Joachim used the term in his *Hungarian Concerto*).

Another instructive example in a very different context occurs in *Götterdämmerung*. Here, after a *fortissimo* flourish in quick tempo, the violins alight on a briefly held *c-sharp* that Wagner marks “vibrato.” Siegfried has just taken the love potion and seen Gutrune, and Wagner instructs that he sing “with trembling voice.” So the violins mirror the vocal timbre in adopting *an unusual degree* of emphatic vibrato. All Siegfrieds possesses a natural level of vocal vibrato independent of the trembling occasioned by the dramatic situation (one hopes), so it’s probably safe to assume that Wagner’s violin section does too<sup>8</sup>. The important point to stress is that if the instruments supposedly take their cues from the voice, this in turn suggests just how silly it would be to assert that strings should refrain from using a natural level of “blank canvas” vibrato unless specifically requested.

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<sup>8</sup> Wagner’s earliest clear use of vibrato occurs in *Das Liebesverbot* (1836), but only for the singers--most notably in Friedrich’s Act II aria (No. 10, at figure 3, *Andante con moto*). Here Wagner’s use of the term suggests a continuous texture, and certainly not individual ornaments (unless we are to believe that only the very first note of the melody gets the vibrato). What makes this example so interesting isn’t just the clear use of the Italian term in a Wagner opera (albeit one set in Italy), but rather the fact that after these early examples Wagner’s use of vibrato vanishes from the vocal line and applies solely to the orchestral strings. Is this “transference effect” indicative of the rise of continuous orchestral vibrato around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century? It might well seem so.

In case you're curious, by the way, Isolde's Liebestodt has no vibrato indications, and for good reason: the strings play tremolos almost throughout, and a tremolo is of course the most violent kind of "vibrato" there is, albeit one of a different type. Indeed, the Rossini examples cited above reveal quite clearly that, as in Wagner, there are many kinds of vibrato: delicate in the clarinet, loud and ringing in the writing for strings and voice, and appropriate to both fast and slow tempos. This last point by itself turns out to be a very suggestive fact, particularly as it relates the possibility of making vibrato "continuous."

The first three, purely instrumental examples from *Mosè*, plus that from *Otello*, all occur in unusual contexts by today's standards: very short notes, or slightly longer notes in a quick tempo, often fortissimo and quite bold, even militant, in demeanor. Like the Wagner examples, they also beg the question of what the strings were doing during the numerous "dolce," "sensibile" ["emotional"], and "cantabile" moments so liberally sprinkled throughout Rossini's scores. For example, you will find at numerous points in these works, whether by Wagner or Rossini, the directive "espressivo" (or its equivalent) written over the vocal line. Does this mean that the composer wanted the music sung *inexpressively* wherever he does not say "espressivo?"

Until recently the very idea would have been scoffed at, and rightly so, but this is what the HIPPLF would basically have us believe in analogous passages for strings. They seem to think that it is logical--to use an analogy--for a person to be living, just not breathing. Consider a particularly extreme example: Dvorák's Ninth Symphony "From the New World," contains not a single expressive direction for anyone, no "dolce," no "cantabile," no "espressivo," nothing--not for the strings, brass, winds, or percussion. Does this mean that he wanted the music played *inexpressively*, as emotionally coldly as possible? Does any rational person believe that? Similarly, does the absence of the word "vibrato" mean that there should therefore be none?

We do have, in fact, evidence of a "blank canvas" sonority of a basically expressive character, though it concerns vocal rather than instrumental music. However, given the notion that what applies to one applies also to the other, it's quite intriguing. In Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, the title character's narrative--beginning with the words "Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen"--is marked "Mit Ausdruck, aber ohne Leidenschaft" ("With expression, but without passion"). The accompanying strings aren't marked at all, though in many other passages the orchestral directions mirror those given to the singers. Does the fact that there are no special expressive directions indicate that the strings are also playing "with expression, but without passion?"

Here, after all, is the perfect description of a "blank canvas" sonority, one which may include a measure of vibrato and is therefore expressive, but not *distinctively* so. It gives the music room to maneuver, emotionally speaking, in both directions. It's very tempting to say that this must indeed be the case, if only because both the musical notation and common sense suggest that it must be so. The only thing that Wagner's example lacks is a specific reference to vibrato; the aesthetic concept that we are looking for is certainly

there<sup>9</sup>, but the means by which it is realized in orchestral terms is not mentioned. For that, we have no choice but to look elsewhere.

The example from Rossini's *Armida*, an obbligato violin solo of exceptionally florid character, does indeed suggest the presence of vibrato as a baseline expressive device. It reveals the technique not as an individual ornament to be applied sparingly, separate and apart from other forms of decorating the melody, but to be used generously in support of extensive and elaborate figuration, which in this case is fully notated. Shortly after the phrase marked "vibrato," Rossini also adds the direction "dolce." According to the editor of the critical edition, Rossini's manuscript has the half-written word "sensibile" ("with feeling") crossed out, and "vibrato" substituted.

This case is important, because in all of the discussion of vibrato being used as an "ornament," no one deals with the fact that, unlike all other ornaments (such as trills, mordents, and the like) which can only be used *successively*, vibrato may be applied *simultaneously* on any note that lasts long enough for it to be perceptible. So even if we accept the ideal of its being an "ornament," the very nature of vibrato suggests its use (as Rossini shows) in a manner quite different from that of all other effects in this category. In short, the rules for vibrato will necessarily be unique, a fact that the HIPPLF has conveniently decided to ignore in lumping it in with a collection of otherwise very different musical objects<sup>10</sup>.

As in Glinka, the characterful employment of vibrato encourages the violin to hold its own in tandem with the human voice, and vibrato is also requested from the singers, exactly as from the orchestra. The passage from *Mosè* is particularly useful in this respect because the aria in question isn't by Rossini at all, but by a colleague, Michele Carafa, and was inserted into the opera at a later date. It suggests, then, that the "vibrato" instruction was already standard terminology by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and not merely an aberration of Rossini's genius.

The final proof of the essentially vocal nature of vibrato, and its aptness in any passage in which instruments attempt to convey the expressive qualities of the voice, can be found in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. It's probably not an exaggeration to say that in this opera

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<sup>9</sup> As it is also in the words of Ludwig Spohr, that supposed enemy of continuous vibrato. In the explanatory notes to the ninth variation of the little piece he composed for pedagogical purposes in his *Grand Violin School* (1833), he explains the "con espressione" directive thusly: "This notification might here appear superfluous, as a Solo should never be played without its due expression, but in this instance it applies to a heightened expression, to a performance full of soul." The variation in question is, naturally, liberally sprinkled with vibrato wherever feasible (and very highly ornamented in all other respects as well). It's also quite plain from this and other examples in the treatise that the use of vibrato is not limited to verbally marked passages calling for extra emphasis. The artist is never starting from a point of zero or non-expressivity, and in Spohr's world an artist would never ask for such a thing.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as we will see, although both Leopold Mozart and Spohr class vibrato in the category of "embellishments," they are neither entirely comfortable nor consistent in their discussion of its use. In particular, the ability of vibrato to further "ornament an ornament," as it were, is not addressed, and really falls outside the scope of an introductory violin primer.

some 90% (or more) of the lyrical string entrances are marked expressively in some way: “dolce,” “ausdrucksvoll,” “espressivo,” and their variants. In quick tempos, this being a comic opera, “staccato” and “scherzando” are the two favorites. If you want to see the best possible circumstantial argument for the existence of continuous vibrato by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, look no farther than here. However, in the entire opera Wagner uses “vibrato” only twice.

The first occasion applies to the first violins, who double the vocal line throughout Walter’s Prize Song. Why use “vibrato” here and not “espressivo” or “ausdrucksvoll,” like everywhere else in the score? Because Wagner obviously wants his strings to match their timbre to the tenor’s voice. Since they must follow his lead in terms of tempo, dynamics, and phrasing (that is, in all other matters relating to the basic “espressivo”), the technical term “vibrato” is appropriate precisely because in this case it does *not* tell the strings to bring out their part independently, but rather to *accompany* with a special timbral warmth and vividness.

The only other appearance of the term in the opera concerns a single note in the first violins, an A-flat that doubles the voice on the last word of Walter’s exclamation “Nicht Meister! Nein!” Wagner marks this phrase to be sung “with bitter ferocity” (“mit schmerzlicher Heftigkeit”). These examples define two very different qualities of vibrato: the first a lyrical, long-lined, singing timbre, and the second an abrupt, forceful emotional emphasis, both entirely consistent with varying degrees of vocal expression.

That said, I freely admit that these assorted examples do not necessarily provide definitive evidence of continuous vibrato--that blank canvas previously mentioned--but they come very, very close, and make the opposing view rather difficult to sustain. They do establish beyond doubt the emotional qualities associated with the use of vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and attest to its frequent, indeed regular presence in orchestral music. They also reveal the composer’s willingness to let vibrato take pride of place in the mix of bowing, fingering, and phrasing techniques that produce the most commonly notated expressive effects in the string section.

Most importantly, the above examples demonstrate that vibrato was not something programmed into student musicians as a series of inflexible rules and then fixed once and for all time. It was an expressive device subject to the conscious whim of composers who were not shy to ask for it. I have no doubt that the frequently parroted equation that extra vibrato equals “bad taste” has put a chill on the willingness of scholars to even look for it with any degree of thoroughness or enthusiasm. After all, great composers (and leaving aside the not so great) had the highest standards of taste, right? Well, evidently not, and we must be careful not to judge them by our own standards, or those of a vocal minority of self-conscious aesthetes.

So Flesch’s contention that the use of vibrato in anything but lyrical passages originated with Fritz Kreisler turns out to be nonsense. Either he’s just plain wrong, or the attempt to adduce orchestral practice from the habits of early 20<sup>th</sup> century soloists is useless on its face (or both). The evidence is perfectly clear on this point, at the very least. Vibrato was

called for in quick tempos, in loud, abrupt, or violent contexts, and in instruments other than just the strings--in addition to more traditional, lyrically expressive moments. Moreover, this has been the case at least since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting (in our examples) with Rossini in the 1810s, and continuing in an unbroken chain through many composers and national schools right up to the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So if you believe, as I do, that the request to use vibrato means “in addition to what is already there” or “make it more prominent than usual,” then this may be all of the evidence you need to accept the presence of “continuous” vibrato in the orchestra at a very early period. In this respect, there is yet another aspect to the music under consideration here that is worth noting. At no point throughout these works does the composer, after specifically asking for vibrato or some unusual degree of *espressivo*, subsequently cancel this designation. In other words, not only is there no specific “non” or “senza” or “ohne” indication later on, but there is also no instruction to play “ordinario,” “naturale,” or “gewöhnlich” (all meaning “as usual”).

Granted, there’s often little room for doubt given the length of the phrase or change in texture, but in many of these cases (Wagner especially), there is simply no way to tell when or where the “vibrato” directive ceases to be valid. So although this survey can hardly be called exhaustive, it does establish, first, that a direction to use vibrato, or to play tenderly and *espressivo* in some fashion, is not treated as a deviation from the norm to the degree that it requires subsequent verbal correction. Second, it’s clear that composers prefer that their performers err on the side of more expressivity rather than less, a significant fact in considering the vibrato question that the HIPPLF, worried as it is about all that potentially tasteless extra ornamentation, chooses to disregard.

The Bloch Symphony is particularly interesting in this respect. As the work of a young, unknown, 21 year-old composer it can be counted on as an adumbration of the most up-to-date, but at the same time acceptable notational techniques (otherwise it would stand no reasonable chance of performance, or of passing muster with teachers and colleagues). In the first movement, the “vibrato” indication comes on the top note of a triple piano, excruciatingly high violin solo. Clearly the sense of the passage is “no matter how difficult, soft, or high, don’t lose your natural vibrato.” Similarly, in the scherzo, the viola’s “*espressivo*” is *pianissimo*, on a single held note with a fermata. There is simply no other way to achieve the desired effect without vibrato, and this example is by no means unusual in calling for an *espressivo* effect on a single note, or two, or three, all at a very subdued dynamic level.

Finally, as you can see, Bloch, like Rossini (and Puccini, below), also expects his wind section to execute vibrato, even the bassoon, and on a single note yet! The oboe and piccolo are also marked “vibrante” in the above-cited passage, on single held notes. It beggars belief that moments such as these represent the only time in the entire work that a composer would expect his players to use vibrato. It’s much more reasonable to assume that these and other “special effect” markings are either (1) suggestions to give what would otherwise be the standard, comparatively unobtrusive vibrato special prominence, or (2) a reminder not to lose the natural vibrato already in place owing to the special

technical difficulty or extreme dynamics (loud or soft) of a passage (in the same sense that you very often find, particularly in quiet sections, the qualifying “piano ma...” [“softly but...”] “marcato,” “espressivo,” “dolce,” etc.)

Once again I have to stress in this connection that orchestral string vibrato cannot be heard as on a solo instrument, as a distinct, rapid wavering of pitch, unless it is extremely exaggerated. It automatically becomes the base sonority of a warm, well-blended string tone, and the ear recognizes it not as a special expressive effect, but as “neutral ground.” In order to make it audible at all as a distinctive ensemble tone quality, the composer would have to specifically ask his players to make it as prominent as possible *in context*, which is exactly what is happening in some of the above cases. The example from Elektra is particularly telling in this respect: “very much vibrato” is what Strauss wants, and it is clear in this context that he is asking for “more than usual, to the degree that you really can hear it.”

There are, in fact, many things a composer ordinarily does not have to specify, but will in special circumstances, where an otherwise obvious point requires reinforcement. Mahler, for example, at the end of the second movement of his Fifth Symphony cautions the timpanist with the directive “good intonation!” It goes without saying that every player tries to tune accurately, but this is a solo, the very last note of the movement, and thus the warning is appropriate. So it is with the “vibrato” directive when used in connection with other, more general exhortations to expressivity. Glinka is telling his soloist, “be a prima donna,” but does the fact that he asks the solo violin to take the spotlight mean that the members of the chorus are not also singers, and that they should not use their voices expressively? The answer is, I hope, obvious.

One of the more remarkable aspects of the above examples is their consistency, transcending both period as well as nationality. Modern scholars, who specialize ever more narrowly, love to stress the independence of various “schools,” the lack of rapid communication, of consistent standards, and the wide variations in style and traditions from place to place. Much of this is an illusion. We know, for example, that the orchestra and chorus of Her Majesty’s Theatre in London for the year 1847 consisted of personnel from England, Paris, Brussels, Turin, Milan, Parma, Rome, Palermo, Linz, Vienna, Prague, Leipzig, and St. Petersburg. The string section numbered 52 players, and the names that have come down to us confirm the group’s polyglot composition. So there is no reason to accept the theory that the presence of vibrato was in some way limited by nationality or local conditions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Although quite sketchy in its remarks concerning orchestral violin playing, Spohr’s Grand Violin School supports this notion specifically. Speaking of the near impossibility of encountering uniform bowing in orchestras of his day, he notes: “One principal cause of the difficulty may be traced to the negligent and faulty marking of the bowings of the Orchestra pieces (more so than in Concerto and Quartett music) and also that the Violinists of an Orchestra never originate from the same school.” It’s also worth pointing out that the situation that Spohr describes indirectly supports the notion that continuous orchestral vibrato emerged naturally from the prevailing circumstances of performance in early 19<sup>th</sup> century ensembles, and is entirely consistent with Forsyth’s observations as well. Finally, Spohr’s observations show how illogical it is for the HIPPLF to insist on uniformity of practice in Europe over a period of centuries merely because of [footnote continued on next page]

This also explains why it is useless for the anti-vibrato crowd to cite individual pedagogical treatises, such as Leopold Mozart's "Violin School," or the memoirs of famous teachers such as Leopold Auer (who is often quoted out of context and whose most famous students, Heifetz, Milstein, and Mischa Elman, were in any event enthusiastic vibrators) as "evidence" in support of their position<sup>12</sup>. There may indeed have been schools of playing that discouraged the use of continuous vibrato; Glinka may have been taking this into account, for example, in writing that violin solo in *Ruslan and Ludmila*, or he simply may have wished to make his intentions clear for future performances in which he had no opportunity to participate and explain his intentions. The facts support either interpretation.

Nevertheless, musicians are by nature peripatetic, whether now or as far back as Haydn's Esterházy orchestra in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. They go where the work is, and the wealthiest ensembles hire the best players, wherever they come from. While there can be little question that local traditions existed in various places at various times, the modern tendency to segregate these into regional or national categories is nothing more than an intellectually shallow remnant of 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnic nationalism filtered through a modern political lens. The reality was quite different. Until 1918, Europe did not consist of politically distinct countries as much as it did *empires* and *alliances* of various sizes and geographical shapes. Within and between these large and often loosely organized multi-ethnic agglomerations, goods and services (including artists) moved with great fluidity.

Another issue that needs to be addressed in this connection is the role of the conductor. Many opera (and other) orchestras of the mid 1800s did not even have them. The principal violin often stood in as orchestra leader. As for those that did employ a conductor, he normally stood between the singers and the orchestra, facing the stage, as did the orchestra itself. Watching the drama allowed the instrumentalists to time and phrase their parts as closely as possible with the singers. The gradual emergence of the modern conductor certainly represents a major difference in performance practice as

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the existence of a few well-known violin treatises (while at the same time attempting to pinpoint the rise of continuous vibrato in a patchwork fashion at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with reference to a few far from technologically satisfactory early recordings).

<sup>12</sup> The HIPPLF takes for granted the stability of the various schools of violin technique up through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; but although several of these still exist today, there is a curious reluctance to do the obvious: ask the violinists. The reason for this hesitation is not difficult to understand: modern players all use continuous vibrato and so have been "contaminated," or no longer represent the true path of their forbearers. But maybe, just maybe, that notion is nonsense. For example, in the course of writing this essay, I was speaking to a Russian colleague who informed me that he was a student of one of Auer's last pupils. So I asked him about the vibrato question. He told me categorically that Auer was not an enemy of vibrato; Auer, he said, despised bad vibrato, insisting on consummate technique and perfect control. For Auer, the use of many different kinds of vibrato was a science with definite rules of application. It was a stylistic component suitable only to the most advanced artists, but this fact never precluded its "continuous" use, as the evidence of Auer's greatest successors clearly shows. This is, admittedly, anecdotal evidence, but it is consistent with Auer's writings on the subject, and it is certainly no more anecdotal than the memoirs and other similar documents cited by the anti-vibrato forces.



compared to what went on for much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it supports Forsyth's statement that matters such as vibrato were left completely to the whim of the individual player--and to whatever blended, corporate identity the string section forged over time.

The obvious point that Forsyth neglects to mention, perhaps due to its very obviousness, is that the player's "whim" is, first and foremost, conditioned by the score. And as you can plainly see, the presence of vibrato in the orchestra is often not "implied," or merely "understood." It is called for explicitly and frequently in works of all sorts, in a very wide variety of emotional contexts, and in connection with a consistently used vocabulary of expressive terms. Some composers are more detailed in their markings of string parts, some less so, but what matters, I stress once again, is the fact that vibrato, for 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral players, was not something seldom encountered, an extraordinary aberration, or the subject of aesthetic controversy. It was very much part of the "bread and butter" descriptive language of the music that they played. This fact alone argues in favor of its presence, so much so that to compare modern "continuous" orchestral vibrato to the kind possibly encountered say, in the 1840s, is to harp on a distinction without a difference.

It follows, then, that if the descriptive language of music has its roots in the expressive characteristics of the human voice, and if composers often associate certain emotional directives with the regular employment of vibrato (and there are many other examples that I could cite to support this proposition), then asking specifically that players avoid these same expressive qualities would indicate logically that they should discontinue using vibrato entirely. After all, you can't eliminate what isn't there, or likely to be there, nor would there be a need to caution against using a technique not in general service. In other words, the real timbral "special effect," the one that conclusively proves the existence of "continuous vibrato," is not the request to turn it on even more, but rather the admonition to turn it off.

### The Expressive Terminology of Non (or Less) Vibrato

Or

### Thirty-Three Variations on the Case for Intrinsic Orchestral Vibrato

In beginning our discussion of "non-vibrato" as an expressive tool, Enescu helps yet again. Although his Third Sonata exhorts his violinist to use vibrato on numerous occasions, the overwhelming majority of the piece is still silent on the subject. But at several points Enescu does specifically require non-vibrato playing. Many of these instances, such as the start of the slow movement, or at several entrances in the finale, start from scratch. In other words, if violinists did not use vibrato as their "blank canvas," then Enescu would have had no reason at all to request "senza vibrato" at the points in question. Either it is present, or it is not, and even a casual glance at the score reveals quite clearly that beyond the "special effect" vibratos called for in unique circumstances (often in connection with the use of "slide" effects, such as glissando or portamento) continuous vibrato must be the rule. Otherwise Enescu's instructions are either pointlessly redundant, or nonsensical.

Here, then, is his list of specifically indicated “non-vibrato” expressive terms. Note that it is much smaller than the previous list. Non-vibrato effects understandably occur with comparative infrequency. Composers usually want their music to sound as expressive, and as expressively varied, as possible, and this only adds further weight to the argument that the use of vibrato is very much the rule.

#### Non-Vibrato

[molto] tranquillo  
misterioso  
senza espressione  
esitando

To this list we should probably add Elgar’s “semplice,” as well as associated terms, such as “innocently,” or “timidly” (found, for example, in Janáček’s First String Quartet of 1923), and this short list is by no means complete. Romantic composers very quickly became quite creative in coming up with colorful and quirky verbal descriptions of the effects that they had in mind, but it has to be conceded that some of these can be realized in ways that are not clearly associated with the vibrato question, and so I will not deal with them here. On the other hand, the following discussion presents, in reverse chronological order, a richly varied selection of verbal instructions that would make no sense at all without the expectation of vibrato as a basic determinant of texture and timbre. I also include, where useful or necessary, some information about the larger expressive context in which each example occurs.

#### 1. Bartók

Piano Concerto No. 2 (1931); Second Movement: “tutto il pezzo con sord., non vibrato” [“the entire piece muted, no vibrato”]; so marked over all string parts.

Fourth String Quartet (1928) Third Movement, constant alteration of non-vibrato/vibrato in all parts

The Miraculous Mandarin (1918/24)

7 bars after figure 17, violas and cellos: “f molto vibrato, espressivo”

2 bars before figure 27, muted solo violin, “pp senza alcuna espressione, non vibrato” [“without any expression, no vibrato”]

The Second Piano Concerto is the classic example of non-vibrato in an orchestral context since Bartók sustains this texture for such a long time, but in some ways the Fourth Quartet is more informative, at least for our purposes. That he begins both movements with a “non-vibrato” injunction tells us right away that vibrato naturally would be present, hence the need for this unusual request. The latter work reveals a vibrato “blank canvas” texture firmly in place in 1928, and we can be sure that it likely existed for decades previously in order for Bartók to exploit the effect as confidently as he does here--and as Enesco had also done in 1926.

The way that Bartók actually deploys his string sonorities in this quartet movement is truly fascinating. From the outset, there is an ongoing alteration of non-vibrato and

vibrato timbres in the upper strings, below which the cello plays the main theme, “espressivo.” The non-vibrato moments are, for the part, quite short, and it is the shift from “dead” to “live” tone that Bartók particularly wishes us to hear. Making the point even clearer, after figure 50, Bartók cancels yet another non-vibrato directive for the first violin and cello, this time marking “espressivo” in both parts.

What does this example teach us? Several things. Bartók, bless his soul, reserves the technical terms (vibrato, non-vibrato, ponticello) for passages of pure accompanying texture. The emotional descriptors like “espressivo” always refer to an actual melody. Most other composers aren’t so specific, but then most don’t make a point of isolating and embedding lyrical expression in such highly atmospheric textures. More significant, though, is the coexistence of vibrato and *espressivo* simultaneously. Here, as also in the example from *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Bartók demonstrates that vibrato is the “blank canvas” standard string texture, while “espressivo” necessarily means to add something extra to the already existing vibrato.

This is the complete antithesis of vibrato as embellishment. It also reflects a use of the term “vibrato” that is uniquely modern: that is, as a purely technical indication rather than as a superlative form of “espressivo,” a state of affairs more typical of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Either way, we can plainly see Bartók establishing a clearly demarcated expressive continuum based on a several different levels of vibrato: none, standard, and expressive. Although different works have their own self-consistent means of describing this continuum, the practice itself is very old, and places this particular example in a long-established tradition.

Indeed, analogous passages of this type of texture are extremely common in both orchestral and chamber music (and you will see several of the former below). Consider, to cite just one example, the *Adagio ma non troppo* from Beethoven’s Tenth Quartet, Op. 74, composed way back in 1809. It begins with the tune in the first violin “cantabile,” and the lower strings “mezza voce.” As the movement proceeds, Beethoven marks the lower parts “espressivo” and continues the “cantabile” in the first violin. Although written some 120 years earlier, the situation is exactly analogous to the Bartók, however different in style and sound. In both cases the accompaniment moves from non (or less) expressive to more so, while the lyrical melody retains primacy of place.

The only real difference, I would argue, between these two examples is that Bartók gives us the courtesy of using technical terminology--but Beethoven’s vocabulary is equally clear in its way. Bartók’s vibrato/non-vibrato sections are static chords; Beethoven’s *mezza voce/espressivo* passages are subsidiary melodies. So Beethoven naturally is thinking in vocal terms, and uses the standard operatic language: “half voice,” then “expressive,” then “cantabile,” the closest possible instrumental equivalent to true human singing. All three instructions inherently encompass a certain level of natural vibrato because all three ask the players to impersonate singers. In other words, the vibrato in Beethoven is even more “continuous” than it is in Bartók.

Bartók was also no stranger to “ornamental” vibrato. In second movement of his Second Orchestral Suite (1905-07), you will find a brief solo violin lick at figure 35, marked “poco a poco più espressivo,” leading to “molto espressivo” and two tied eighth notes with a little wavy line over them, to which Bartók adds a parenthetical “(vibrato).” This precedes a fermata and the presto continuation of the solo, so it’s clear that he wants a very exaggerated emphasis at this point. This same notational device also appears at the triple forte climax of the Third String Quartet of 1927 in all four parts, marked “molto vibrato.” It’s worth pointing out in this connection that never subsequently in the work does Bartók instruct the quartet to play “non-vibrato,” in turn suggesting, as the Fourth Quartet proves, the normalcy of a “blank canvas” vibrato texture.

Finally, here’s an interesting fact. After the Second Piano Concerto (that is, the early 1930s), Bartók never again asks for “non-vibrato” in a major orchestral work, despite the fact that he was intensely involved in writing for strings during this period: his efforts for the remainder of the decade included the Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta (1936), the Violin Concerto (1937/8) and the Divertimento (1939), and the 1940s saw the completion of the Concerto for Orchestra and the Third Piano Concerto as well (both 1945). In other words, if the HIPPLF is to be believed, Bartók was very concerned to cancel vibrato when orchestras weren’t using it, but couldn’t have cared less about it when they were. So someone’s grip on reality appears to be a mite tenuous, and I’m willing to bet that it’s not Bartók’s.

## 2. Varèse: Ameriques (1927)

Figure 12: all strings “sans nuances”

You would think that the early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde would be a terrific place to find “senza vibrato” indications almost ubiquitously, but you would be wrong for several reasons. Works such as Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring are actually quite tuneful; dissonance results from a pile-up of sonority, excitement from the treatment of rhythm, but the basic material is simple and folk-like. Other modern works of the period, such as Webern’s, spend so much time fussing with string texture in just about every possible way, with the instruments muted or unmuted, the exploration of harmonics, playing on the fingerboard, on the bridge, special glissando effects, pizzicato, col legno, and other unusual bowing techniques, that a “senza vibrato” or two would scarcely register.

It came as a very pleasant surprise, then, to see Varèse designate a passage in his largest orchestral work “sans nuances,” which is basically synonymous with two directives: “no dynamic inflections” and “no vibrato” (as we shall see, the two are often related). It is also used by Saint-Saëns and others, below. What’s more, you can even hear it in this instance, no mean feat in a work whose massive forces include a huge brass section and at least nine percussionists playing everything from a lion’s roar to sirens (and not including the two timpanists). In his later music Varèse minimized or eliminated string participation entirely, making this example all the more precious and useful.

## 3. Sibelius: “Miranda” from The Tempest: Suite No. 2 (1926)

Borodin/Rimsky-Korsakov: Polovtsian Dance No. 2 (1879)

The Sibelius is a particularly charming example. The first violins, which have the tune, are marked “spianato,” which means “smooth” or “leveled,” while the solo cello below, which has an inner part, is marked “vibrato.” The contrast between vibrato and non-vibrato timbres creates the delightful impression of a demure young girl, but with passion trembling just below the surface. The “spianato” indication shows that Sibelius expects the violins to play expressively unless otherwise indicated (they have the tune, after all), and the cello marking offers an instance of the desire to give additional prominence to a subsidiary voice.

The Borodin isn’t technically speaking a “non-vibrato” situation, but the context is similar to the Sibelius: the melody is marked “cantabile” in the violins, while half the cellos have an inner part marked “cantabile e vibrato.” The extra emphasis arises from the fact that (a) the cellos are divided, and so the half with the more important part needs to project strongly, and (b) the additional vibrato adds richness to the texture, especially when used in counterpoint with the main theme. But does anyone seriously believe that the cantabile “big tune” in the violins does not also demand the use of vibrato? Or that the violas must leave it out when the theme returns towards the end, “dolce e cantabile” against “dolce” in the cellos?

Remember that Ysaÿe (as per Flesch) used vibrato continuously in lyrical passages, and this tune certainly counts as lyrical. Note what happens as composers balance competing melodic lines among string *sections*, as opposed to asking a soloist to ornament a single tune. Clearly, “vibrato” in this context means “bring out this subsidiary voice even more than usual.” These two examples demonstrate that Romantic composers felt free to orchestrate their string music on both sides of the “blank canvas” vibrato divide, making subtle distinctions as to how much expressivity competing melodic lines should enjoy at any one moment<sup>13</sup>.

The situation described here--the presence of extra vibrato in a subsidiary part--obviously cannot occur when a single violinist plays solo. It is never addressed in any historical treatises on the subject (to the best of my knowledge). At the same time, it offers significant evidence about the presence of continuous vibrato in the orchestra at a very early stage. Why? Consider the practical result from the listener’s perspective when, in an orchestral setting, one or more parts almost invariably has a lyrical melody or counterpoint of some kind. You get “continuous vibrato” by default.

This may not be exactly the same thing that supposedly characterizes modern string sections, but the distance from this perhaps more primitive situation to the current style is not, in audible terms, all that far. Continuous orchestral vibrato need not have arisen as a result of a self-conscious choice on the part of the players, or via some mysteriously appearing pro-vibrato, post-War zeitgeist. Rather, it more likely happened through a

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<sup>13</sup> In his preface to the opera *Intermezzo* (1924), Richard Strauss makes this point especially clear. He writes: “Particular care should be given to the meticulous execution of the *fp* and of every *espressivo* marking that seeks, often barely perceptibly, to highlight one particular voice.”

natural and spontaneous process as musicians did as they were trained in following the directions of composers who, for their part, in writing for orchestral string sections, exploited textural and expressive possibilities denied them in music destined for a single soloist. The directions in the scores regarding the use or non-use of vibrato in the various parts make this fact explicit.

#### 4. Erwin Schulhoff

Symphony No. 1 (1925)

First Movement, Figure 3, ppp cellos “non vibrando”

String Quartet No. 1 (1924)

Finale: muted violins, “dolce astrattamente...senza vibrato...pp senza espressione sine al fine e poco a poco smorzando sin al perendosi”

Schulhoff’s delightful First Symphony employs a huge range of exotic colors, textures, and rhythms. Aside from the above non-vibrato moment, it’s worth pausing to mention another very commonly found extra vibrato term: “*sonore*.” For example, at the beginning of the slow movement, we find in the violins “dolce ma molto sonore.” The use of more technical or abstract language such as we find here was useful to composers like Schulhoff, who pursued an anti-Romantic musical aesthetic beginning in the 1920s. It permitted them to make the sounds they wanted without risking the traditional liberties with rhythm and phrasing that come with “*espressivo*” and its verbal relations.

And speaking of abstract, the wonderful closing pages of the First String Quartet are actually marked “abstractly,” for four long bars in slow tempo. At figure 5, Schulhoff adds “*senza vibrato*” and this persists for the next ten bars. After a full measure’s rest, the two violins reenter on a single held note for the last six bars, pianissimo, and “without expression until the end, diminishing gradually until dying out.” We can thus see quite clearly, and fascinatingly, the gradual elimination of feeling from the music. The fact that Schulhoff reserves his “*senza espressione*” directive for that final note also indicates the term’s equivalence with “*senza vibrato*,” since in this case there would be nothing else the players could be doing to generate any kind of emotion at all.

#### 5. Zemlinsky:

Lyric Symphony (1922)

Der Zwerg (1921)

String Quartet No. 2 (1915)

Sechs Gesänge Op. 13 (1913)

Zemlinsky, like Berg and Mahler, constitutes an important source of information in answering the vibrato question, particularly with respect to the Viennese style that, according to Norrington, did not acquire continuous orchestral vibrato until after World War Two. Zemlinsky’s scores suggest otherwise. Not only are they orgies of “*espressivo*” and its German equivalents, at figure 6 in the Symphony we find “*ohne espressivo*” in cellos and basses vs. “*espressivo*” in violins and violas. More significantly, at figure 33, Zemlinsky has “*ohne Ausdruck*” [without expression] in solo violin, the only expressive

indication for the entire phrase. The fifth of the *Sechs Gesänge* features “sehr zart” (“very tender”) first violins against “ohne espressivo” seconds and violas.

Similarly, in the even earlier String Quartet No. 2, three measures before figure 4, Zemlinsky writes “ohne espressivo” for the first violin--pianissimo and on a single sustained note--and counters this with “zart hervortretend” (“tenderly coming out”) immediately thereafter. This quartet, incidentally, was premiered in 1924 by the Rosé Quartet, whose first violin, Arnold Rosé, was Mahler’s brother-in-law as well as concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic (and State Opera Orchestra) for decades. He can be heard vibrating enthusiastically in the coda of the supposedly (according to Norrington) vibrato-less 1938 Bruno Walter Mahler Ninth.

The score to *Der Zwerg* (The Dwarf), a neglected masterpiece if ever there was one, shows Zemlinsky’s extraordinary fastidiousness in marking his parts. Musical terminology isn’t so much vague as it is redundant, with multiple ways in multiple languages of saying “expressive” and “inexpressive,” and the many shades in between. Already at figure 28, we find Zemlinsky’s characteristic “ohne espressivo” in first and second violins, against “zart espressivo” in the cellos. You can find all of the colors of “continuous” vibrato in the first violins after figure 255. Beginning “dolce,” the music quickly moves to “espressivo,” then to “mit grosser Wärme,” followed by “Ruhig, doch mit leidenschaftliche Ausdruck” (“Calmly, but with passionate expression”), culminating at figure 258 “mit grossem Ausdruck.”

It may be that some of these distinctions constitute wishful thinking, particularly when real voices command the center of attention, but sometimes overkill is what it takes to ensure that even the general spirit of the music gets projected. What also makes Zemlinsky’s scores so interesting, with all of their fanatical specificity, is his avoidance of the term “vibrato.” He does in fact use it in the opera, once, five bars before figure 154, for a sustained f-sharp for solo violin. Why here and nowhere else? Simple: it is only on a long-held note on a solo string instrument that vibrato is plainly audible as such. In the full section, or even with a soloist playing a melodic line, the result is everything else Zemlinsky describes: “warmth,” “passion,” “tenderness,” but almost never the technical perception of a distinct departure from, and return to, correct pitch. Indeed, as soon as the solo leaves its f-sharp and once again begins playing a moving line of music, Zemlinsky specifies “espressivo.”

Examples such as this are unusual: most composers have neither the inclination nor the need to split terminological hairs in the way the Zemlinsky does here. In a way, it’s unfortunate. The range of synonymous verbal options has given the HIPPLF an opening to attempt to deny the basic vibrato = expression, non-vibrato = non-expression equation by adopting an expedient, unhistorical literalism. Happily Zemlinsky’s verbal precision offers an antidote that at once explains and affirms the historical relationship between technique and emotional meaning, between the feelings the music embodies and how the

composer asks the players to realize his intentions<sup>14</sup>. It's a useful lesson, the validity of which may be ignored, but not denied.

## 6. Nielsen

Pan and Syrinx (1918): final bars

Maskarade (1906): Act III, measure 366, violin, violas, and cellos "tranquillo"

Of all the examples cited in this essay, the final measures of this marvelously evocative piece, when viewed in context, stand among the most revealing. In the work's last six bars, the main body of first and second violins sustain high harmonics, piano. At the same time, two solo firsts and one solo second violin play a single chord "vibrato," then "poco a poco senza vibrato" right through the final fermata. This slow draining of color from the string tone is exactly the same effect used by Richard Strauss in *Ein Heldenleben* two decades earlier (just before the battle scene). Below this ethereal texture, a solo cello has a series of three gently sustained notes ending in glissandos, which Nielsen marks "glissandi senza vibrato." The cello's last, sustained note, and that of the double bass, are both played normally. Nielsen perfectly realizes the music's programmatic intent: the transformation of the nymph Syrinx into a reed, from an animate being into an inanimate object.

Why is this passage so interesting? First of all, Nielsen is not a composer normally associated with vibrato-laden textures. His music is passionate, intense, heroic, and warm-hearted, but also entirely unsentimental. Orchestral sonorities tend to be lean, busy, and highly contrapuntal. Purely timbral effects are rare. *Pan and Syrinx*, for example, contains no expressive indications for the strings at all, save for two "dolces" at the very beginning. His other orchestral works are similarly sparingly marked (Nielsen lavishes much greater attention on the woodwinds)<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, there's no question that his style, rooted as it is in the melos of Danish folk music, encompasses a natural

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<sup>14</sup> Another composer who shows similar sensitivity is Charles Martin Loeffler. In his tone poem *La Morte de Tintagiles* (1897), there's an extended passage (after Letter O) for solo viola d'amore accompanied by four each of first and second violins, and violas. The accompaniment is marked, initially, "con vibrato," later joined by the viola d'amore, and the full cello section "vibrato teneramente dolce espressivo." This last complex of expressive terms reflects, it would seem, the difference between technical advice given to soloists, which have the ability to make their vibrato audible as such, and the more generalized feelings and timbral warmth typical of vibrato in a large string section.

In 1902, at figure W in *A Pagan Poem*, Loeffler confirms this notion, calling for the violins to play *pp* and "vibrante," a term that clearly encompasses "vibrato" but which reflects the audible result, rather than the technical means of sound production. Recall in this connection Ernest Bloch's *C-Sharp Minor Symphony*, which uses both terms simultaneously in different parts, the former in the strings and the latter in the winds.

<sup>15</sup> Fascinatingly Nielsen, like Dvorák, was a professional orchestral string player who worked primarily in the theater. Of the three great Romantic nationalist composers who played the violin (add in Sibelius), none became virtuoso soloists, and all three are noteworthy for their particularly characterful handling of the woodwind section, writing some very awkward and difficult orchestral violin parts in the process. This curious outcome constitutes one difference between them and virtuoso violinist/composers such as Spohr, Vieuxtemps, Wieniawski, Paganini, and the like. It seems that the experience of actually playing in the orchestra, and the failure to develop a solo career, leads to the development of a very different approach to orchestration (Elgar, also a violinist, offers another example of this phenomenon).



expressivity that presupposes an intrinsic quantity of vibrato, whether he adds still more by marking his parts “*espressivo*” or not. It is the timbre of the human voice that governs all that he writes. Indeed, in his native Denmark, Nielsen is popularly known primarily as a song writer.

This example, then, tells us that “blank canvas” vibrato is indeed present. The initial “vibrato” exhortation means, as by now should be clear beyond all doubt, “exaggerate it,” so that its gradual elimination is clearly audible. The context makes this additionally obvious: a quiet, sustained final chord, exactly the instance where the treatises of Leopold Mozart and Spohr insist that vibrato ought particularly to be used. Nielsen’s instruction to the cello tellingly emphasizes this fact. Only the glissandos are to be played without vibrato<sup>16</sup>. This looks very curious until we note that Enescu, in his Third Violin Sonata, frequently places vibrato on the destination note of glissandos and portamentos. This is the habit that Nielsen wishes to avoid, while at the same time preserving the natural expressive timbre of the preceding long notes.

The extract from Nielsen’s opera *Maskarade* is also very revealing, particularly as it applies to the correct method for interpreting the expressive indications in Romantic scores. As Enescu suggests, “*tranquillo*” can mean “non vibrato,” but Nielsen uses the term very frequently, most often as a description of general tempo and mood. In measure 350, for example, he begins to slow down, modifying the initial “*Allegro, ma non tanto*” with “*Un poco tranquillo*,” then at measure 362 with “*un poco meno*,” and finally making a big ritard leading to *Adagio* (measure 368). The “*tranquillo*” in measure 366, however, only applies to the four string parts individually. It is not a universal designation.

Furthermore, the actual passage consists of only two chords containing a successive pair of notes for the violins, and a single long note for violas and cellos. In other words, the only possible interpretation of “*tranquillo*” in this context is one which applies to the actual string timbre and nothing else, because there *is* nothing else. This means that Nielsen is asking the players to withhold vibrato from this single bar, as a special effect. As a further example of this technique, but in the opposite emotional direction, just a few dozen bars later at measure 415 Nielsen gives the orchestra the general designation “*Andante espressivo*,” but then simultaneously marks the flutes, oboes, and clarinets “*espressivo*” individually.

This practice highlights the principal instrumental voices, giving them additional prominence within the overall emotional character of a larger musical paragraph, whether “*espressivo*” or “*tranquillo*.” The point is that it works both ways. Many composers, like Nielsen, take the vocal basis of abstract instrumental music for granted, and so feel little need to indulge in an orgy of expressive indications, but this doesn’t mean that they do not operate on both sides of the base-line expressive norm, one which must by definition

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<sup>16</sup> In the recently published Critical Edition, the commentary on *Pan and Syrinx* notes that Nielsen experimented somewhat with the degree and placement of the “*senza vibrato*” indication; his initial thought was to so designate the entire cello part throughout the final bars, but he ultimately decided on the above-mentioned formula. Either solution would suffice to demonstrate the presence of intrinsic vibrato.

include a measure of intrinsic vibrato for the simple reason that this *modus operandi* takes great care to preserve the historical identity between vocal and instrumental music.

Accordingly, only the fact that Pan and Syrinx is a piece of program music, a “nature scene” (as Nielsen describes it), gives him license to indulge in his particular bit of non-vibrato legerdemain. The general busyness and often subordinate, accompanimental role of the string section in Nielsen’s larger orchestral works means that the notion of “continuous” vibrato is particularly meaningless as it applies to him, and lengthy passages of soft-edged lyricism for the strings tend to be few and far between. But this only serves to make the role of intrinsic vibrato all the more important as an expressive force animating his music, just as it does the character of Syrinx in this tone poem.

Composers like Nielsen are in particular danger from the vibrato naysayers, those literalists who deliberately disregard the expressive ambience and root inspiration of much 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century music, particularly of the “Romantic nationalist” school. Whether speaking of Dvořák, Smetana, Sibelius, Rimsky-Korsakov, Falla, Bartók, Stravinsky, Nielsen, Enescu, Vaughan Williams, or dozens of other composers I could easily name, music with its source in folksong, however sophisticated and stylized it may become, starts and ends with the sound of the human voice, and that means with a measure of natural vibrato.

So Nielsen’s preference for lean sonorities, rhythmic dynamism, and his mastery of abstract formal architecture should never be confused with a license to render the music lifeless and ugly. One shudders to think of what the HIPPLF would do to such powerfully human--and humane--works as “The Four Temperaments” (Symphony No. 2) or the Sinfonia Espansiva (Symphony No. 3), or to that warm and serene sustained string chord that closes the first movement of the Fifth Symphony. But thanks to Pan and Syrinx, as well as Maskerade, we know that a natural, vocal vibrato is as innately present in Nielsen, and by extension other composers of similar aesthetic outlook, as it is in Richard Strauss or the most ardent advocates of heart-on-sleeve Romanticism.

#### 7. Willem Pijper: Symphony No. 1 (1917)

Second movement, Figure 8: all strings pp and senza espressivo

The slow movement of Pijper’s symphony offers an opportunity to confirm, once again, the relationships proposed by Enescu between emotionally descriptive terminology and technical directions to the string players. The above passage actually begins with the English horn playing “senza espressivo,” followed by the strings, and is marked “molto tranquillo.” The cellos continue the same string figuration “poco espressivo,” followed by the violins “molto espressivo,” and making a big crescendo on a whole-note marked “vibrando.” Like almost all of the passages cited in this section, the “senza espressivo” designation does not cancel any prior urging to greater expressivity: it appears “cold,” suggesting a modification to the orchestra’s basic, or neutral string sonority.

This example is actually the second, more extended version of an earlier passage (beginning 4 before figure 3) in which the violas have the “senza espressivo,” and the

violins once again take up the “molto espressivo” melody, but playing their “vibrando” in decrescendo. The context, as well as the terminology, makes it particularly clear that “vibrando” tells the players to use an especially exaggerated or “ornamental” form of vibrato, and Pijper takes care that they have plenty of time to make it audible. On the other hand, as with all of the examples in this section, the “senza” directive is used very selectively, as a means of contrast within a consistently “espressivo” continuum.

#### 8. Casella: Elegia eroica (1916)

Figure 40, violas “sempre p, non espressivo”

In Casella’s monumental tribute to Italy’s fallen (in World War I), the viola part accompanies the principal melody in the oboe, marked “espressivo e dolce assai.” This example is thus similar to many of those in Prokofiev or Zemlinsky, where the composer needs to limit the prominence of a subsidiary voice. The tempo here is *Andante dolcemente mosso*, in 6/8 time, and the viola part (even dotted quarters) leaves no doubt that Casella wishes to eliminate intrinsic vibrato. Incidentally, I do wonder how the HIPPLF would explain in technical terms the realization of the work’s two final pages, which are marked “Con infinita dolcezza e poesia di sonorità.” No vibrato there? I don’t think so.

One of the reasons we know that all of these “non espressivo” or “ohne Ausdruck” indications refer specifically to string vibrato stems from the fact that in virtually all of the examples where the possibility exists to extend the designation over the entire orchestra, or to doubling parts, the composer limits it to the string section. We have already seen that winds are often called upon to add vibrato, or play *espressivo*, but the opposite (as just noted with Pijper, or see Mahler, below) is almost vanishingly rare<sup>17</sup>. This is because while all woodwinds and brass have an intrinsic vibrato which can be exaggerated, it is almost impossible to turn it off completely.

Only the clarinets employ a recognizable non-vibrato technique (you can hear it at the beginning of Copland’s *Appalachian Spring*, and also in the first movement of Mahler’s *Second Symphony*). So the question then becomes: What can strings do to play “without expression” that no one else readily can? The answer: eliminate vibrato. And in order for it to be suppressed, it has to exist in the first place as a component in the section’s standard sonority. This is yet another example of the importance of understanding a composer’s directions in context, and why the answer to the vibrato question lies beyond mere speculative historical assumptions regarding the technicalities of string technique alone.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, in Berg’s *Violin Concerto*, among an orgy of “non vibrato” and “ohne Ausdruck” indications in the strings, there is only one such phrase for any other instrument, the solo horn at measure 153 in the first movement. There, it is clear that Berg’s request is so unusual that he feels the need to be quite emphatic: “**p sempre non espr.!**” he writes. The request to members of the wind section to play without expression only starts appearing occasionally (as far as I can tell) around the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and remains very rare even then. However, the fact that such instructions to the strings (which the HIPPLF insists played without vibrato) predate those for the winds (which everyone admits have an intrinsic vibrato) by at least half a century is certainly a telling fact.

And speaking of context, there is a very interesting historical link between Casella's "non espressivo," and the same indications in Zemlinsky and Berg. All three composers were employed in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in making piano arrangements of Mahler symphonies (the Seventh, Sixth, and Eighth, respectively); and all of those symphonies also have string passages directed to be played "without expression." This doesn't prove that Mahler was the ultimate source and inspiration for his younger colleagues on this particular subject, but it's an interesting point of contact between the four men nonetheless.

#### 9. Korngold

Sextet (1914/15)

Third Movement: First violin 3 bars after 29, pp "non espressivo"

String Quartet No. 1 (1924)

First Movement: First violin two bars after figure 7 p "ohne Ausdruck"

Second Movement (Adagio quasi Fantasia): First and Second violins at figure 24, pp "ohne Ausdruck;" similar passages at figure 29, and Second Violin after figure 35

Yes, believe it or not, it's true. The poster child of decadent, fin-de-siècle sentimental excess, the evil genius most responsible for the sweaty, overwrought "Hollywood sound," belongs to the non-vibrato fraternity. In fact, I have yet to find an orchestral or chamber score by Korngold (and I've seen most of them) that calls for additional vibrato at all, for the simple reason that even from his earliest days as a child prodigy in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he had no need to ask for any. It was already there. Certainly the two works above suggest as much, never mind the Sinfonietta, Sursum Corda, or Violanta.

Both of these chamber pieces, like Zemlinsky's Second Quartet just discussed, are also intimately associated with the person of Arnold Rosé, concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic/State Opera Orchestra, and his eponymous quartet. That illustrious ensemble gave the premiere of the Sextet, and was the dedicatee of the Quartet. So Korngold certainly knew who he was writing for, as well as what their inclinations were with respect to vibrato, and it's pretty clear that it was "continuous" in all respects that matter.

The context in which the specific passages cited above occur makes the case for continuous vibrato in Viennese string playing even clearer. In the Sextet, the relevant entrance is "cold," after three bars of rest. The "non espressivo" indication would hardly have been necessary unless vibrato were the norm. In the quartet, the entire slow movement is marked "Langsam, mit grossem Ausdruck," from the very first bar. "Adagio," by the way, for Korngold as for earlier composers like Bruckner, is as much a movement type as it is a tempo indication, one whose sustained string textures inevitably presuppose the continuous use of vibrato.

As you will see in considering the treatises of Leopold Mozart and Spohr later in this essay, whatever else they may say about vibrato, they agree that it naturally belongs on virtually all sustained tones in passionate or "espressivo" passages. What they never

considered, of course, is the possibility that later styles might consist entirely of this kind of texture. But we see it in the great symphonic adagios of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Korngold's First Quartet, and especially in the German/Austrian symphonic tradition, making the assertion that string players in Viennese orchestras only acquired continuous vibrato after the Second World War seem ever more ridiculous.

#### 10. Holst: The Planets (1915)

Neptune: Footnote in score, "The Orchestra is to play *sempre pp* throughout, dead tone, except for the Clarinet and Violin after fig. V." Both clarinet and violins, when they enter, are marked "dolce."

This particular footnote is very well known; it's quoted in most program notes on the work. What you may not know, however, and the reason that it's so useful, is that *The Planets* is one of the most expressively abstemious pieces in existence. Aside from that "dolce" in Neptune, there is not a single "espressivo" or similar indication in the entire string part anywhere else in the score (the winds have a few). So the reason we know that continuous vibrato must have existed in the orchestra ca. 1915 is obvious: if it did not, Holst's footnote to Neptune would have been utterly redundant and pointless. "Dead tone" would have been the norm, particularly as he never asks his strings to do anything else. Amazing, isn't it?

#### 11. Prokofiev:

Piano Concerto No. 2 (1912/13) First Movement, figure 17, cellos "*p senza espressione*" leading to "*un poco cantando e ben tenuto*" [at figure 18]

Classical Symphony (1917) Second Movement (*Larghetto*)

Figure 1: First violins "*molto dolce*," second violins "*senza espressione*"

Piano Concerto No. 3 (1917/21) First Movement

Figure 27, first violins "*p senza espressione*"

These are very useful examples because they all concern accompanying countermelodies on secondary or inner voices. In the Second Piano Concerto, the cellos accompany the piano at Figure 17, but take over the principal melody at Figure 18, hence the shift in expressive emphasis. In the Classical Symphony, the second violins have a simple accompanimental figure under the principal theme in the first violins. The example from the Third Piano Concerto features a gentle countermelody in the first violins supporting the solo clarinet, "dolce." The exact same effect characterizes the initial and concluding presentations of the theme of the Second Symphony's (1924) variation finale.

None of these examples would have needed to be marked at all unless normally played expressively, with vibrato, and so you can see clearly Prokofiev's expectation from 1912 on that it would be present at all levels of the string texture, irrespective of their relative importance. Prokofiev also used the "senza espressione" designation in pianissimo in his Third Symphony of 1928 (second movement, just before figure 84), significantly on very long, single notes in slow tempo for the violins and cellos. He is thus quite close to Berg and Zemlinsky in his sensitivity to string sonority and his specificity in calling for the widest possible range of expressivity on either side of the "vibrato continuum."

Incidentally, Prokofiev very seldom specifically calls for additional vibrato<sup>18</sup>, but one of the points in which he does is interesting. In the second movement of his suite *Egyptian Nights* (1934), at figure 4, he marks the cellos “*piangendo e vibrato*,” just as Tchaikovsky did in *The Queen of Spades*, and further confirming Enescu’s association of musical “weeping” with the use of vibrato. The date of composition is significant because 1934 was, according to the HIPPLF, well on the way to the “continuous vibrato period” (if not already there). Like several of the composers considered in this section, Prokofiev’s active career spanned the entire alleged transition, but also like those others, his scores show no sign of it.

## 12. Berg

Three Pieces for Orchestra (1912-15):

First Movement: Figure 10, viola solo “non vibrato”; Figure 15, cellos “non vibrato”

String Quartet Op. 3 (1910)

First movement, final chord, all instruments *pppp* and “non vibrato”

These examples should put paid once and for all to the ridiculous HIPPLF contention, which has appeared in print, that Viennese orchestras didn’t adopt vibrato until after WWII. If you believe that it was the “Vienna sound” that Berg viewed as his standard, then these citations are dispositive, along with those of Zemlinsky above (and taking into account Mahler, discussed in detail further on). Berg’s music generally provides a complete dissertation on the subject of both “blank canvas” vibrato, and the relationship between this technique and various degrees of expressivity. His treatment of vibrato is almost completely systematized and notated, and not just in the above two cases.

Consider also, for example, the *Lyric Suite* (1926) for string quartet (and string orchestra). In the first five movements, there is only one single, brief “non *espressivo*” passage, in the *Adagio appassionato*. Berg reserves his “non vibratos,” appropriately, for the concluding *Largo desolato*. One passage, in particular, beginning in measure 13 for the first violin, is particularly instructive. The violin’s entrance, as a subsidiary voice after a quarter rest, is one of the very few places in the entire score not marked with either detailed expressive or technical verbiage. So what happens next truly does presume an intrinsic vibrato timbre.

Measure 16 is an empty bar, and when the violin reenters in measure 17 as the principal voice (*Hauptstimme*), Berg writes “non vibrato” [emphasis original], then “*poco vibrato*” in the next bar, and just a beat or two later, “*molto vibrato*” for the melodic climax of the passage. Everyone below is scraping away “*col legno*,” except for the cello who has a few pizzicatos thrown in, each of which is also marked “vibrato.” At the climax, Berg

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<sup>18</sup> As with everything in music, there is one notable exception: the opera *The Fiery Angel* (1927). Aside from one very telling example of “*senza espressione*,” the opera is chock full of “*espressivo vibrato*,” for the obvious reason that nothing else serves better to characterize this steamy tale of hysterical obsession and demonic possession. If that’s not an extra vibrato situation, then what is?

asks the remaining three performers to play “as usual” (gewöhnlich), after which the main melody passes among the various parts, each marked “cantabile” in turn.

In addition to many further examples in both this work, the String Quartet of 1910, and the Three Pieces for Orchestra of a couple of years later, the Violin Concerto (1935) provides the final proof of continuous orchestral (or ensemble) vibrato, and ties this in with specific expressive terminology.. Witness the second violins at measure 140 in the first movement, which are marked “non espressivo, senza vibrato.” Even more useful is the string phrase for violins, violas, and cellos at measure 160. Berg begins “espressivo,” then cancels this indication with “senza vibrato” for the pianissimo--a long sustained chord--then returns to normalcy as the melody continues with no further indication other than “vibrato” in all parts.

The process also works in reverse. In the concerto’s second movement, at figure 135, Berg begins in the violas “non vibrato,” then two bars later has “poco espressivo,” and then in the next bar, “espressivo.” We also find, three bars after 155, further confirmation of the meaning of “misterioso,” when Berg has both solo violin and the second violin section playing “non vibrato” and “non vibrato flautando” respectively. Finally, evidence that “espressivo” always includes vibrato unless otherwise indicated can be found in the first movement, at measure 28, where Berg tells the violas “poco espressivo, ma non vibrato.”

In general, Berg agrees completely with Enescu’s terminology as set forth in the Third Violin Sonata. It’s also worth pointing out that the Violin Concerto’s first movement, which demonstrates so conclusively the ubiquity of “blank canvas” vibrato in 1935, is written largely in waltz tempo and is often characterized by the adjective “Viennese” (“Wienerisch”).

### 13. Debussy

(orch. Caplet): La Boite a Joux (1913)

4<sup>th</sup> tableaux at figure 48: all strings, “sempre pp lointain”

Iberia (1905-08): Second Movement

6 measures before 47, solo violin: “lointain et expressif”

2 measures after 50, first violins on the G-string: “p expressif et appuyé dans la douceur, pp en s’élougnant” (“p expressive and sustained in sweetness, pp becoming more distant”)

“Lointain” means “far away” or “in the distance,” and this directive falls into the category of “misterioso” effects that (per Enesco and others, such as Mahler) require minimum or no vibrato in order to register correctly. The tempo marking in the first example above is “Lent et mélancolique.” The strings accompany, with gently sustained chords, an English horn solo marked “pp expressif et lointain.” Note that the solo voice is specifically directed to play expressively, while the strings are not. The HIPPLF might argue that Debussy/Caplet don’t specify “no vibrato” here, which is true enough. How do we know, then, that the “lointain” direction must be realized through elimination of natural vibrato?

Examples such as these perfectly illustrate why the HIPPLF methodology is hopelessly unsuited to describing what really happens in orchestral music. Each situation has to be viewed in its proper context, and take into account the composer's particular expressive language. In this case, in the eight measures preceding figure 48, the strings are already playing pianissimo sustained chords in similar rhythm. How, then, are they to realize the timbral shift from what they had been doing, to "l'ointain?" All other things being equal, there really is only one way.

Bear in mind that Debussy/Caplet are perfectly capable of asking for mutes, playing on the fingerboard, on the bridge, at the point of the bow, or any one of a number of other techniques employed in this very work. But they don't here. Some of these effects might help in creating the desired atmosphere, but the fact is that nothing communicates "distance" or "otherness" in a string texture better than the avoidance of vibrato. Even if it were not the case, I challenge the HIPPLF to explain how a string section should achieve the desired effect, in its context, from a vibratoless starting point.

The extracts from Iberia confirm the above interpretation. "Distant *and* expressive" once again applies to the melodic line, as compared to pure, accompanimental timbre. So Debussy, with typical sensitivity, preserves some elements of his "expressif" while at the same time canceling others. A few pages later we see exactly the same effect that Strauss asks for in *Ein Heldenleben*: a gradual draining of vibrato (and expressivity), in this case while remaining on the G-string. Why, you may ask, does Debussy not address string vibrato specifically?

One reason may be that he's not just writing for strings. In the first example from Iberia, the violin is doubled by the bassoon; in the second, the full horn section participates. Another reason may be simply a fondness for atmospheric accuracy. "Non vibrato," after all, is not associated with any specific kind of feeling (or lack thereof), whereas "l'ointain" is a precise term that Debussy evokes often, using all kinds of instrumental combinations. His music is full of "distance" effects; it's a timbral realm that can only be explored meaningfully in contrast to a norm that otherwise includes intrinsic vibrato.

We find confirmation of this interpretation, incidentally, in Berg's Violin Concerto, measure 208 (second movement), where the violins are marked "pp non vibrato (wie aus der Ferne)" ["as if from a distance"]. A few bars earlier, the clarinet and horn are directed to play "poco" and "molto" *espressivo* respectively, "but," Berg says, "always as if from a distance." This makes it clear that the "distancing effect" desired specifically relates to timbre (thus by implication, treatment of vibrato), and not necessarily rhythm or phrasing. The concept is exactly consistent with Debussy's more than two decades earlier.

14. Vaughan Williams:  
Tallis Fantasia (1910)  
A London Symphony (1920)

Bax:



Symphony No. 3 (1929)  
Symphony No. 5 (1932)  
Symphony No. 6 (1935)  
The Garden of Fand (1916)  
November Woods (1917)

In the Tallis Fantasia, see Figure H: small orchestra “*senza espressione*” against the larger orchestra “*sostenuto*”. Note the fact that “*espressivo*” is unnecessary in the larger orchestra at this point (though it occurs a few bars earlier), while “without expression” is clearly essential for the small orchestra. Again, were not the presence of vibrato simply understood, the notation would make no sense. RVW also uses “*senza espressione*” for that wonderfully gaunt, triple piano string chord after the big climax in the finale of A London Symphony, just before the epilog starts at Letter R. This pale texture accompanies the final appearance of the Westminster chimes, and its placement and voicing make it especially easy to hear the absence of vibrato in the “dead” timbre of the string section.

Arnold Bax is also an excellent source of both ornamental vibrato (November Woods and Fifth Symphony) and “no expression” (the three other works listed). In the Third Symphony, note especially the long passage for muted violas and second violins, *senza espressione*, at figure 39 in the first movement. In the Sixth Symphony, the finale’s “Epilogue” opens with magical chords for solo strings similarly described. In The Garden of Fand, before rehearsal letter L, the entire orchestra is marked (in English) “always *pp* and expressionless.” Bax’s use of this technique belongs entirely to the “mysterioso” school of Romantic sound effects, and contributes to the atmospheric qualities of his music. It’s especially striking in evoking the eerie stillness of nature, as Bax so often does in both his symphonies and tone poems.

#### 15. Schoenberg: Erwartung (1909)

Violas in measure 39: “*p* ruhig, ohne *espress*, trocken” [“trocken” = “dry”]  
Violins and violas in measure 128ff, “*pp* ohne *espress*.”

Interestingly, Schoenberg was not particularly concerned about string vibrato, judging from his scores. Either he was obsessed with the idea of proving that his expressionistic and 12-tone melodies could be just as traditionally expressive as the tonal kind, or his textures change so frequently in color and timbre that he just didn’t see the value (unlike Berg) in specifying the degree of vibrato at any given moment. And who can blame him? He had enough to worry about, all things considered. Here, however, are two exceptions where the intent is unmistakable.

Reminder: please note that “without expression” means more than just “no vibrato,” implying also a certain flatness of both accent and dynamics, and an inflexible, even mechanical treatment of rhythm. This is undoubtedly the reason why most composers prefer to say “without expression” rather than “no vibrato” specifically. When they want to keep the emotions in check, they prefer to go for the whole package. So “no vibrato” is

not invariably synonymous with “no expression;” but on the other hand, you simply can’t follow the latter instruction effectively and still use vibrato to your heart’s content.

16. Janáček: *Jenufa* (1908)

Act II figure 114, solo violin, p, nine bar sustained “open” E natural

Technically, this E-natural could be played on any of the three lower violin strings, and given the general injunction against playing on open strings in slow, lyrical music (the tempo here is *Adagio*), most players would naturally avoid the E-string unless specifically asked to use it, as in this case. We have already seen how composers use the term “vibrato” as a way of telling players to be both expressive and to avoid their open strings<sup>19</sup>. This example reveals the opposite: an automatic means of obtaining a “non-vibrato” sonority. (Incidentally, there actually is a way to achieve a vibrato of sorts on open strings. It involves stopping a neighboring string and making a “silent vibrato” there, to take advantage of sympathetic vibrations).

This single note on a solo violin, accompanied by just a few muted, *pianissimo* murmurings from the other strings, accompanies *Jenufa*’s question to Laca--after she has just learned of her illegitimate child’s death--why he would ever ask to marry her. It’s impossible to imagine a more poetic and sensitive way to capture *Jenufa*’s utter numbness of feeling and spiritual exhaustion than by this flat, dead sonority. It’s a brilliant example of the way composers exploit non-vibrato tone color, and again, it is a sound that would be effectively meaningless outside the context of a continuous vibrato texture.

To understand this even better, listen to what happens when Janáček returns to this same timbre at the end of the first movement of his orchestral rhapsody *Taras Bulba* (1918). The solo violin plays its open E then immediately sounds the same note, now stopped and marked “*dolce espressivo*.” The contrast is so striking that you might well believe that the passage had been played by two different instruments entirely.

The deliberate use of open strings for a non-vibrato special effect is, in fact, quite common in the literature. For example, there’s that scratchy, devilish solo violin at the opening of Saint-Saëns’ *Dance Macabre* (1874), a “tuning up” sound whose character derives largely from the nasal twang of open strings sounded *forte*. Mahler makes equally wonderful use of this timbre in his own “dance of death,” the scherzo of the Seventh Symphony of 1905 (see figure 128 in the first violins). The “primitiveness” of the open strings also makes them obvious choices for stylized folk tunes or pastoral imagery, such as the sustained fifth on C and G in the violas that supports the clarinet’s piping at the start of the finale of Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* (1808).

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<sup>19</sup> This in itself is an interesting bit of detail in the history of performance practice. Modern violinists are schooled to avoid open strings as a matter of course, so much so that Szigeti, in “Szigeto on the Violin,” devotes a good bit of time urging that the practice be reconsidered and that the special tone colors of the open strings be used more frequently.

The same attractively rustic color characterizes Haydn's Symphony No. 88 in G (1787), a key that not coincidentally encourages plenty of open Gs on the violins (one of which opens the symphony), never mind what happens in the unforgettable "hurdy-gurdy" trio of the minuet (trios of minuets and scherzos are good places to find open string effects: consider also Bizet's *Symphont in C* of 1855). Haydn particularly specialized in these "drone bass" or bagpipe evocations. There's the famous drinking chorus that concludes "Autumn" in the oratorio *The Seasons* (1801), and for a really spectacular example, consider the closing measures of the *String Quartet Op. 74 No. 1* (1793), which unforgettably harp on the cello's open Cs and the second violin's open Gs.

Perhaps the most striking of all of Haydn's open string excursions occurs in the trio of *Symphony No. 67's* third movement (1776). This is written entirely for two solo violins, both muted. The first violin has the tune, directed to be played entirely on the E-string. As with those G-string solos previously discussed, a liberal treatment of vibrato would be expected in these circumstances, and should be used to create the strongest possible timbral contrast with the very striking accompaniment, in which Haydn asks the second player to retune the G-string down a whole step. He uses the resultant open F as a sort of drone bass. It's a remarkably imaginative sonority, but with the tune played entirely non-vibrato by the first violin, it certainly will not register as colorfully as it should.

It's also important to emphasize the care that Haydn and other composers took in making deliberate use of their open strings. It is not just an accident of tonality. In the first movement of Mozart's *Symphony No. 40*, the violins avoid low G in an exposed, melodic context entirely, reserving its gaunt sonority for their crunching, final note. At the other end of this same tone's expressive universe, there's that wonderful, soft open G in Mendelssohn's *E-Minor Violin Concerto* (1844) that accompanies the first movement's second subject (on the woodwinds). This is a particularly useful example, because Mendelssohn marks the violin's descent to that G "tranquillo," which we now know is often synonymous with "senza vibrato."

However, after the open G--which lasts for eight full bars in slower tempo--the violin gets the tune, and Mendelssohn once again writes "tranquillo." This is a clear warning to the soloist to continue the melody as before, without vibrato, and an equally obvious indication that the composer believed, absent instructions to the contrary, that vibrato would likely be used. I need to stress in this connection that to the extent the period performance movement heightens awareness of moments such as this, and makes players more conscious of the poetic uses of vibrato (or its absence), I'm all in favor of it. More color and greater variety of expression is always desirable. It is only when taken to the dogmatic extremes of the HIPPLF, where the music really suffers, that the proponents of "authenticity" need to be called to account.

Anyway, my main concern here is to show that the potential to exploit opposing vibrato and non-vibrato textures is built into the violin. It is the natural consequence of the contrast between open and stopped sonorities. One last example combines this principal with the notion of vibrato on the G-string, discussed in the previous section of this essay. At figure 21 of Dvorák's tone poem *The Wood Dove* (1896), the violins play a mournful

phrase marked “sul G” in diminuendo from fortissimo to piano. Beginning on a sustained A-flat, the phrase comes to rest, first, on the same note an octave below for three slow beats, and then on open G for two beats and a bit, backed by muted pianissimo timpani.

Dvorák has designed this moment to take maximum advantage of the difference between stopped and open tones, and as already demonstrated, the stopped notes on the G-string in all likelihood assume the presence of vibrato, which makes the contrast all the more vivid. A non-vibrato performance would still reveal a certain degree of timbral variety, but it would be much less noticeable, particularly with an entire string section as opposed to a solo instrument. Dvorák had many options in writing this phrase, and it is very difficult to believe that he would have objected to the vibrato that gives his carefully planned use of string color as much impact as possible.

Composers probably learned to treat devices such as this poetically from the day that the violin was invented. You will also see further on in this essay that no less an authority than Leopold Mozart himself, writing in 1756, cautions players against using open strings on account of their peculiar timbre, which he contends upsets smooth tone production if they appear in mid-melody. Some period instrument players, on the other hand, employ such a raspy, dead basic sonority that you would never be able to tell open from stopped strings in the first instance.

I would argue, then, that another bit of evidence in favor of the notion of “blank canvas” continual vibrato is the extent to which we see composers exploiting the timbral potential of the open strings as an expressive device in its own right. It’s an effect admittedly limited in scope, and obviously one that has to be measured in context. After all, there are only four open strings; but notwithstanding this restriction, their colorful employment remains neither all that unusual, nor a recent development. The examples cited here cover the period 1776 - 1908, and there’s no telling how far back we might comfortably go.

## 17. Mahler

Mahler is famous as the composer who pioneered the use of “ohne Ausdruck” and “ohne Empfindung” (without expression/feeling), and you can find it throughout his work. The most famous example occurs in the “frozen” interludes in the finale of the Ninth Symphony (1909), but there are many others: the “misterioso” episode in the Andante of the Sixth Symphony (1904), the “moonlight” interlude in the first movement of the Seventh (1905), the lonely second movement of “Das Lied von der Erde” (1908), and in contrast with the espressivo principal melody near the beginning of the Fourth Symphony (1900), among other places. Set these passages alongside the instances where Mahler calls for vibrato (or “vibrando,” as in the Adagio of the Fourth or the Mater Glorioso episode in the Eighth [1906]), and once again the presence of vibrato as the “blank canvas” sonority can confidently be inferred.

One of the more famous non-vibrato effects in Mahler doesn't concern the strings at all: it is the "echoton" on the clarinets<sup>20</sup>, a timbre identical to the "white tone" called for at the opening and conclusion of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* (1944). Mahler uses it very poetically in the development section of the first movement of the *Second Symphony* (1888-94), seven bars after figure 8. It is relevant here because, as suggested previously, the vibrato question needs to be understood in context, and in particular as a function of the wider assumption that all instruments (as W.A. Mozart points out in a famous letter cited below), in attempting to imitate the expressive qualities of the human voice, have a natural level of vibrato (or should). Passages such as this show that Mahler was clearly conscious of this basic fact and more than ready to exploit it to further his artistic ends.

We find further evidence for this in the first song of the *Kindertotenlieder* (1901-4), where both the woodwinds (oboe and horn at figure 3) and strings (after figure 4) are directed to play "ausdruckslos." The latter case is particularly telling, for as often happens in Prokofiev, Mahler has the violas playing *pianissimo* "aber ausdrucksvoll" against the expressionless countermelody in the cellos *at the same dynamic level*. The directive to eliminate vibrato thus serves as an important contrasting element and a tool that facilitates contrapuntal clarity of texture among otherwise similar-sounding parts. Obviously, given this fact, the claim that an intrinsic or "blank canvas" vibrato muddies textures or thickens sonority detrimentally is arrant nonsense. What it really does is just the opposite: provide a purely timbral basis for differentiating competing voices in the often complex textures of late-Romantic and contemporary orchestral music.

The present example, for instance, features no less the five independent voices, all at piano or *pianissimo*, including the singer (whose presence naturally tends to thrust all of the others into the background). And this is just the purely technical side. It says nothing about the wonderful expressive effects that Mahler obtains by having, say, the oboe and horn "turn off" their expressiveness in mid-phrase at figure 3. It is surely significant that Mahler employs this technique to convey the feeling of a father emotionally benumbed with grief, in contrast to the later violent gusts of passion (the song's orchestral climax at figure 8, marked "with passionate expression"). In an orchestra without intrinsic vibrato, some of the song's potential emotional range and intensity certainly would be squandered.

The question of vibrato in Mahler performance has achieved currency thanks to recent performances and recordings by Roger Norrington and the SWR Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra. This isn't the place to consider them in detail, but essentially Norrington argues that he has "discovered" that Bruno Walter's 1938 Mahler Ninth with the Vienna Philharmonic does not employ continuous vibrato. He thus deems it

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<sup>20</sup> Indeed, one of the very earliest specific non-vibrato references concerns not strings, but the flute. It occurs in the second movement (*Intermezzo*) of Reinecke's "Undine" Sonata for flute and piano (1882). The central section is marked "dolce e misterioso" and over the flute part Reinecke marks "Ohne jegliche Bebung in Tone (without any vibrato in the tone). Not only does this show an expectation that vibrato would be used as a matter of course, it also once again confirms the relationship between "misterioso" and straight tone, especially in soft passages.

legitimate to play the music according to what he takes to be an “authentic” style. Leaving aside the fact that no one else listening to this recording since the year of its issue has noticed any marked absence of vibrato, Norrington’s position fails to measure up to even the lowest standards of logic and good sense, never mind the audible reality.

First, if the near total absence of vibrato is so critical to a correct Mahler style, then it beggars belief that conductors who worked with Mahler (indeed idolized him), or heard him conduct his own music, and who later went on to make modern stereo recordings of his music--including such illustrious names as Walter, Klemperer, and Stokowski--would have tolerated a fundamental disregard for correct playing style. Indeed, this argument applies, as previously discussed at the beginning of this essay, to all of the conductors who lived, worked, and made recordings on either side of Norrington’s hypothetical “vibrato divide” (that is, World War II).

Second, as noted previously, there is no audible evidence that the 1938 Vienna Philharmonic was not using continuous vibrato in Mahler’s Ninth, even taking into account the limitations of the recording technology and its effect on the timbre of the string section. This work is particularly interesting in that its wistful opening pages are traditionally played “semplice,” with less vibrato than usual. When one conductor on disc (Giulini on DG) performed this opening “molto espressivo,” the result was so startling and unusual that it occasioned critical comment in reviews of the recording. So variations in the degree of vibrato employed in various passages are hardly atypical. Using little or no vibrato throughout, however, makes nonsense of the contrasting episodes of the finale, and most listeners would probably agree that to play that entire movement “ohne Empfindung” isn’t a terribly good idea.

Third, Norrington ignores other recorded documents of the same period as Walter’s Mahler Ninth, including Walter’s and Mengelberg’s recordings of the Fourth Symphony, and most critically Walter’s Adagietto from the Fifth, also made with the Vienna Philharmonic. Comparing apples to apples, one has only to set the cantabile string timbre of the Viennese players in this movement against the flat, lifeless sound of Norrington’s orchestra in this same work to understand just how off base he is. In my view, Norrington is simply cynically exploiting a phenomenon all too common in the world of classical music: people would rather talk about it than listen to it. When a supposed “authority” makes an oracular pronouncement seeking to justify his interpretive biases, it’s much easier to just accept the result at face value, even if the music sounds awful.

Finally, the real issue with Norrington’s position on vibrato is not the question of whether or not it was used “continuously” in the modern sense, because even if he is correct in this regard, it was in fact legitimately and frequently employed during this period--essentially whenever the strings got the tune, if we are to believe Carl Flesch. Norrington, on the other hand, denies his strings the benefit of using vibrato even in those passages that explicitly call for it, or where its employment would have been completely uncontroversial at just about any time, or by any aesthetic standard, over the past several centuries.

In short, Norrington finds “the vibrato question” a useful way both to legitimize a purely personal interpretive prejudice, and to get attention. It has certainly been good for his career (“cleansing the orchestra” makes a wonderful sound-bite), even if his attitude smacks more of gimmickry than of serious musicianship<sup>21</sup>.

#### 18. Suk: Asrael Symphony (1906)

Third movement: Figure 20, cellos and basses “pp misterioso”

Finale: figure 44, four solo cellos “pp misterioso”

As both Enescu and Berg make clear (not to mention Mahler in the Andante of his Sixth Symphony, and Liszt in the examples cited further on) “misterioso” effects are often synonymous with the absence of vibrato--or any other suggestion of vocal timbre. That is precisely why they sound mysterious to us in the first place. Suk’s intentions are particularly clear in the first example cited, where a single cello rises out of the mass of instruments and begins to play “dolce.” The contrast between dead tone and expressive melody is very effective, as well as affecting. This is exactly the same effect that you will find in Verdi’s *Otello*, discussed below, with a different but essentially synonymous terminology.

#### 19. Richard Strauss

Like Mahler, and as we have already seen, Strauss was quite specific in his handling of vibrato and its attendant expressive indications. At figure 42 in *Ein Heldenleben* (1898), on a long-held chord for violas and cellos just before the battle begins, he indicates “vibrato, poco a poco senza vibrato,” followed immediately by his habitual “molto espressivo” as soon as melody returns to the texture. Obviously the initial “vibrato” does not mean to use it where none previously existed; rather, in order to hear the gradual draining of color from the string section it’s necessary to exaggerate, and make it clearly audible at the start. “Senza vibrato” appears nowhere else in the entire work, suggesting not just that Strauss was well-aware of its use as a special effect, but that its very unusualness as such would be meaningless without a “blank canvas” vibrato to begin with. If non-vibrato were normal, he would most likely have said “gradually as usual” (in its German or Italian equivalents already described).

This passage offers an excellent opportunity, by the way, to prove to yourself that anyone who claims to hear the degree of orchestral string vibrato in early recordings is hallucinating. Simply cue up Mengelberg’s celebrated 1928 New York Philharmonic recording of *Ein Heldenleben*, which was technically excellent for its day, to this point in the score. Despite flattened dynamics, which are useful for our purposes even if they

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<sup>21</sup> In his book *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, Robert Philip devotes a good bit of time to discussing Mahlerian performance practice without ever dealing with the vibrato question (or giving the slightest consideration to what the scores actually say). Indeed, his take on orchestral vibrato is limited largely to the baldly unsupported claim that the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic string sections took their timbral characteristics from their respective concertmasters, while accepting in passing, and without a shred of corroborating evidence, Norrington’s assertion that German orchestras in the 1920s and 30s played without vibrato. This is the epitome of impressionistic nonsense masquerading as serious scholarship.

make a true string pianissimo impossible, you will not hear any perceptible change in timbre during these several bars of sustained sonority in slow tempo.

Granted, Strauss intended that this be a subtle effect, an accompaniment, and it's barely perceptible even in most modern recordings with their wider and more natural dynamic range; but that is precisely the point<sup>22</sup>. The issue, this example makes quite clear, is not really whether orchestras or soloists used vibrato. We know that they all did. It is the degree to which modern performers exaggerate its absence for the sake of sounding "authentic," reducing the permissible amount (and in the process rendering the music ugly) well beyond the reasonable norm of any period, past or present.

Just as interesting from the historical point of view, Strauss' use of "without expression" terminology predates even Mahler's. You can find it in both *Death and Transfiguration* (1889) (cello, viola, and violin solos before letter M), and in *Don Juan* (1888) (cellos, before letter G). These are all "cold" entrances, in which the "senza espressione" indication would be completely unnecessary without the expectation of an inherent use of vibrato--as well as the other rhythmic and timbral paraphernalia of Romantic feeling applicable during this period.

Strauss lived, just barely, on both sides of the "great vibrato divide." So it's particularly interesting to see him in *Capriccio* (1941), his last opera, composed when the continuous vibrato revolution was well underway, writing a typically Straussian "pp vibrato espressivo" for the strings six bars after figure 72. After all, if everyone was by then using vibrato anyway, why the need to call for it now, unless of course the direction means--as it did explicitly in *Elektra* in 1908 (previously cited), and very likely always has--"give us more than usual?" How fascinating it is to find a composer asking for no vibrato in the 1880s and 90s, when it theoretically did not exist, and for more of it in the 1940s, by which time it was supposedly ubiquitous.

## 20. Puccini *La Bohème* (1896)

Act III: All strings (plus winds), except basses, at figure 22: pppp con stanchezza (literally "with exhaustion," but colloquially "spent" and "pallid"). The harp part, by the way, is marked "vibrato," but this means "don't damp the tone, let it reverberate." So the same word means different things in terms of the playing techniques of the various instrumentalists.

Examples such as this one reinforce just how necessary it was for orchestras to evolve a "blank canvas" or neutral sonority other than a pure, non-vibrato tone. Composers aren't

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<sup>22</sup> If you're curious, two recordings where you can hear the effect Strauss has in mind are Ormandy's with the Philadelphia Orchestra (Sony) and Oue's with the Minnesota Orchestra (Reference Recordings). It's worth noting that both of these, of course, date from the "continuous vibrato" period, thus proving that the existence of intrinsic vibrato never precludes it being used "ornamentally," for additional color, accent, or emphasis.



always reasonable in their choice of terminology: they characterize music in all kinds of ways, and then leave it to the player to figure out how to realize their instructions in timbral terms. The Romantic period really took this habit to extremes at both ends of the expressive scale (at one splendid point in *Tosca*, Puccini marks his string parts “velvety”). Colorful language abounds. If you are really curious about this point, have a look at Scriabin’s *Poem of Ecstasy*, the ultimate in linguistic (never mind musical) extravagance.

As we saw with the Enescu, the number of “pro-vibrato” directives greatly outnumbers suggestions to withhold vibrato, but as noted in connection with Liszt’s *Faust Symphony*, it is not unusual in Romantic music to have almost every single string entrance containing even a scrap of melody descriptively characterized in some way. All of these vivid adjectives require the player to modify his timbre to make the passage in question stand out as expressively special in its context. A non-vibrato norm is useless to convey the intent of passages such as this one, and the same holds true for the strings-only interlude at figure 20 in Act 4, marked “calmo,” which introduces Mimi’s death scene--“calmo” in comparison to what?

#### La Fanciulla del West (1910)

In “The Girl,” there is little question that Puccini calculates his string sonority from a “neutral” base that includes continuous vibrato, but as I am sure you will agree, the proper term really ought to be “continuously variable vibrato,” because there are so many injunctions being hurled at the string players that at times it’s difficult to imagine any fundamental sonority at all. The piece is, first and foremost, an absolute orgy of vibrato--similar to Strauss’ *Salomé* in this respect--but unlike Strauss, Puccini’s vibrato isn’t just for the strings. Puccini marks the very first tune after the introductory bars “molto vibrato e animando un poco,” and if that isn’t enough, the phrase’s concluding *fff* brass fanfare should be played “vibratissimo e ben ritmato.”

And this is just the beginning. Puccini has invented new names for whole tempo areas. Minnie’s entrance is an “Andante vibrato” (dotted quarter = 54, in case you were wondering). A bit later in the act, at figure 72, the tempo picks up to “Allegro vibrato,” with the strings additionally told “espressivo” and “cantando.” The second act has a large section at figure 27 headed “Largo (vibratissimo),” leading to “Largo sostenuto molto,” with the strings instructed to play “espressivo dolcissimo,” “dimuendo *pp* ma sempre espressivo,” and finally “con calore” (with warmth). *La Fanciulla del West* is, in truth, comparatively atypical for its composer in its specificity regarding vibrato, though not with respect to other expressive indications.

At the other end of the vibrato scale, we find in the first act, at figure 60, the pianissimo violins marked “senza espressione,” unusually direct given the composer’s preference for poetic or fanciful terminology. The desolate sound of blowing wind (Act II, figure 56) is rendered by the full orchestra playing “staccatissimo e secco.” Minnie bids farewell to the cowboys in Act III to a plaintive cello line marked “con semplicità.” Most tellingly of all, there’s a wonderful passage towards the end of the first act with lower strings and winds

playing “calmo,” but “i primi Violini un po’ espressivo” (“first violins a little bit expressive”). In *Fanciulla*, you really can see Puccini creating a variable timbral continuum that defines itself by the degree to which vibrato is used (or very unusually, is not used) at any given point. This piece shows, in effect, what “continuous vibrato” really means.

#### 21. Busoni: *Geharnischte Suite* (1895, rev. 1903)

In the first movement of his suite, at the “Più Lento” between rehearsal figures B and C, Busoni asks his (muted) *pianissimo* violas to play on phrase “*dolcissimo, espressivo*,” and another two bars later “*dolcissimo, senza espressivo*.” This is another very useful example of the fact that many expressive terms do not concern a single aspect of performance (timbre, phrasing, rhythm), but many at once. We have already seen how “*semplice*” can be used with “*vibrato*” and “*espressivo*” to limit its application to matters of phrasing. Busoni demonstrates the same fact here with his “*senza espressivo*.”

It is already clear, thanks to Enescu and others, that both “*dolcissimo*” and “*espressivo*” naturally will include vibrato where possible. Busoni’s detailed markings of the initial “*espressivo*” viola line provide still more information: small staccato accents and “hairpin” dynamic swells give the music emphasis, as does that fact that the initial phrases are only marked “*piano*.” On the other hand, the non-*espressivo* bits have no accents or additional dynamic indications, and they are marked “*pianissimo*” to further reduce their prominence. And then, vibrato aside, there are the other elements of the Romantic *espressivo* or *dolce* that are seldom notated.

For example, another clearly associated technique is the use of portamento (sliding between notes). We know this with certainty thanks to Benjamin Britten, who in the first of his very early *Quatre Chansons Françaises* (1928), after figure 3, has the courtesy to tell the first violins “*pp ma espressivo, non portamento*.” Conductor Charles Mackerras, an artist whose work embodies the best in enlightened scholarship applied to practical musicianship, actually found over 500 unmarked instances of portamento in Elgar’s own 1920s recordings of his *Second Symphony* (you can also hear them in Mackerras’ interpretation of the work on Argo which, I might add, also accepts the concomitant presence of continuous vibrato).

The reason this matters is because in many of the examples cited thus far (Busoni here, Viotti and Falla previously), composers seem at pains to preserve or reintroduce the timbral element of compound terms such as “*espressivo*” or “*semplice*” first and foremost. In other words, the natural tendency is to preserve vibrato and other aspects of tone-quality. These are priorities because the expressivity of the phrase begins with the basic sound that the players produce. This is how they avoid “dead spots.”

“Conservation of expressive timbre,” if you want to call it that, is one of the pillars of our musical tradition. It explains the use of “*dolce*” instead of the much plainer “*piano*” in so much music of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Franck, below), and even if it does not address the vibrato question head-on, it suggests that the bias of composers--and by

extension performers--almost invariably leans in the direction of more feeling, greater fullness of tone, and a more direct communication of emotion to the listener. In Romantic music particularly, it provides the context within which the vibrato debate should occur, one that needs to be addressed specifically by anyone who contends that when it comes to the basics of musical expression, “less is more.”

## 22. Boëllmann: Variations Symphoniques (1893)

Figure 21: violins and violas, “*toujours pp et sans nuances*”

Léon Boëllmann (1862-97) was a French composer best known, to the extent he’s remembered at all, for his organ works. His Symphonic Variations for Cello and Orchestra is a lovely piece that deserves an occasional performance; the above passage is particularly evocative. The solo cello plays “*dolce cantabile*” against an “*espressivo*” solo flute melody, accompanied by rippling harp arpeggios and soft, non-vibrato chords in the strings. It’s very French, a legacy of the Franck/d’Indy school, and yet another reminder that the some of the most compelling evidence for continuous orchestral vibrato will not necessary be found in the most popular works by the best-known or greatest composers.

## 23. Charpentier: Impressions d’Italie (1891)

Gustave Charpentier’s (of Louise fame) splendid orchestral tribute to Italy contains a lengthy cello solo in its finale movement, Napoli, that speaks volumes about his expectations of contemporary string players. It begins *mf*, “*avec emphase sans passion*,” a remarkable enough designation in itself. The melody picks up energy, “*vigourement*,” as well as expression, becoming “*gracieux*” and indulging in a bit of “*rubato*.” As the volume steadily increases, Charpentier finally urges “*avec passion*” at its fortissimo climax, only to let the melody subside, “*tres doux et triste*” (“very sweet and sad”). The non-vibrato opening is essential to the music’s evolving emotional curve, and the “*sans passion*” directive would hardly have been necessary unless (quite understandably) the opportunity for a lyrical solo ordinarily called forth a generous dose of expressive vibrato.

## 24. Catalani: La Wally (1891)

Act 1 after letter AA: Hegenbach “*Primo ei m’offese!*” Strings plus oboe, *pp tranquillo*, and strings only “*timidamente*”

Act 2 after letter Q: Wally “*Da ache son la padrona*” All strings “*Andante sostenuto e severamente calmo*”

Act 3 Introduction: Piccolo, flute, English horn, and cellos: “*desolatamente*”

Catalani’s opera is a delightful source of descriptive terminology at both ends of the expressive scale. You can find everything in the string parts from “*voluptuously*” to “*dolcissimo e morbido*,” to my personal favorites: “*Color pastorale*,” and “*Grottescamente funebre*.” Cynics would say that the composer’s descriptions are overly hopeful: the words are more vivid than the music. But we won’t go there.

The three examples chosen from this highly appealing and undeniably vivid score clearly suggest a non-vibrato timbre, even if those actual words don't appear specifically. "Timidamente" recalls the non-vibrato "esitando" in Enescu's Third Violin Sonata. The "severamente calmo" Andante from Act Two moves in steady quarter notes, with variations in dynamics from forte to piano, and the only way to achieve a really noticeable "calmo," however smooth the bowing, is to minimize vibrato as well.

Finally, "desolatamente" speaks for itself (and recall the "Largo desolato" from Berg's Lyric Suite, cited above). One possible reason that Catalani, in common with most other composers in similar situations, doesn't discuss string vibrato specifically is simply because the description applies to more than just the strings. Here it is a blended sonority, a phenomenon obviously unheard of in the world of solo writing, but one very common in orchestral music. From the doublings listed above, you can see quite clearly that Catalani is after a thin, bleak, somewhat nasal tone color.

Now you may argue that these and other special effects may be realized, at least to some degree, in ways other than by simply omitting vibrato. This is true in general, and it's yet another reason that composers tend not to single out vibrato for special treatment. They want players to use every means at their disposal to realize the required mood. But one thing is certain: these colors and timbres cannot be evoked effectively, at least as far as the strings are concerned, from a non-vibrato fundamental sonority. Certain effects require more color, some less, but the latter won't be noticeable in their proper context if the basic string timbre has no vibrato to begin with.

#### 25. Franck

Symphony in D minor (1888) Finale, measure 330, all strings "non troppo dolce" (not too sweetly)

Piano Quintet (1879) First Movement, violin, cello, and piano at measure 832: "p molto espressivo ma senza agitazione"

These examples are really instructive. Franck's symphony positively overflows with various "espressivo" "cantabile," and "dolce" indications. It's a work with a long and not entirely reputable history as a reservoir of sugary, sweaty, Romantic vibrato. It's all the more remarkable, then, that after a lengthy and strenuous orchestral tutti containing lots of busy string writing of no specifically defined emotional character, Franck asks his strings out of nowhere to sound "not too sweet." It suggests, among other things, that "dolce," or something close to it, may in fact be our theoretical "black canvas."

In assorted languages, "sweet" is probably the most frequently used descriptive term in all of Romantic (and much earlier) music, and could very plausibly serve as the era's expressive norm. You will find it used synonymously, and in tandem, with "piano" throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's an interesting choice, when you think about it. "Cantabile" (songful) and "espressivo" are comparatively generalized in meaning. The former refers to music of a vocal nature, and the latter to emotion in a non-specific (or contextual) sense. "Dolce," though, refers to a very particular and tactile quality of sound,

one which these various examples demonstrate beyond doubt is inextricably bound with the use of vibrato.

Indeed, so often does “dolce” occur that Franck might well assume that any soft, melodic passage would be played that way as a matter of course. Perhaps this is why he even finds it necessary to repeat his stricture not just with respect to the tune, but over all of the accompanying parts too--an argument in favor of the notion that the handling of vibrato was comparatively well-equalized throughout the entire string section. Note, though, that Franck refuses to go all the way and say “not sweetly” or “without expression.” Clearly, for him, the presence of melody means some level of emotion no matter what. More significantly, here is yet another instance that helps us to understand that “continuous vibrato” does not mean one thick, heavy, monochrome sound, but rather wide variations of a basic ensemble sonority.

This observation is even more applicable Franck’s D-major String Quartet of 1889. Throughout the first movement, the cello part is marked “sempre vibrato,” “vibrato marcato,” and “espressivo vibrato,” but these directions are later modified by “espressivo non troppo,” “tranquillo,” and “meno dolce” (interestingly appearing “cold,” after no “dolce” indication at all). The same “non troppo dolce” that we see in the symphony appears throughout the quartet as well, and both the Larghetto third movement and the finale present opposing vibrato and non-vibrato timbres in terms of the contrast between singing “espressivo” lines, and “recitando” declamation--a point to be explored in greater detail at the conclusion of this section.

The fact that “vibrato” doesn’t appear after the first movement, but a rich vocabulary of the other expressive indications does, obviously should not be taken as a sign that Franck has all of a sudden decided that that the players should never use it. Such would be the view of the HIPPLF. The reality, of course, which you can confirm simply by listening to the work, is that the first movement features particularly important melodic lines for the cello, and so Franck has used the strongest possible language to emphasize this fact to the players and ensure that the lowest and often least prominent voice in the quartet takes the lead wherever necessary.

Now consider Franck’s Piano Quintet. “Vibrato” is of course synonymous, quite literally, with “agitation,” but he doesn’t use the term here even though it’s quite clear how the strings would realize his direction. But what about the piano? This example makes it very obvious that it’s really much easier and more efficient for composers to use colorfully descriptive words and phrases, and leave the details to the players. Technical instructions, even when everyone thinks they know what they mean, run the dual risk of confusing the performers and ruining the music, particularly if the physical realization of the sought-after effect differs markedly from one instrument to the next.

Franck, in any case, isn’t asking for no vibrato here, merely less, so as to ensure a certain smoothness of sonority. It’s a useful reminder, once again, that the “vibrato question” isn’t an all-or-nothing proposition. Composers and performers are far more sensitive to fine shades of color and subtle timbral distinctions than the HIPPLF, with its crudely

simplistic view of the musical world, would have us believe. So when writing for strings alone, Franck is happy to use “vibrato” alongside the more usual terminology. In the Quintet and the Symphony, he’s more cautious as well as more pragmatic, but like Liszt-- as you will see further on--he’s no less imaginative in finding poetic equivalents for the effects he has in mind.

26. Verdi:

Otello (1886)

Act IV Letter N, all strings “cupo e piano”

“Cupo” means, approximately, “dark/dull/hollow,” and the phrase in question accompanies Desdemona’s “Willow Song.” What clinches this as a “non-vibrato” indication is the very last note of the phrase, in the cellos only, which Verdi marks “dolce.” This passage is only playable as indicated if it begins non-vibrato, and then acquires just the tiniest breath of life at the end, on that single note. “Cupo” makes no sense in context unless Verdi expected that the strings have a normal vibrato that needed suppressing. There are no other expressive or technical indications, and no previous “espressivo” markings that need to be cancelled. This term, by the way, occurs elsewhere in Verdi (in *Il Corsaro* [1848], for example), as well as in other composers of the Italian school.

Macbeth (1847/65)

Act III (Apparition Scene), measure 90: voice marked “parlando” (as if speaking) and “voce muta” (mute, or toneless). All strings marked “legato; e muto comme se fosse colle sordine” (“legato, and toneless as if it were with mutes”).

But it’s not with mutes. How on earth is a string section to realize this directive save through a complete avoidance of any hint of vibrato? This example vividly highlights one conundrum that the HIPPLF faces when dealing with the vibrato question. According to the editors of the opera’s critical edition, this injunction appears only in the score, and not in the actual parts. So unless the conductor said something in rehearsal, the strings would not have known what to do.

What, then, is more “authentic?” To play the passage as it might have been done by orchestras of the day, and disregard Verdi’s requirements, or to try to do as the score asks? But wait a minute: if you believe that there should be no vibrato used in the first place, then you cannot do as the score asks, at least not so anyone would notice the significant timbral contrast between this passage and any other featuring a similar tempo and dynamic. Examples such as this, when composers ask the strings to do something extraordinary, allow us to infer with relative confidence what must have been otherwise normal and ordinary.

These cases also reveal just why finding “non-vibrato/espressivo” indications is so difficult. You won’t see them, for example, in arias, which are by definition the expression of feelings; this also effectively rules out Wagner, whose “endless melody,” though more theory than reality, does manifest itself in an attempt to render the entire

orchestral part expressive from beginning to end. The place to look, in opera at least, is in accompanied recitative, where the orchestra is not necessarily seconding the voice, but setting a mood reflecting the declamation above.

Indeed, if I had to venture a guess, I would say that continuous orchestral vibrato probably originated in the opera house as a “special effect” to enliven the texture of plain recitative, of the type accompanied by sustained, static chords in the strings. Such passages are ubiquitous from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century on, and it strikes me as inconceivable that the strings would hold single chords quite literally for minutes on end while maintaining a flat, dead tone all the while<sup>23</sup>. Such a practice also flies directly in the face of the advice offered by treatise-writers such as Leopold Mozart and Spohr, who invariably recommend using vibrato on sustained tones.

At the same time, composers since time immemorial often include expressive indications calling for vibrato whenever instruments double a vocal melody. We’ve already seen it in such places as Walter’s Prize Song from *Die Meistersinger*, as well as Boito’s *Mefisofele*. So if string sections use vibrato to sustain recitative, and also when they get a tune (or countermelody), you effectively have continuous vibrato textures, and from there it’s but a short step for the same players to do something similar in a concert situation featuring “abstract” music. Most concerts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, right up through the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup>, were not just very long and wildly varied as to content. They often featured vocal soloists singing opera excerpts, never mind non-theatrical sacred and secular vocal works. It would be quite unreasonable for players drawn from theater orchestras in the first place to turn their vibrato on for the operatic bits, and then off for the symphony or concerto.

So in determining whether vibrato was or was not present, it helps to find works which have lengthy passages of accompanied recitative, situations that call for extremes of illustrative instrumental color, and composers willing to mark their scores accordingly. Outside the field of opera, and particularly when trying to find non-vibrato timbres, we are limited to those unusual circumstances, mostly in program music of some kind, in which a dry, emotionless texture fulfills some genuine expressive purpose. As you might surmise, these cases do not occur all that frequently. How remarkable, then, that there are still so many useful instances of this phenomenon, and certainly far more than those listed here, waiting to be discovered and analyzed.

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<sup>23</sup> There is circumstantial evidence supporting this point of view in Gustave Huberti’s *Symphonie funèbre* (1883), a useful work for reasons to be discussed in greater detail further on. At the opening of the finale the full string section softly supports the melody, *pianissimo*, in the brass. Huberti marks the strings “*le quator espressivo et pp* (Caractère d’accompagnement).” This is exactly the kind of texture that operatic composers probably expect of their string sections in similar situations (which means much of the time). Vibrato offers an ideal means of softening the collective tone of the string section, allowing the sound to project without ever covering the soloist. The topic of “accompaniment” generally, of vital concern to instrumental string players, is almost entirely neglected in discussions of the vibrato question because period performance scholars focus on the technicalities of solo execution (with good reason: it’s the only topic treated extensively in the available sources).

27. Saint-Saëns: “Organ Symphony” (1886)  
Second Movement, Figure S “sans nuance aux Contrebasses”

This example demonstrates that Saint-Saëns is thinking of vibrato in combination with dynamics, an extremely common effect in both orchestral and chamber music of all kinds. The remaining strings have no expressive directions at all other than the hairpin [ $\langle \rangle$ ] marking. In his treatise on violin playing, Baillot shows how swells are often accompanied by vibrato (particularly on single notes)<sup>24</sup>. Similarly, even the most conservative treatise-writers, such as Spohr, approve of vibrato in long, slow crescendos and diminuendos on sustained tones such as we have here. It would be most unusual, in fact, for string players not to use vibrato in such passages at virtually any period.

Furthermore, Saint-Saëns gives the same indication, “sans nuance,” to the organ. Now the organ is a special case, as the player has no control at all over its tone production as a function of touch. It is wholly mechanically generated. And the only timbral nuance available to the organ beyond stop selection is--vibrato. Here is Forsyth again: “It happens that the only instrument which is a wholesale dealer in vibrato is...the Organ.” (p. 493). Saint-Saëns clearly wants the organist to choose stops with as smooth a tone as possible, and for the double basses to match this flat timbre. The upper strings, in contrast, remain free to vibrate to their heart’s content, the vibrato in the basses is restored at the end of the phrase with a final hairpin marking.

#### An Organ Interlude

This seems an appropriate place to touch on one of the more arcane branches of the vibrato question, specifically the device known as the “tremulant.” This isn’t an organ stop so much as an optional gadget, like power steering or automatic transmission in a car. It causes a rapid “beat” similar to the more familiar tremolo in string writing, and because the pitch of the pipe involved doesn’t actually change it can’t really be called vibrato as the term is commonly understood today. Nevertheless, the purpose of this device, when first added to organs in the Baroque period, was to give the instrument a more vocal, expressive timbre. Controversy arises when the HIPPLF uses the existence of the tremulant to explain the absence of continuous vibrato in stringed instruments: “Continuous vibrato,” they argue, “would be like continuous use of the tremulant, rather than the special effect that it was intended to be.” The wrong-headedness of this argument is easily demonstrated.

In the first place, the organ is the one instrument which is not designed in the image of the human voice, and is not particularly comfortable when forced into this role. This is precisely why it is the vehicle of choice in religious music, which theoretically represents eternal, mystical truths emanating from a greater than human authority. But don’t take my word for it. Here is Widor’s explanation in the preface to the printed edition of his first eight organ symphonies:

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<sup>24</sup> See Part Two of this essay for a full discussion of the  $\langle \rangle$  indication as it relates to orchestral vibrato.



“Whereas the orchestral string and wind instruments, piano and voices dominate only at the first impulse of the accent, the moment of the attack, the organ, confined in its original majesty, speaks philosophically: alone among them all, it can produce indefinitely the same volume of sound and thus, from the idea of infinity, give rise to religious ideas. Surprises and accents are not natural to it; they are brought to it, they are adopted accents.”

So it is pointless to try to approach the vibrato question by comparing an instrument not made in imitation of the human voice to those which were so created, and whose whole technique has evolved over centuries to that specific end. The issue is further complicated by the fact that no two organs are exactly the same, and so composers are either very circumspect in their choice of registrations (providing minimal or no information at all), or extremely specific and limited to a particular instrument (or family of instruments). Still, a perfectly valid, analogous way of looking at the problem does exist, making it possible to illuminate the vibrato question in a most interesting way. Consider two examples:

In F. J. Fétis’ *Fantaisie Symphonique* (1866) for organ and orchestra, the central set of variations contains a lengthy passage for “voix humaine avec la tremblant.” Neither are used elsewhere, and they only appear together. Furthermore, in the first and second of his *Trois Chorales* (1890), Franck treats the *vox humana* and tremulant similarly, save that he also adds the latter to the conclusion of the Second Chorale. In other words, the use of the two stops together for the same length of time offers *prima facie* evidence of the belief that the human voice has a natural, continuous vibrato. It therefore follows that a degree of vibrato also should logically serve as the “blank canvas,” intrinsic sonority of orchestral instruments, at least to the extent that they operate in vocal mode.

28. Draeseke: *Symphonia tragica* (Symphony No. 3) [1885/6]

First Movement, measure 27, first violins “*p semplice*” against second violins and violas, “*p molto espressivo*”

As noted in connection with Elgar, “*semplice*” is often associated with the withholding of vibrato, and this case makes it particularly clear because the first violin line consists of steady eighth notes in slow tempo, every second one of which for several bars is an “open” G. The simultaneous juxtaposition of expressive and non-expressive timbres is one of the new contrasts made possible by the presence of continuous vibrato in orchestral string sections.

Draeseke’s handling of his “*semplice*” texture suggests very strongly that some sort of “blank canvas” vibrato must be the norm. If non-vibrato were the rule, there would be no need to worry about the regular stopped tones acquiring an unwanted degree of expressive emphasis. But Draeseke was one of those late Romantic German composers who did worry, about everything. His scores reveal an extreme sensitivity to this kind of detail, being very carefully and copiously marked, and accordingly unambiguous as to his intentions.

29. Dvorák:

Symphonic Poem (Rhapsody) Op. 14 (1874)

Measure 314, lower strings “secco” (“dry”)

Symphony No. 4 (1874), Finale, main theme, all strings marked “secco” (and in analogous passages whenever they return throughout the movement)

Symphony No. 5 (1875), second movement (Letter C): full orchestra, “secco” (strings also “marcatissimo”)

Rusalka (1900) Act 1, measure 247, first violins, cellos, and basses: “secco”

Here is another example that illustrates why the argument for the existence of continuous vibrato requires a certain amount of detective work (as well as a composer who uses musical terminology rationally and consistently, no sure thing by any means). The Rhapsody is a piece that almost no one knows, and the passage in question isn't an important episode or climax, but a simple accompaniment in quarter notes on cellos and basses in march tempo. But what makes this piece so interesting is the choice of terminology, especially given the fact that the composer was himself a professional orchestral string player.

Dvorák does not say “staccato,” though he indicates that type of articulation with dots over all of the notes. Instead, he describes timbre, and any string player will tell you that “dry” means “without vibrato.” There is no rational reason why Dvorák would choose this term, the only time it's used in the entire work, to characterize an accompanimental passage in a swift tempo unless vibrato was being used (to quote Flesch) “even in technical passages.” Furthermore, the “secco” injunction is not used to negate a previous *espressivo*, but appears in the context of the work's “blank canvas” string timbre. You can find the same directive in the string parts at the opening of the finale of the A Major Piano Quintet (1887).

That “secco” here is not the same thing as “staccato” becomes clearer in considering the finale of the Fourth Symphony (and the example from the Fifth). In both works, but especially in the Fourth's concluding movement, Dvorák uses the “dry” indication in combination with, and in contrast to, “staccato” (measure 29), “*marcato*” (before and after measure 135), and even “*dolce*” (recapitulation, measure 415, “*sempre secco*” in the basses vs. the violins “*dolce legato*,” not marked this time around but identical to the passage so indicated in the exposition). The concept in this case is to produce the greatest possible expressive distance between the glum first subject and the warmly lyrical second theme, marked “*molto espressivo*” and/or “*dolce*” whenever it appears.

The “secco” = “non *espressivo*” = “non vibrato” equation gains credence in considering the extract from *Rusalka*, part of the accompaniment to the opening scene and trio of the three water sprites. These characters, being non-human, would naturally be denied the kind of *espressivo* music that typifies *Rusalka* (who wants to be human), as well as the actual people (the prince, the princess, etc). The “dry,” *scherzando* idiom that Dvorák uses to characterize them thus makes perfect sense. In a work where the strings are asked to run the gamut from this “secco,” to a frequently used “*molto appassionato*,” the

dramatic context here helps to clarify Dvorák's intentions in the comparatively abstract orchestral and chamber pieces as well.

30. Bruckner: Symphony No. 3 (1873) [first version]  
Adagio figure C, all strings ppp "misterioso"

Bruckner's style of writing for orchestra is so idiosyncratic that it really does seem to live its own expressive world. He operates by juxtaposing musical archetypes, each supported by different instrumental textures. There are chorales, dances, mosaic-like sequences built out of motivic fragments, and richly lyrical and polyphonic "song periods" [Bruckner's term]. Each features a characteristic treatment of the strings, and perhaps no other composer provides more compelling evidence that the phrase "continuous orchestral vibrato" is nonsense. Bruckner's string writing, which violinists generally detest because they so seldom get "the tune," largely consists of (a) tremolos, (b) rhythmic ostinatos of various types, and (c) lyrical melodies or motives.

Only in this last category does vibrato play a significant role, but Bruckner was certainly aware of it. He constantly, indeed obsessively, asks for "long-drawn out bowing" or "broad strokes" to obtain a perpetual sostenuto sound, and he is the "king of the G-string." Sustained passages in slow tempo, particularly on the G-string, are nearly always an invitation to use plenty of vibrato as previously demonstrated from Enescu on down; and as you will see further on, this is also entirely consistent with even the most conservative theories from Leopold Mozart and Spohr as well.

All of this is most obvious in Bruckner's adagios, and nowhere more so than in the above example. This triple-piano chorale for the full string section (minus basses), the spiritual center of the movement, requires minimal or no vibrato to give the requisite hushed, distant effect. It is exactly equivalent in mood to those "senza espressione" passages for the separate string orchestra in Vaughan Williams' Tallis Fantasia, or Debussy's "Jouissance." The moment only produces the maximum impact if its non-vibrato character appears in contrast to the normally expressive surrounding timbre of Bruckner's strings.

It could be argued that these and other cases of non-vibrato texture cannot be proven by "counting backwards" from similar examples taken from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when composers felt more comfortable being extremely technically specific when marking their scores, and continuous orchestral vibrato was (theoretically) just starting to come into fashion. This argument strikes me as fair, but ultimately unpersuasive for several reasons. First, there is the consistency of terminology, emotional content, and the manner of writing for the strings in virtually all of these cases over a period of nearly a century. But most importantly, and as suggested time and again throughout this essay, the real issue is one of context.

It makes no sense for a composer to ask for a special timbral effect if the style of playing is such that the desired impression, in the normal course of performance, would be impossible for listeners to discern, and if the method of its production were not self-evident to the players, requiring minimal fuss and bother. In short, the sounds in question

have to be idiomatic to the instruments, easy to produce, and an obvious contrast with their surroundings--foolproof both in their realization and their impact. To this extent the absence of vibrato in passages such as the one under consideration here isn't just the simplest answer; it's really the only answer.

31. Liszt:

Dante Symphony (1856), first movement at Letter V "Andante amoroso"

A Faust Symphony (1854-57), first movement at Letter Ee

Christus (1866), bars 248ff, 410, and 809

We have already seen that the expressive indications in the second movement of Liszt's Faust Symphony make an excellent case for the need to adopt continuous vibrato to perform the music at all. This example from the Dante Symphony offers even clearer evidence of its presence. Over the upper string parts, Liszt writes "dolce con intimo sentimento," an indication that would obviously call for a healthy dose of vibrato, as suggested by the Enescu, Mahler and Strauss pieces already cited. However, in addition to this directive, Liszt adds a footnote to the triplet accompaniment in the viola part that reads "the violas very pure, equal, and tender" ("Die Bratschen sehr rein, Gleichmässig, und zart")--"equal," by the way, because they are divided--a clear indication to limit the use of vibrato in this subsidiary voice.

Obviously there would have been no need for the footnote if the initial directive did not entail the automatic use of vibrato, and Liszt makes the point even more obvious a few bars later with "crescendo e molto appassionato" in the strings generally, "espressivo" in the cellos, and then "appassionato" for the violas only, all along the way to a violin-led climax "con somma passione." Once again we see the requirement, not just for "continuous vibrato," but for continuously varying vibrato. Liszt asks his players to distinguish between multiple degrees of expressivity as the music progresses.

Of course, realizing these expressive indications isn't just a matter of using vibrato (or not). The music exploits string textures ranging from sectional solos to the full ensemble, both muted and unmuted, and we aren't even considering the equally detailed markings in the woodwinds ("dolce soave") and harp ("tenderamente"). But there's no question that vibrato has a major role to play in assisting the strings to create the timbres that Liszt has in mind, and it's very difficult to imagine a successful performance that denies the players the opportunity to exploit the widest possible range of their instruments' coloristic resources.

You can see the same process is reverse at figure Ee in the first movement of the Faust Symphony, where the violins progress from "dolce," to "dolce et molto tranquillo," to "quieto" all at a uniform piano dynamic level, within the span of five or six bars at a "poco andante" tempo. Without a steady diminution in vibrato (never mind using it to distinguish between the violin's "dolce" and the cellos' "espressivo" in the same passage), Liszt's expressive markings are simply unplayable. Variations in bow speed and pressure can only achieve so much at an unchanging, soft dynamic level, and in music consisting either of sustained tones or a legato articulation of steady eighth notes.

These examples also illustrate an important point: the request to refrain from using vibrato (or expressing emotion) doesn't imply that the passage means nothing at all, or represents some sort of musical nullity. What really happens is that the composer wishes to avoid a singing, cantabile (and therefore human) quality. This isn't as odd as it sounds. Aside from expressing human emotion, music can be illustrative of everything from sounds of nature to places, events, and objects. The 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular, saw the rise of "program" music and the symphonic poem, and so it makes perfect sense that composers needed to find techniques for doing more than imitating the expressivity of actual singing.

Achieving this goal can be done in many different ways, from using strange harmonies, to employing athenatic textures, to merely making noise. One of the most famous examples of this is the "statue music" in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Not only does the passage consist entirely of eerie harmony and crisscrossing rhythmic patterns devoid of melody, I suspect that string players in Mozart's day would have understood, as they usually do today, to minimize their use of vibrato and produce an appropriately gaunt sonority.

However, in situations where the composer wishes to capture the supernatural, mystical, or spiritual in musical terms and also employ a clear tune, the handling of timbre is particularly important, and we find a telling example of this in Liszt's oratorio *Christus*. In the first passage cited, at bar 248 in the section called "The Entry into Jerusalem," Liszt directs the initially "espressivo" violins (piano throughout) to play "espressivo con serenita," obviously suggesting a soft, smooth tone with yet the necessary vibrato to convey emotion. A few bars later, Liszt adds "senza agitazione," and at this dynamic level and degree of legato phrasing, the only "agitazione" that could possibly be going on is vibrato. Finally, a sudden drop to pianissimo (after a crescendo), a change of key, and all of the previous elements combine to create a hushed, otherworldly "misterioso."

By the way, in case the HIPPLF questions the equivalence of terms such as "senza agitazione," "misterioso," "secco," and the like with "no vibrato" (as well as the terms meaning the opposite), never mind the evidence already cited from Enesco on down that demonstrates just this point, let us not forget that their much-quoted historical sources barely mention the word "vibrato" at all, preferring instead not just "tremolo," which we know can have a very different technical meaning, but also a whole vocabulary of little-known and marginally understood oddities such as "Bebung," "flattement," and several others. These are routinely equated with modern string vibrato on little or no hard evidence at all. Back to Liszt.

Later in *Christus*, at measure 410 in the setting of the *Stabat Mater*, Liszt has the choir singing "con divozione," the winds playing "dolce," the basses "tranquillo," and the rest of the strings playing "espressivo ma senza agitazione," an indication that shows quite clearly that a normal "espressivo" automatically includes a healthy degree of vibrato. In other words, "espressivo" without it (or without much of it) is very much a special effect that needs to be requested specifically. Finally, towards the end of the work, at measure

809, the first violins play “dolce legatissimo, con grazia,” while the remaining strings accompany in simple chords marked “senza agitazione.” This is a moment similar to that in Prokofiev’s Classical Symphony, cited above, where the extreme delicacy of the melodic line motivates the composer to ensure that the accompaniment remains as unobtrusive, expressively speaking, as possible.

This “misterioso,” otherworldly quality was first explored in the works of Haydn (“Chaos” from The Creation, for example), Mozart (as already mentioned), and Beethoven (Ninth Symphony, Missa Solemnis, the late string quartets and piano sonatas). It was seized on and developed by Romantic composers with a vengeance, and the single most critical aid to its successful realization is the ability to obtain sounds that are, to human ears, alien. Asking that string players refrain from using vibrato helps this process along immeasurably, as Mahler suggests in the Sixth Symphony’s Andante, and both Enescu and Berg above make explicit. However, it only makes sense, and has the desired impact, if some degree of natural vibrato is the norm. Absent this convention, the contrast between a regular piano/pianissimo texture and Liszt’s “misterioso” would indeed be inexpressive in an absolute sense, and thus effectively meaningless.

### 32. Bellini: Norma (1831)

Act I: Introduction to chorus “Dell’aura tua profetica”

All strings in successive entries, “secche” (“dry”)

Here’s another request to play the music dryly, and as a non-vibrato indication it’s all the more believable coming, as it does, as the first normally bowed phrase following a passage of tremolo string texture. The “dry” designation is thus clearly meant in relationship to the orchestra’s “blank canvas” tone color. Bellini is, in general, extremely sensitive in marking his string parts, especially for the period. He distinguishes between measured and unmeasured tremolos, demands unusually varied levels of dynamics (particularly in piano), and indicates “sul ponticello” effects. That he intends “dry” specifically as a function of timbre rather than articulation is made particularly clear a couple of bars later, where he further adds the directive “and staccato.”

The same observation holds true of the Act II chorus “Norma, che fu?” Bellini asks the whole orchestra to play “Allegro marcato, secco,” and in this case the accentuation makes clear that a short staccato is out of the question. Bellini’s “secco” is thus a tone color in its own right, and probably served as the source not just of the multitude of “seccos” in other Italian operas, but as an inspiration to the composers heavily influenced by the Bel Canto style. Dvorák was one; he was a violist in the Prague Provisional Theater orchestra for nine years, and Bel Canto opera was a repertoire staple. This, by the way, is how notational and stylistic conventions really flow from one generation to the next—from the actual experience of playing and hearing music.

This example only reinforces the notion (consistent with the idea that historically the majority of orchestral string players worked in theaters) that one likely place to find the answer to the “vibrato question” is in operatic and incidental music, where scenic requirements offer the composer the opportunity to demand unusual timbral effects from

the string section. Unfortunately, few members of the anti-vibrato crowd seem to care about Bel Canto, and no school of instrumental technique has a lower reputation among academics than the Italian Romantic tradition. But that's just plain snobbery, and prejudice is no excuse for choosing not to look where the truth most likely lies. Our final example drives home this point in a somewhat unusual, but very appropriate way.

### 33. Beethoven

String Quartet No. 13 (1825)

Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo; first violin "Beklemmt"

*Beklemmt* means "oppressed, stifled, inhibited," and coming midway through the "molto espressivo" Cavatina, it invites contrast by eliminating vibrato (particularly as it is followed by *sotto voce*, suggesting the barest return to vocally inspired normalcy). Arnold Steinhardt, first violinist of the Guarneri Quartet, describes his view of the passage thusly: "I being almost inaudibly, without vibrato--truly *beklemmt* [stifled]--and then the vibrato gradually develops a little." [*The Art of Quartet Playing, The Guarneri Quartet in conversation with David Blum*, Knopf, 1986] This is a particularly pungent example of a timbral contrast that presupposes the differentiation between vibrato and non-vibrato in extended musical paragraphs, even though the word itself never actually appears.

### Symphony No. 9 (1824)

Finale: Cellos and basses "selon le caractère d'un Recitativ"

What does it mean when a composer asks his instruments to imitate the intonations of vocal recitative, to effectively "speak" in music, as opposed to actual singing? Is it merely a matter of rhythm, or is there something players can do to modify their timbre as well? The answer is obvious. If vibrato is invariably associated with singing, then its absence will naturally characterize speaking, whether in voices or instruments. But if this perfectly logical assumption is to be valid, then the only way to make the contrast audible on stringed instruments is to employ a basic, "blank canvas" vibrato at most other times. Otherwise the "speaking" character of certain instrumental recitative will hardly be as evident as it might be.

With all due respect to the period performance people, should any of this have to be specifically marked in the score or discussed in some treatise to be self-evident? Doesn't the style and meaning of the music speak for itself, and shouldn't musicians, who are theoretically trained to recognize such things, instinctively know what to do? According to Leopold Mozart (as further discussed below) a good orchestral musician must possess "the dexterity to understand and at once interpret rightly the taste of various composers, their thoughts and expressions." I submit to you, then, that this one is easy, a musical "no brainer" that only the HIPPLF could possibly get wrong.

Finally, it is also worth noting that examples of instrumental recitation in "parlando" style are not rare, both in the concerto and symphonic literature. Haydn's early Symphonies Nos. 6 "Le Matin" and 7 "Le Midi," both dating from 1761, have slow movements beginning with a recitative, followed by an instrumental aria. That of No. 7 is on a

particularly grand scale, consisting of a dramatic introduction actually marked “Recit.” with a “dolce” initial entry of the solo violin, an allegro and adagio of obviously declamatory and rhetorical character (those repeated notes that always mean “speech”), then a lengthy adagio duet between solo violin and solo cello, complete with an elaborate and fully composed cadenza.

It is impossible to look at this music and accept the notion that vibrato was unknown at this time as a continuous *texture*, rather than as an occasionally used embellishment. This is because Haydn has taken great pains to notate all of the ornaments; there’s hardly room for much more. So if a melodic line can be, effectively, continually embellished, why can it not employ continuous vibrato as a further expressive enhancement, and in contrast to the plainer, “secco” character of the introductory recitatives? The situation here is exactly analogous to those vibrato-laden violin solos in Rossini and Glinka discussed previously, and while this example can’t settle the question of whether or not continuous vibrato was actually employed, the musical argument and evidence in favor seems considerably more persuasive than the contrary position.

In any event, plenty of other composers also liked instrumental recitation. Berlioz was one. You can find a passage “col carattere di Recit.” for cellos in the Scène d’amour from *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), and there’s a particularly famous example for solo trombone in the second movement of the *Grande Symphonie funèbre et triomphale*. In this latter case, Berlioz cancels the “Recit.” indication with “espressivo.” Even more dispositive in this regard is the *Symphonie funèbre* (1883) of Belgian composer Gustave Huberti. At letter C in the finale, he has the violins playing “déclamé,” (declaimed) which he then modifies just a bar later to “avec passion” by way of transition to full-fledged lyricism, unambiguously marked “vibrato.” The cellos then continue the violin melody “chanté” (cantabile). Stylized rhetorical speech often characterizes funereal music, giving a solemn but emotionally *detached* emphasis to the instrumental line.

These and other examples beg the question of how the players should realize the broad expressive contrasts that composers obviously have in mind. I submit to you that if performing musicians do not instinctively understand the need audibly to differentiate their handling of vibrato in music evocative of speaking versus singing, or between musical declamation and cantabile melody, then no historical treatise will be of the slightest value. Indeed, when it comes to orchestral music, the period performance folks would do the cause of authenticity far greater justice if they stopped worrying about when and where vibrato was appropriate, and instead documented the myriad ways that players cultivated a communicative, vocal tone quality at all times, save for those special moments when the music itself makes clear, whether implicitly or explicitly, that the composer does not desire it.

### The Post-War Persistence of Ornamental Vibrato

Why should we care about what happened after the so-called “continuous vibrato” revolution occurred? The answer is simple. I have asserted that the existence of notated vibrato in orchestral scores throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries does not offer



proof of its limited employment, but rather the desire that the players should exaggerate or emphasize the intrinsic, “blank canvas” vibrato already present. In other words, this isn’t a zero-sum game, as some members of the HIPPLF would have us believe. The previously cited examples demonstrate the existence of vibrato in two complementary and simultaneously occurring ways: first, as ornament, and second, as a fundamental component of *both* instrumental and vocal timbre. Furthermore, we have seen that many composers treat voices and instruments in an essentially identical manner.

What better way, then, to make this fact pellucidly clear than to take a look at the use of vibrato in post-War music, and in particular, to prove that embellishment and continuous texture really do go hand in hand. Remember, even the HIPPLF concedes that after 1945 permanent orchestral vibrato was basically a universal fact. Reality has to impinge on their notice at some point, after all. Post-War composers, then, should have no need whatsoever to mention vibrato except as an expressive embellishment. If such ornamental uses persist, it stands to reason that they have much the same meaning as they did in previous eras: as a request to the players to cooperate in making a particular phrase or passage audibly emotional by exaggerating the already existing vibrato to the degree where it becomes, not a background timbre, but an obvious effect.

So I offer for your consideration the following list as a sort of world tour beginning in 1945 and covering about four decades of music. It includes a brief description of ten works by ten composers coming from ten different countries (on three continents), and hopefully provides a sufficiently broad overview to make the case concisely, but definitively. What these examples show, above all, is continuity: there is basically no difference in the way vibrato is requested and notated in the modern orchestra as compared to earlier times. But don’t take my word for it. See for yourself:

1. Frank Martin: *Petite Symphonie Concertante* (1945)

Figure 15: String orchestra 1, solo violin, viola, and cello: “*pp dolce espressivo*;” String orchestra 2, solo violin, 2 solo violas, cello: “*p senza vibrato*”

Figure 30: String orchestra 1, first violins, “*f molto marcato e vibrato*;” String orchestra 2, first violins, “*f molto vibrato*”

In the first example, Martin juxtaposes normal expressive melody with a ghostly accompaniment. In atmosphere, it belongs to the long list of “*misterioso-style*” passages that we have already seen in Mahler, Suk, Liszt, Verdi, and elsewhere, many of which contrast vibrato and non-vibrato timbres. I include it here because as long as we’re on the subject, it couldn’t hurt to emphasize the continuity with previous tradition in this specific area as well. The second example is more on point: a nice, straightforward instance of giving maximum emphasis to the principle melody as played over a simple accompaniment, much as in the Glinka aria previously noted. It is probably the oldest and most basic means of using additional vibrato.

2. Karl Amadeus Hartmann: *Symphony No. 4* (1947)

Third Movement: *Adagio appassionato*, figure 2, first violins and upper divided cellos: “*pp molto espressivo*;” all other strings “*pp molto vibrato*”

Hartmann's use of vibrato in this context is very similar to that found in Mahler (Adagietto of the Fifth Symphony). He wants to create a texture both intimate and intense at a very low dynamic level. This is a theme that runs through many of these and the previous examples: heightened expressivity in pianissimo, when the more usual "dolce" simply won't do. This is also precisely the same effect we find in those many passages from Beethoven forward (and not forgetting Liszt) marked, in Italian, "con intimo [or intimissimo] sentimento."

### 3. Messiaen: Turangalîla-Symphonie (1946-8)

Sixth Movement: The Garden of Love's Sleep, footnote, "Dans tout le morceau, pour les cordes: vibrato très serré" [In the entire piece, for the strings, very tight (close) vibrato]

Obviously the vibrato is continuous, but what makes this example so interesting is the fact that Messiaen is asking for a specific type, very rapid and intense. It's a reminder of the fact that there are many different kinds of vibrato, each suited to different levels of expression. This movement also highlights the notion that modern orchestral "continuous vibrato," as I can't stress often enough, is seldom truly continuous and almost never means "the same vibrato all the time." That's what makes Messiaen's request so unusual, and what gives the music its curiously timeless quality (that and the eerie doubling of the strings by the Ondes Martenot).

### 4. David Diamond: Symphony No. 4 (1948)

First Movement, measure 136, violins "p vibrato" against "p cantabile" violas

The violas have the tune, but Diamond clearly wants the upper parts' sustained chords to get equal attention. The result embeds the melody in a lightly shimmering texture, a use of extra vibrato similar to what we find in Strauss (Salomé, in particular). And once again, as in the Hartmann, note the need for additional expressiveness at soft dynamic levels.

### 5. László Lajtha: Symphony No. 6 (1955)

Second Movement: Très calme, measure 70, all strings "p vibrato"

Another example of the use of vibrato to give intensity to a simple melody played piano. I chose this work, a beautiful symphony by a sadly neglected composer, not just for the traditional use of vibrato, but also because Lajtha sheds additional light on the non-vibrato character of yet another of those "misterioso" effects so beloved of Romantic and later composers, specifically "lontain" ("distant"), which we already saw used by Debussy. In this same movement, at measure 28 and elsewhere, Lajtha marks the upper strings and harps: "toujours le même ppp très lointain et sans aucune nuance" ("always the same ppp very distant and without the slightest nuance"). This lengthy description makes the expected absence of vibrato particularly clear.

### 6. Alberto Ginastera: Piano Concerto (1961)

Third Movement: Adagissimo, measure 35, first violins "ff vibrante"

This is classic vibrato as used as far back as Rossini's *Mosè* a century and a half earlier, adding a touch of brilliance to a very slow, very loud violin phrase (Rossini's example, you may recall, was marked "largo" and the dynamics were identical). The actual term "vibrante" also occurs in Bloch's *Symphony in C-sharp Minor*, as well as in many 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian operas. Personally, I find the idea of vibrato put to such a traditional use in Ginastera's expressionist, twelve-tone concerto, absolutely delightful.

The same composer's *First String Quartet* (1948) offers an absolute clinic on the fact that the prior existence of continuous vibrato has nothing whatsoever to do with a composer's request for even more. Its third movement begins with static chords for the second violin, viola, and cello, marked "pp ma chiaro" (pp but clearly). When similar chords return at figure 5, they are marked "non vibrato," thus establishing the "blank canvas" variety unless otherwise specified. Meanwhile, the actual melody appears in the first violin, and later the cello, first "mf tranquillo, dolce vibrato," then "p ma sonore e vibrato," and finally "quasi f espressivo e vibrato."

Could the case for the simultaneous coexistence of the two kinds of vibrato, intrinsic and ornamental, be more compellingly made?

#### 7. Britten: *War Requiem* (1962)

*Libera me*, figure 119, violins and violas, "vibrato" in crescendo from pp to f

This motive accompanies the last of Britten's settings of the Wilfred Owen poems that intermingle with the Latin liturgy in this magnificent work. In addition to using vibrato to give the attendant crescendo its disturbing "tingle," the two singers (baritone and tenor) are accompanied by sustained chords from the remaining strings and winds of the chamber orchestra, alternately marked "cold" and "expressive." It is perfectly clear from the context here that "normal" timbre is "warm/expressive," while "vibrato" means, as it has for the past couple of hundred years or so, "exaggerate it."

You may wonder why Britten does not use "non vibrato" for these "cold" passages<sup>25</sup>. The reason could well be the same as that previously noted: the direction here to play without expression applies uniformly not just to the strings, but the flute, clarinet, and horn as

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<sup>25</sup> In case there's any question as to what "cold" means, see the note after figure 22 in *The Turn of the Screw* (1954) where, in an exactly analogous passage, Britten writes "cold, throughout, means non-vibrato." He's even more specific nine years earlier, in *Peter Grimes* (1945). At figure 64 in Act 2, the strings play ppp "senza vibrato," alternating successively with the winds (trumpet, piccolo, oboe) marked "senza espressione." All of these examples validate the idea that non-vibrato texture in earlier music will most likely be found in operatic or theatrical works; Britten's use of it here is also entirely in keeping with the "misterioso" tradition. In the *War Requiem*, he accompanies the dialog of two dead soldiers; *The Turn of the Screw* is a ghost story, and in *Grimes*, the strings support the distant (recall Debussy's "Iolaintain") sound of the tenor drum heralding the arrival of the lynch mob. The variety of terminology in these examples simply shows that there are many different ways for composers to say the same thing, depending on the context, and there is no fundamental difference between Britten's use of non-vibrato and that in Verdi's *Macbeth* in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

well. While these instruments all have a natural as well as an ornamental vibrato, they cannot turn it on and off in the same way technically as do the strings. So the terminology is correspondingly more general and descriptive, leaving the instrumentalists to find the best solution in terms of their individual technique. Britten also, in common with so many other composers, clearly chooses to emphasize to his players the expressive result he desires rather than the technical means of producing it.

Incidentally, there's also an interesting example of "ornamental" vibrato in the solo violin chords accompanying the First Lute Song in the opera *Gloriana* (1953). This is instructive because continuous solo vibrato theoretically predates the orchestral kind according to the theory of the HIPPLF, making it doubly unnecessary for Britten to call for it specifically--unless of course the term means that the players should exaggerate a quality already present, which is precisely the point.

Finally, before leaving Britten, it's worth pointing out that his *Violin Concerto* (1939, rev. 1950) confirms the observation that the rules of vibrato are different as between soloists and orchestral players. Britten never asks his soloist for extra vibrato, not even in the big cadenza before the finale. The orchestral strings, on the other hand, have passages marked "senza espressione," as well as "vibrato," and in general have to cope with an extremely detailed and specifically marked repertoire of timbral and expressive instructions.

#### 8. Rodion Shchedrin: *Carmen* Ballet (1967)

Five bars before figure 17, violas, "sf molto vibrato"

Two bars before figure 34, cellos, "ff vibrato" against "ff espressivo" in upper strings

Figure 58, double basses, "p molto vibrato" in pizzicato

Shchedrin's ballet is, in itself, a treatise on colorful handling of the string orchestra, and he uses additional vibrato in all of the traditional ways: to highlight a principal melody (first example), to give additional life to an inner part (second example, recall Borodin's *Polovstian Dances*), and lastly, to create a nice, resonant pizzicato at a low dynamic level. The use of vibrato in connection with pizzicato has a long and dignified history as well (in 20<sup>th</sup> century music alone, consider Bartók, the Second Viennese School, and Debussy, among others), one which deserves consideration all by itself<sup>26</sup>.

For reasons of time, I haven't gone into this topic in detail, but Shchedrin's piece does at least offer the opportunity to mention yet another interesting byway of the vibrato tradition. The most enthusiastic pizzicato vibrato composer that I know of is Carl Orff, beginning with *Carmina Burana* (1937) and continuing throughout his works of the 40s

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<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most interesting example of pizzicato vibrato occurs in Arthur Foote's *Four Characteristic Pieces After the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1900). The third movement ends with a series of isolated pizzicatos, piano, for all of the strings (except basses), doubled by harp. The melody is in the winds. Of these five individual notes separated by rests, Foote marks only the fourth of them "espressivo" in all parts, thereby proving once and for all, practically speaking, that *espressivo*=vibrato. After all, what else are the players to do on a single, soft pizzicato?

and 50s. Given how limited his interest was in strings generally, at least as compared to the winds and percussion, his extreme specificity in this one area is quite interesting, though necessarily of limited significance for the purposes of this analysis.

#### 9. Vahn Holmboe: String Quartet No. 10 (1969)

Holmboe was a master at quartet writing, with a great understanding and love for the medium's essentially vocal style. He even marks his pianissimos "sotto voce," just like Haydn, with all that this implies in terms of moderating expressivity to produce the necessary "under the voice" quality. There's also a wonderful bit of ornamental vibrato in the Tenth Quartet's first movement cello part, five bars before figure 11: a notated quivering that increases in amplitude to the point where it turns into an actual trill. We can only guess as to whether or not this is a true "ornamental" vibrato, the kind of thing that the old treatises attempt so confusingly to quantify. It is, regardless, a particularly pungent example of an embellishment on top of an already "continuous" vibrato texture.

#### 10. Witold Lutoslawski: Symphony No. 3 (1983)

One before figure 42, cellos, "f vibrato" pizzicato

Figure 88: 4 solo violins, "ppp non vibrato," second violins ppp naturally, double basses "p laissez vibrer" [let it vibrate]

The first example offers yet another instance of the pizzicato-vibrato, while the second displays, at the lowest possible dynamic level, the entire "vibrato family" at the same time: non vibrato, normal timbre, and an ornamental vibrato that, like the pizzicato version, also appears both in earlier music and modern (consider, for example, the marvelous final chord of the "Aria Italiana" from Britten's Frank Bridge Variations of 1937). Practically speaking this direction encourages the player to continue producing vibrato past the actual point at which bowing stops, to help the sound resonate as long as possible.

Given these examples, it should now appear beyond question that the modern use of notated, "ornamental" vibrato is in all significant essentials consistent with that prevailing in earlier times. This isn't surprising. Does any sensible person really believe that after some magical, arbitrarily chosen date, the entire nature of orchestral sound changed? It certainly had no effect whatsoever on the way composers wrote for the string section, and this in turn means that the likelihood of such a watershed moment having actually occurred is, well, basically zero. More importantly, the presence of ornamental vibrato in no way precludes the orchestral timbre we now call "continuous vibrato." They are, in fact, two different animals; one is foreground, the other background, and both have a place in the musician's expressive arsenal.

#### Summary: Vibrato (or not) as an Expressive Force

Before moving on to consider in detail some of the more interesting historical aspects of the "vibrato question" raised by the HIPPLF, it makes sense to pause, summarize, and expand on what the examples cited in the three previous sections reveal.

1. Composers certainly expect music to be expressive at all times, unless otherwise stated. Wagner's concept of "expressive but without passion" is singularly appropriate here. When used in orchestral music, verbal descriptors such as "dolce," "cantabile," "espressivo," "vibrato," "semplice," and others, serve both to emphasize the emotional qualities that the composer desires, and also to help highlight the instrumental lines which should stand out in the orchestral texture at any given time. They denote the relative importance of the various parts in relationship to each other. There is no rational reason to assume that just because a composer does not say "cantabile" that he wishes the music to be played inexpressively, dismissively, or in a timbrally cold, dead manner.

2. Verbal terminology often requires the player to access a wide variety of technical and interpretive tools, depending on context, for its correct realization. For example, "dolce" usually also means "piano," while the very general "espressivo" encompasses not just questions of timbre, but also (when it refers to an entire melody and not merely single notes) matters of phrasing and rhythm. Vibrato is thus often one component of many, but the fact that other factors intervene and combine with it in realizing the composer's directions does not mean that it is any less necessary or desirable when available.

3. To elaborate on the above through an analogy, consider another seldom-used descriptive musical term: *rubato*. It does appear from time to time, and everyone knows what it means. Its presence is even implied by some of the same terminology as vibrato (i.e. "espressivo," "dolcissimo"). No composer expects his music to be played in a rhythmically mechanical fashion except as a special effect (for example, the "meccanico" episode marked "Allegretto, con indifferenza" in the finale of Bartók's Fifth Quartet). Since the dawn of musical time, it seems, players have understood the need to treat rhythm flexibly, for the simple reason that one of the most important ways of bringing music to life is to imbue it with a certain spontaneity of pulse.

The fact that composers do not usually call for a specific degree of rubato (some do: Berg, in his Lulu Suite [1934], for instance, or Tchaikovsky in his--oh, never mind!) doesn't mean that it should not be used as an expressive tool. In reality it is used--as continuously as vibrato--and it likely always has been, whether specified or not. The HIPPLF is silent on the question of rubato, even though it is a quality quite similar to vibrato, both in its importance and purpose (and no, I'm not writing a sequel). Of course, rubato does not apply to a specific instrumental school or technique, and it has a long and distinguished history in the critical and pedagogical literature. In other words, the early music fanatics really have nothing new to contribute to the debate, but this in turn gives all the more reason to question their motives in singling out vibrato for special attention.

4. Composers tend to view music as an expressively fluid continuum, one founded on the basic communicative qualities of the human singing voice. The emotional range of this continuum varies from composer to composer, and from work to work, but as the above examples show, a remarkable amount of verbal evidence exists to tell us exactly how far this range extends. For example, from the works already discussed we find the following:

- *mezza voce* – *espressivo* – *cantabile* (Beethoven: Quartet No. 10)
- *non troppo dolce* – *dolce* – *cantabile* – *espressivo* – *vibrato* (Franck: String Quartet)
- *non vibrato* – *vibrato* – *espressivo* (Bartók: Quartet No. 4)
- *dolce* – *cantabile* – *espressivo* (Brahms: Symphony No. 2)
- *dolce* – *cantabile* – *espressivo* – *appassionato* – *con somma passione* (Liszt: Dante Symphony)
- *senza espressione* – *dolce* – *poco cantabile* – *espressivo* – *molto espressivo* (Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 2)
- *déclamé* – *avec passion* – *vibrato* (Huberti: Symphonie funèbre)

Obviously, some composers are more systematic than others. For example, three interesting, contemporaneous, and aesthetically related cases not considered previously are Raff, Goldmark, and Bruch. In the second movement of his Symphony No. 5 “Leonore” (1872), and other works as well, Raff systematically takes the strings through a principal melody marked “*cantabile* – *con espressione* – *vibrato*” as it progresses (with “*appassionato*” sometimes thrown in as well). In his “Rustic Wedding Symphony,” (1877) Goldmark consistently uses a vocabulary that runs: “*zart* – *cantabile* – *espressivo* – *molto espressivo* – *mit Leidenschaft*.” Bruch, a notorious musical conservative, has in his Second Symphony (1870) “*tranquillo* – *dolce* – *espressivo* – *agitato*,” with this last term in particular a descriptive, and I hope by now uncontroversial, stand-in for the more technical “*vibrato*.”

Now, are we to assume that because Raff uses the term “*vibrato*” but Goldmark and Bruch, writing respectively two years earlier and five years later, do not, that *vibrato* was not present or that the others did not desire it? Or does it make more logical sense to suggest that orchestral musicians will naturally use all of the technical means at their disposal to realize what they take to be the expressive range of the music placed before them? The answer, I hope, in light of all of the evidence considered thus far, is obvious. This is after all basic stuff, the vernacular of 19<sup>th</sup> century music, however much the HIPPLF wishes to redefine what generations of musicians have understood to be true.

In fact, I think it would be worthwhile at this point to show what, practically speaking, Romantic string writing looks like, and how *vibrato* implicitly serves the composer’s expressive wishes. Both of the examples below come from Max Bruch’s Second Symphony, which I chose for two reasons: first, for its generic qualities, it’s very lack of remarkable or unusual characteristics. It is probably as close to being standard of its era and style (basic Central European symphonic music) as can be. Second, Bruch is one of those composers who clearly operates on either side of a base-line standard of expressivity, thereby showing that the answer to the *vibrato* question is not a function of “conservative” vs. “radical” or “traditional” vs. “progressive.” It is a component of individual artistic temperament that crosses all boundaries of style, period, and nationality.

The first excerpt begins nine bars before letter G in the first movement. As you can see, the expressive range starts “*tranquillo*” and progresses to “*espressivo*.” This brief passage

requires a full range of vibrato, from little or none, to a good bit extra. The lower strings are already playing “sempre dolce,” while the violas have no expressive indications at all. So if the violins’ “tranquillo” already offers a timbre as smooth and calm as possible, using virtually no vibrato, then what are the violas doing by way of nuance as they play normally?

Or to put it another way, how is the violins’ directive to play more tranquilly than usual going to be audible against a “dead tone” string texture, particularly when the various phrases are all rhythmically similar, and the dynamics stable at or around piano throughout? Bruch clearly wants an emotional crescendo, an increase in feeling, and this is exactly what everyone—even the treatise writers—agrees that vibrato is for. There is, by the way, obviously no opportunity for added or improvised embellishment here, so to insist that vibrato nevertheless is an “ornament” within the context of Bruch’s orchestral string writing is patently ridiculous. More importantly, you can see that there is a certain base-line expressivity present all the time, one which can be both increased or decreased by verbal instruction, but which is otherwise necessary in permitting the composer to define audibly the emotional range of the music.



The next passage comes from the symphony’s adagio, six bars before letter L. It is entirely typical of the string textures found throughout the movement, and it shows quite clearly the use of “espressivo” not just on the tune, but in subsidiary voices as well, creating a depth of additional vibrato timbre in four parts simultaneously. This sort of writing is unique to orchestral and chamber music, and encompasses a use of vibrato beyond that discussed in the standard historical violin treatises by writers such as Mozart and Spohr. These passages are ubiquitous from about the 1840s onwards, and if the conservative Bruch has no compunction about lavishing “espressivo” directives on his string section in a comparatively abstract work such as his Second Symphony, you can just imagine what other, less hidebound composers might have expected.





The technique of using additional vibrato in an inner or subsidiary part thus plays a critical role, as you can now see, in making it “continuous” in terms of texture. When used in such a fashion the technique loses its function as a surface enhancement and acts in timbral terms as an aid to clarity, emphasis, and in the creation of atmosphere. Such uses tend to be extended, and applicable to long phrases and entire sections. Examples of this technique previously discussed include works by Borodin and Sibelius.

Another excellent specimen occurs in Glazunov’s Fourth Symphony. The string writing here partakes of an impressively rich and logical expressive continuum: dolce cantabile – dolce espressivo – cantabile – espressivo – con passione. “Vibrato,” however, is used only once in the entire work, at figure 9 in the first movement. The principal melody is in the solo clarinet, piano and “scherzando,” while the violas, pianissimo, play a subordinate, accompanimental melody marked “vibrato.” “Be vivid, but remain secondary,” Glazunov is saying.

Creating textures that sound “alive” at all times is one of the primary goals of orchestration in the Classical and Romantic periods. In the former, inner parts tended to move, most often in steadily repeated eighth notes (particularly in quick movements). By the latter period, however, accompaniments regularly consisted of tremolos, sustained chords, or “functional” polyphony (that is, brief counter melodies and lyrical enrichments). This more static background naturally requires a greater range of color in order to sustain interest, hence the burgeoning role of special string timbres: ponticello, col legno, flautato, the extensive use of mutes, and both extra vibrato as well as its complete absence.

So as I noted previously, continuous vibrato arises naturally out of the demand for continuous expression. It truly boggles the mind that anyone, musicians in particular, could look at passages such as these and conclude that the continuous application of vibrato was unknown to 19<sup>th</sup> century composers, players, and orchestras, or that an intrinsic, “blank canvas” vibrato is not the practical outcome of large groups of strings playing together.

We also need to consider one further, extremely practical matter: the vocabulary of generally understood musical terms. Composers may of course describe their music however they like, and most do just that, but there's a big difference between indicating the emotional character of a particularly striking passage with the assistance of colorful adjectives, and creating a useful system of key words that results in consistent, idiomatic, and accurate performances. The strange or unusual characterization, as we have seen, is excellent for suggesting unique tone colors in extreme musical (or more likely theatrical) situations. This is precisely where "non-vibrato" is most likely to crop up, and this is the difference between its appearances and the more common, standard exhortation to use more vibrato for expressive purposes. The former is unusual, and rare; the latter is normal and occurs relatively frequently.

Accordingly, it is very easy to understand how the actual word "vibrato," within the terminological hierarchy of "sweet," "singing," "expressive," etc, finds a natural place and helps in creating yet another distinctive *degree* of expression, acquiring an emotional rather than a technical meaning. Raff uses it in precisely this fashion<sup>27</sup>, as do many others. Consider, for example, the "vibré" climax of the first movement of Enescu's *Orchestral Suite No. 1* (1903), or the marvelous "diminuendo e espressivo" followed by a crescendo leading to "vibrato" after letter K in the central *Andante* of Dukas' *Symphony in C* (1896). In both of these cases, and so many others already described, the composer needs a term that translates as "super duper molto espressivo," one certain to get the right result at a very important moment in the piece. "Vibrato" (along with synonymous terms such as "appassionato" and "agitato") is obviously the most simple, surefire, easily understood, and least ridiculous of the many possibilities.

One further example drives these points home with particular force. The finale of Mahler's *Third Symphony* (1896) begins with possibly more urgings to expressivity than just about any previous music. The entire opening, for strings alone, is designated "Empfunden" ("with feeling"), while the individual parts are variously marked "sehr ausdrucksvoll gesungen" (very expressively sung) and "molto espressivo" quite literally every few bars. But this is just the relatively peaceful, major-key principal theme. For his second subject, in the minor, Mahler wants an even greater degree of feeling, and so below the main melody, played piano and "espressivo" by the oboe, the violins at figure 5 have a counter-theme marked "pp espressivo, Griffbrett, vibrirend" ("on the fingerboard, vibrating").

When this passage returns at figure 14, Mahler prefers the Italian "vibrando" (along with "sehr gesangvoll") and also asks the flute to join in. The urging to use additional vibrato here hardly suggests that it should not be present at the multiply expressive opening of the movement; merely that it needs to be exaggerated so as to create the above-mentioned

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<sup>27</sup> There is another, particularly telling example of this phenomenon in Raff's *Fourth Symphony* (1871), in the cello theme after letter B in the first movement. Marked "cantando dolce espressivo," Raff has literally run out of generally accepted adjectives and so, seven bars later, tosses in what would otherwise seem a superfluous "vibrato" for good measure. The terms here has a function beyond the merely ornamental, though of course it also retains that meaning to the extent that an orchestral cello section can realize it.

“super espressivo.” And this latter passage makes particular nonsense of the notion of vibrato as an “ornament,” if by this we mean an effect applied selectively to individual notes, one at a time. The effect Mahler desires lasts several minutes at both occurrences; in fact, there are no verbal indications as to when it ends (presumably when the entire large section arrives at its natural conclusion)<sup>28</sup>.

The scores considered thus far reflect not just the era’s standard practice, but the growing confidence of composers in their ability to control and dictate the exact sounds that the players make, as well as the struggle to find a useful vocabulary of terms that would yield the correct results. This, in turn, arose out of the expectation that the newly constituted, fully professional orchestras of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century would have sufficient rehearsal time and the necessary technique at their disposal to realize all kinds of previously unheard musical effects. That some composers may avail themselves of these new opportunities more than others--for whatever practical reasons--does not mean that the conditions for their execution don’t exist, did not exist in earlier eras, or that the players did not stand ready to use their full expressive arsenals at all times.

A beautifully modulated natural vibrato, any string player will tell you, is an extremely difficult thing to master, requiring years of practice and endless patience. Many never really gain complete control over the full coloristic range that vibrato offers. This is the reason that noted virtuosos and teachers such as Leopold Auer caution against its overuse by students, and view with revulsion those soi-disant virtuosos whose sheer physical dexterity is not equaled by the development of other, equally important aspects of violin technique (never mind plain good taste). Once acquired, however, no sane artist willingly forgoes the advantages of a supple, singing tone, and there is no evidence whatsoever that composers of any period demanded anything less.

5. Time and time again, the HIPPLF maintains that the reason vibrato should be used infrequently is because it is “an ornament.” This, they claim, looking exclusively at a solo violin literature written according to an entirely different system when it comes to the purpose and use of ornamentation, also explains why composers do not notate it specifically. However, as we have seen, composers writing for the orchestral medium do notate it, indeed must do so if it is to be used “ornamentally” at all, and have additional uses for it that are unique to orchestral practice. The nature of these uses runs the gamut from individual notes to lengthy, continuous sections and movements, and the existence of vibrato as embellishment does not in any way preclude the presence of intrinsic vibrato as texture. Indeed, more often than not, one implies the other.

Norman Del Mar, in his book *Anatomy of the Orchestra* (1981) notes that, “so automatic is the normal use of vibrato that the appearance of the actual word itself generally signifies that more--or perhaps a slower, wider--vibrato is called for than the players

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<sup>28</sup> Hermann Scherchen, in his *Handbook of Conducting* (1929) uses the opening of this very movement, along with an extract from Weber’s Overture to *Der Freischütz*, as examples of the “caressing tenderness” produced with a “light *vibrato*-pressure of the left hand.” This of course contrasts with the more intense vibrato that Mahler specifically demands later on.

would naturally produce. This could be used to create a special degree of intensity, or perhaps even for the grotesque, or as a parody....” Now I know that naysayers will claim that Del Mar is talking about contemporary music, but not only do the scores say otherwise, there is no evidence that the use of vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before was not “normal.” There may be questions as to absolute frequency, but that is a different, technical matter. As one of the fundamental techniques of violin playing for hundreds of years, nothing could be more normal than vibrato.

Furthermore, we also know that even the large number of notated examples of vibrato barely suggests the extent to which it must have been used. Forsyth’s observations, as ratified by Strauss’s view of the rights of the individual musician, drive this point home. Notated vibrato only describes what the composer wishes to hear from the entire section at a particular point in time; it says nothing about what each player is also doing the rest of the while in realizing his individual part, and even the most abstemious of our ancestral vibrato despisers would have recognized the need for it far more frequently than the most generously notated orchestral score. “Continuous vibrato,” then, is an inevitable consequence of what the players do both collectively and as individuals.

6. Indeed, the true “ornament” that the above examples definitively describe is not so much the occasional presence of extra vibrato, but its *absence*. It is “non vibrato” or “senza espressione” that are the real “special effects” in our musical tradition, and in order to be audible at all as a means of emotional and timbral contrast they need to occur within the context of a continuously expressive musical texture. If there is any difference between pre- and post-War orchestral string technique, then, it is not the degree to which vibrato is used, but just the opposite: the degree to which it is not used.

The decision to withhold vibrato arises from two simultaneous and related trends in modern music: first, the exploitation of “misterioso” timbres that convey a sense of distance, alienation, strangeness, or otherworldliness; and second, the gradual lessening of the importance of imitating human vocal timbre as the pinnacle and goal of all musical expression. Combine this with willing, technically superb string sections trained to do whatever the composer asks, no matter how bizarre, and the circumstances are ripe for unprecedented specificity in the demands that can be made on the players.

However, as should now be clear, the fact that modern music may offer comparatively more proof of the existence of “blank canvas” vibrato hardly diminishes the case for its existence at a much earlier date. Indeed, the evidence for its presence well back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century is extremely compelling, and to the extent that the “vocal standard” was even more firmly in place in the past than it is now, the argument for intrinsic vibrato is even more logical and reasonable.

7. You may well wonder at this point where, in this expressively fluid continuum, the normal or “blank canvas” vibrato lies. What, in other words, is “standard?” It’s a question that has no easy answer, probably because the reality has varied over time, but this fact should never be confused with the larger question of whether or not vibrato is a basic component of ensemble string timbre. Beethoven’s Tenth Quartet, in any case, does offer

an important clue. Between this work's "mezza voce" ("half voice") and its more fulsome expressive indications lies, obviously, "voce," plain and simple.

This is the timbre that instruments aspire to imitate, and it's one of those points that's so obvious that no one needs to notate it musically. At least, no one bothered until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tippett's Second Symphony (1957) actually contains many passages marked "piena voce," or "full voice," but this is a special case because it cancels a designation to play "sotto la voce de...," that is, under some other designated instrument with the principal melodic line. In other words, Tippett is concerned with the tricky task of balancing competing polyphonic parts; he is not in fact asking for unusual tone colors or for peculiar playing techniques, and his "piena voce" usually also signals an increase in dynamics, from p or pp to around mezzo forte (appropriately enough).

The "mezza voce" and "sotto voce" indications, especially in slow movements, have a distinguished history. You find them frequently in Haydn's string quartets. For example, Op. 64 No. 3's Adagio begins "mezza voce," and returns to its initial "m.v." two further times over the course of the movement. There are no expressive indications in between: Haydn leaves it to the players and the thematic material itself to suggest just how it ought to develop emotionally. But the very fact that the music begins in such a fashion suggests that a full-voiced timbre is the norm, and this in turn means the likelihood of vibrato at least a good bit of the time.

More importantly, the notation strongly suggests (and treatises such as Spohr's agree) that composers do not start at a point of zero expressivity. Does the opening of Mozart's Symphony No. 40 betray no hint of emotion just because Mozart doesn't tell the players in words what feelings that the music supposedly describes? No, most music starts somewhere in the middle expressively speaking, between "tranquillo" on the one hand, and "dolce" or "espressivo" on the other. To do otherwise would be to commit the fatal error of neglecting to tell the listener to expect some kind of expressive communication right at the beginning, when it most matters.

One thing, however, is certain from the many scores surveyed thus far: the base-line norm allows much greater room to increase expressivity than it does to decrease it. Enescu's Third Violin Sonata shows that many more descriptive terms are associated with the use of vibrato than with its absence. Intrinsic vibrato is not supposed to sound obvious or obtrusive, merely natural. As Mozart said in one of his more famous letters (dating from June 12, 1778), "The human voice quivers well enough by itself, but in such a fashion that it is beautiful--that is the nature of the voice, and it is imitated not just on wind instruments, but also on stringed instruments, and even on the piano." And this, in a nutshell, is the nature of "blank canvas" orchestral vibrato, and reason enough to acknowledge its existence.

8. In orchestral music, then, it is fair to say that vibrato has likely been a constant component of string timbre and texture since sometime in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, and if Mozart is to be believed, possibly (probably) well before that. This is what the scores certainly show. If the violin treatises do not, if they continue to employ confusing

terminology (“tremolo” instead of “vibrato”) well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and adopt what seems, on its face, to be an obsolete, impractical, and purely theoretical aesthetic position, despite the fact that composers seem to have had no problem understanding vibrato and notating its use accordingly since the time of Rossini, then by all means let someone investigate and try to offer an explanation. But at least start with the right premises.

There are, in truth, many plausible reasons for this strange state of affairs: the persistence of tradition, academic conservatism in the face of changing tastes, the reverence accorded lineage and pedigree in musical pedagogy, and of course the usual difference between theory and practice. Life is too short, and this essay already too long, to go into these in detail now. More significant is the fact that the existence of these various sources has sent the HIPPLF off on the musical equivalent of a wild goose chase, directly away from the readily available evidence of the scores. In the process, they have created their fair share of speculative, anti-musical nonsense.

The remainder of this essay takes a closer look at a few of the more bizarre notions that have resulted from this ongoing misreading of history and the original source material.

### A Case Study: Stravinsky

If, as I have suggested, conductors whose careers spanned “the great vibrato divide” seemed to take the new aesthetic in stride and utter not so much as a peep about it, what then is the situation with composers? It also stands to reason that one way to test the theory of the continuous vibrato revolution might be to have a look at the works of the composers who lived through it. We have already examined several, most notably Bartók, Strauss and Prokofiev. Neither show any change in habits, or in musical notation, as the result of the alleged advent of continuous vibrato.

Within the limited scope of this essay, there is only room for a single detailed case study, but I think you will agree that the choice of Stravinsky is a good one. He was arguably the greatest, and certainly one of the most influential composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His career is split neatly in two by the events of the Second World War. As an artist, he was the ultimate cosmopolite, profoundly influenced by his Russian roots, but composing for the broadest (and finest) international artists and ensembles. He was infinitely adaptable, and obsessed with being *au courant*, with embodying the cutting edge of modern musical aesthetics.

Stravinsky was also from at least the early 1920s on, and notwithstanding the Violin Concerto or the ballet Apollo, a confirmed anti-Romantic with a definite bias against the warm, plush timbres of typical late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century writing for strings. Just consider how many works of his neo-classical period omit them entirely, or reduce the string contingent to a bare minimum: Symphonies of Wind Instruments, Les Noces, Concerto for Piano and Winds, Mavra, Symphony of Psalms, and several others. If anyone would have been dead-set against vibrato and everything that it represented, it was probably Stravinsky, the man who insisted that music expressed nothing beyond itself.

Most importantly, and fascinatingly, in Stravinsky we have an opportunity to compare his pre- and post-vibrato habits in the very same works. Both *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* were composed in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century--1910 and 1911 respectively--but later revised as to orchestration in the 1940s (the latter work substantially so). This gave their composer a golden opportunity to respond to current trends in orchestral playing. Given both his aesthetic distance from these early, Romantic nationalist works, not to mention the alleged advent of continuous vibrato in the post-War symphony orchestra, you would be justified in thinking that in cleaning up the string parts much of the “*espressivo*” would get tossed out, and perhaps even a clear “*senza vibrato*” thrown in for good measure.

I must admit that I came to this particular exercise filled with trepidation. What would it mean if Stravinsky did indeed, as seemed almost certain, strip away the Romantic excess inherent--not so much in the music itself--but in his notation of it? Would it represent simply a mature composer’s wry comment on his youthful indiscretions, or a genuine response to the need to preserve his original intentions in the new timbral environment of post-War vibrato? I resolved to report the facts, come what may, and let them speak for themselves. Here they are:

*Petrushka* (1911, rev. 1947)

Believe it or not, Stravinsky did not add a single “*senza vibrato*” or “without expression” direction to the score. Nor did he remove any of the *espressivo* or related indications that were already there. But he *added* quite a few (all references to the score apply to the 1947 version published by Boosey and Hawkes).

In the First Tableau, right after the Shrovetide fair opening, at 61, all the strings acquire an “*espressivo*” indication. Five bars later, at 62, the first violins’ “*cantabile*” has become “*dolce cantabile*,” while the seconds have gained a “*marcato articolato*.” This contrast is typical of Stravinsky’s revisions: greater expressivity in the melodic surface, and cleaner, sharper rhythms in the accompaniment. Later, in the Second Tableau at the entrance of the ballerina, between figures 109 and 110, Stravinsky clarifies the thematic importance of the violins by changing their dynamics from *mezzo forte* to a healthy “*forte - espressivo*.”

In the Fourth Tableau, Stravinsky withholds the “*cantabile*” from the violins in the Wet Nurses’ Dance until the full tune sails in, *forte*, and now “*ben cantabile*” against a “*ben articolato*” accompaniment in the second violins. When the same tune returns in the Dance of the Coachmen and Grooms (figure 225), the entire string section now has “*cantabile*” where previously they had no expressive markings at all. Finally, the death of *Petrushka*, formerly merely “*lento*,” has now become “*Lento, lamentoso*.” This gives Stravinsky good cause to remove the “*dolente*” qualification of the solo violin’s “*espressivo*,” and replace it with an additional “*dolce*.”

Stravinsky's revisions to his string parts, in short, unanimously enhance rather than negate the music's expressive qualities, and even encourage a more abundant employment of vibrato than the original version. They reveal neither the inclination nor the need to remind the players of a different style of playing, ca. 1911. Frankly, I was shocked. The spunkier rhythms might have been expected, but those "espressivos," "cantabiles" and "dolces?" Clearly the purported plague of continuous vibrato hardly gave Stravinsky pause in cleaning up the scoring of *Petrushka*.

The Firebird (1910, rev. 1919, 1945)

Actually, there is one more Firebird Suite than the two listed above (that is, aside from 1919 and 1945), but life is too short. The situation here is, accordingly, more complicated than *Petrushka* because Stravinsky's work was less systematic--done more with an eye towards reducing the size of the initial orchestra to encourage concert performances. In the process, the string parts were sometimes radically simplified. The original score, however, does offer a very good example of why the notion of "continuous vibrato" is simply stupid as applied to orchestral music.

In the first few pages of the Introduction, we find strings muted and unmuted; harmonic glissandos; tremolos both regular, flautando, at the point of the bow, and ponticello; pizzicatos; quasi trillo and spiccato bowing; col legno; and even the occasional note played normally. Where the continuous vibrato fits into this equation is anyone's guess. The texture often changes several times within a single bar. The revisions reduce the number of parts, but not the kinds of things that Stravinsky expects his strings to do.

Here is a brief summary of the changes from one edition to the other; please bear in mind that each of suites has a different selection of movements. Rehearsal numbers are taken from the musically most inclusive 1945 suite, which contains everything from the 1919 version.

1 before Fig. 12 (Dance of the Firebird), violins and violas, 1945 "marcato," 1910 nothing, 1919 "trés sec"  
Fig. 31 violins, 1945 "cantabile espressivo," 1910 "cantabile"  
Fig. 33 solo violin, 1945 "dolce (non vibrato)," 1910 nothing  
Fig. 64 violins, 1945 mp "espressivo," 1910 pp, no other indications  
Fig. 68 violins, 1945 pp "dolcissimo," 1910 pp, no other indications  
After Fig. 70 solo violin, 1945 "dolce espressivo," 1910 and 1919, "dolce"  
Fig. 77 solo cello, 1945 "dolce," 1910 "dolce cantabile"  
After 82 violins, 1945 "cantabile" and (at 4 solos) "dolce cantabile," 1910 nothing, 1919 "dolcissimo" over 4 solo parts only  
Fig. 96 (Infernal Dance) violins 1945 nothing, 1910 "cantabile," 1919 nothing  
Fig. 109 violins and cellos, 1945 nothing, 1910 "cantabile" in second violins only, 1919 nothing (violins and solo cello)  
Fig. 115 solo violin, viola, cello, 1945 and 1919, parts given to solo flute; 1910 "dolce" and (solo cello) "cantabile"  
Fig. 143 cellos, 1945 and 1910 nothing, 1919 "trés sec"



Fig. 150 (Lullaby) bassoon, 1945 “cantabile espressivo,” 1910 and 1919 nothing  
Fig. 153 violins and violas, 1945 “espressivo cantabile,” 1910 “espressivo” (violins only), 1919 “espressivo”

As you can see, even though there is indeed one “non vibrato” in the 1945 version over a tiny handful of notes for solo violin (albeit with an additional “dolce” at the same time), the general trend is similar to *Petrushka*: that is, greater clarity and greater expressivity as compared with the 1910 original score. The two “sec” indication in 1919 have disappeared by 1945, and most of the other cases where the original version might suggest more vibrato are special cases. For example, at Fig. 109 in the “Infernal Dance” Stravinsky originally gave the melody to the second violins embedded in a welter of figuration. In the revisions, the tune surfaces in the first violins and solo cello (1919), then the full cello section (1945), rendering the prior “cantabile” emphasis unnecessary.

Similarly, at figure 115, the fussy doubling of the solo flute by a solo string trio has been entirely removed in both suites, leaving the melody to the woodwind instrument alone. I include the bassoon part at figure 150 merely to highlight the fact that other instruments also acquire additional expressive directions. What happens in the strings is part of a larger process that Stravinsky carries through section by section. Only at figure 96 in the “Infernal Dance,” representing a couple of bars of melody on the violins, does Stravinsky withdraw the initial “cantabile” in a situation where the overall texture remains comparatively unchanged--and he did it not in 1945, but in 1919, before the alleged “continuous vibrato” revolution.

What, then, does this case study really mean? Certainly it does not prove that changes in the employment of vibrato in orchestral string sections never happened. But it does suggest, at least as far as Stravinsky was concerned, that either the audible difference wasn't all that large, or it wasn't important enough for him to make it a major factor in carrying out his revisions, or he simply didn't care one way or the other. And all three of these possibilities need to be taken seriously, because if the composers themselves weren't concerned, then why should we be? We know that the conductors who actually lived through the period in question certainly had no qualms about continuous vibrato, and the musicians, being the guilty parties, obviously supported the new paradigm wholeheartedly.

Now, in addition to the above two major groups in the larger musical body politic, the conductors and the players, we also have a bit of hard evidence showing that it didn't matter all that much to a very major composer, one who was ideally placed to take the new reality into account in revising his early scores. In making a “big deal” out of vibrato, then, the HIPPLF risks trivializing the music by exaggerating the audible significance of what ought to be, in practical terms, a minor point of style. Conductors, in particular, who seek to validate their otherwise lackluster interpretations by calling attention to their handling of vibrato clearly need to reexamine their musical priorities. When what should be a continual, subtle adjustment in tone color based on the music's changing expressive needs becomes instead a point of dogma, the performance will always suffer.

## Spohr and the Vibrato Counters

No, it's not the title of an opera, but one of the most peculiar phenomena in the history of the vibrato controversy. Spohr was, musically speaking, a loser. This might seem harsh, but it is a fair assessment of the judgment of history on his work as a composer. As a pedagogue, he had more success: he invented both the chin-rest as well as rehearsal numbers, both extremely handy devices. He also wrote, in 1833, the *Grand Violin School*, a treatise that is important to the vibrato question not so much because it's good, but merely because it exists.

Spohr's book is by no means as opposed to the use of vibrato as the HIPPLF would contend. Indeed, we have already seen that it supports, either directly or indirectly, two of our main theses: first, that continuous orchestral vibrato may well have evolved naturally from aggregations of violinists of different schools all playing together in their individual styles, and second, that descriptive terminology (such as "con espressione") means both "more vibrato" as well as "more emotion" than usual, and not "use feeling where otherwise there would be none at all." The same little pedagogical theme and variations in which Spohr explains "con espressione" also shows that "dolce" includes a measure of vibrato as well, if not necessarily quite as much as its more passionate cousins.

Like Leopold Mozart, Spohr lumps vibrato (which he similarly calls "tremolo") into the category of "embellishments," and like the elder Mozart, his statements about it are often taken out of context and misused. Here, for example, are the sum total of his observations on the technique, contained in the chapter "On Graces, Ornaments or Embellishments:"

"Amongst the embellishments may also be classed the *tremolo*, and the changing of the fingers on one tone and on the same string.

The singer's voice in passionate passages, or when he forces it to its most powerful pitch, has a trembling which resembles the vibration of a strongly struck bell. This, the Violinist can imitate very closely, as well as many other peculiarities of the human voice. It consists in the wavering of a stopped tone, which alternately extends a little below or above the perfect intonation, and is produced by a trembling motion of the left hand in the direction from the nut towards the bridge. The motion must however be slight, and the deviation from the perfect intonation of the tone, should hardly be perceptible to the ear.

In old compositions the *tremolo* is indicated by points ..... or by the word *tremolo*<sup>29</sup>: in new compositions it is generally left to the performer. Avoid however its frequent use, or in improper places. 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

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<sup>29</sup> There is by no means universal agreement on this assertion. In particular, it has been suggested that the notation with dots (as seen, for example, in the scores of Gluck) may have meant something quite different from the modern vibrato.

passionate passages, and in strongly marking all the *fz* or *>* tones. Long sustained notes can be animated and strengthened by it: if such a tone swells from *p* to *f*, a beautiful effect is produced by beginning the *tremolo* slowly, and in proportion to the increasing power, to give a gradually accelerating vibration. Also by commencing rapidly, and gradually dropping the tone to a sound hardly perceptible, a good effect is produced. The *tremolo* may be divided into four species,<sup>30</sup> viz: into the rapid, for strongly marked tones; into the slow, for sustained tones of passionate cantabile passages; into the slow commencing and increasing tone; and into the rapid commencing and slowly decreasing of long sustained notes. These two latter species are difficult and require much practice, so that the increasing and decreasing of the vibrations may at all times be uniform, and without any sudden change from slow to quick, or the reverse.”

And that, my friends, is the whole story, but it is an interesting one nonetheless. In the first place, you can see that there are many occasions that plainly call for vibrato. We have already noted that Spohr could be quite liberal in asking for it. Aside from that theme and variations, he offers the solo violin parts of two concertos, Pierre Rode’s Seventh and his own Ninth, with all of the vibrato marked, as further examples not just of this one technique, but of the use of embellishments generally. It is in the passionate central section of the former’s adagio, for example, that we find that the indication “on the G string” also means, essentially, “use vibrato continuously, wherever possible.” Spohr explains it thusly: “The Minore being performed throughout on the 4<sup>th</sup> string, partakes of a more passionate character; here then, the delivery must be augmented proportionably [sic] by a grander tone and increasing tremulous passion.”

[See example below; the solo is the top line of each two-stave system, and vibrato is indicated by the wavy line]



What, then, would be Spohr’s take on an entire *movement* characterized by “tremulous passion,” such as the Allegro appassionato of Mendelssohn’s Violin Concerto? The Adagio of Rode’s Seventh Concerto contains not a single verbal direction, expressively speaking. For Spohr, Rode, and in this style of writing generally, the degree of intensity depends almost entirely on the whim of the player; but other composers aren’t so laissez-

<sup>30</sup> Leopold Mozart, as you will see below, has only three.

faire in their habits. Hopefully this doesn't come as a surprise. Spohr the composer was an outgrowth of Spohr the virtuoso violinist. For him, the soloist largely determines the extent to which a range of optional embellishments may be applied. That makes counting the instances of vibrato in these examples, saying "Spohr only uses it X times in Y bars," and applying these proportions to later (or even other contemporary) music a particularly stupid and futile exercise. Yet this is precisely what the HIPPLF does in seeking to bolster their position by citing Spohr.

Consider a later example: the Brahms Violin Concerto (1878). I hope it will not arouse controversy to suggest that in expressive range this work leaves Mr. Rode's otherwise attractive concerto in the dust. The difference in size alone of the two adagios, 115 versus 32 bars, respectively, gives some indication of the gulf between them. More to the point, every significant entrance of the solo in the Brahms is qualified verbally in a manner that, by Spohr's own criteria, would justify the use of vibrato. First, Brahms marks the violin "dolce." Next, at bar 56, comes "espressivo," followed by a return to "dolce," reinforced successively on two occasions (bars 76 and 78). At bar 91, it's back to "espressivo," then "espressivo dolce" at bar 98, and finally "dolce" once again for the last ten measures.

In other words, the style of this music demands a far greater measure of vibrato than does Rode's, or Spohr's own, and this despite the fact, as we have already seen, that composers even in the late Romantic period tend to be very circumspect in telling their soloists what to do (and this concerto's was none other than Spohr's own disciple, Joachim), and that Brahms was, by any measure, a staunch conservative. Only four years later, in 1882, the seventeen year-old Richard Strauss's Violin Concerto marks virtually every lyrical phrase for the soloist with Spohr's "con espressione." Add to this "license to vibrate" the violinist's own perception of the character of the music, and if the result is not exactly "continuous" in the fully modern sense, it's certainly well on its way. *All of this is completely consistent and justified by Spohr's very own system of aesthetics, one which was hardly the only, or even the predominant, standard of the period.*

It's useful to keep in mind that Spohr's arch rival, at least initially, was Paganini, who gets chastised in the Grand Violin School for his frequent use of harmonics (which Spohr, like Mozart, regarded as largely evil and unnatural), and for his elevation of virtuosity above musicality as Spohr understood it<sup>31</sup>. We all know who won that battle. Nor is Spohr's description of when vibrato is appropriate, and its four various categories, the last word in that department. Indeed, it was hardly comprehensive even in his own day<sup>32</sup>. Consider, for example, Rossini, whose range of vibrato, as we have already seen, extends from the vibrant and passionate fortes that Spohr describes, to those gentle passages for solo clarinet in Mosè (and who actually uses the term "vibrato").

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<sup>31</sup> Spohr's tirade against harmonics, like Leopold Mozart's, is interesting because it demonstrates that they were frequently used as an embellishment even though they are practically never notated. In other words, all kinds of things may have been going on in the real world of violin playing which Spohr did not sanction. This makes using him as the putative norm for his period all the more dubious.

<sup>32</sup> Also keep in mind that the "left hand wiggle" is not the only way to produce vibrato or similar sounds on the violin. Far more important than the means of production is the result: a fine, vocal cantabile.

There is also another really critical way in which Spohr's use of vibrato differs from that of his colleagues and contemporaries. It's clear from his examples that he is indeed thinking of the technique as an ornament: that is, as a device to be used one note at a time. Although other composers, as we have seen, also use it that way on occasion, these same composers also treat vibrato in a more general sense, as continuous texture covering whole phrases and musical paragraphs. The notational conventions here are critically important. Spohr maintains that in earlier times a specific sign (.....) to represent vibrato existed, but is no longer in use. So he is forced to invent one of his own for pedagogical purposes, and to describe the four different varieties he has in mind.

But as we have shown, the actual term "vibrato" is used by composers as diverse as Wagner, Rossini, Glinka, and Liszt, both predating and exactly contemporaneously with the period of the Grand Violin School. So in this respect Spohr is either mistaken or pursuing his own aesthetic agenda. And even if he is not, his terminological confusion certainly explains one very significant fact: the reason why composers often prefer "senza espressivo" (or "molto tranquillo," or "senza agitazione") to "senza vibrato," even well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Although the former terms might seem more subjective and impressionistic than the more precise technical equivalent, it makes good sense to prefer them as long as violinists themselves stand a chance of being confused as to precisely what "tremolo" or "vibrato" actually mean<sup>33</sup>. In such cases, the best practical solution is to stick with an emotional characterization that can't possibly be misunderstood, and the realization of which usually involves the same timbral response from the players anyway.

Interestingly, despite the ready availability of both the older, and Spohr's more recent, notational conventions, neither are adopted--or readopted--in music of the period when composers actually call for additional left-hand vibrato (the "wavy line" does survive for

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<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it's entirely possible that "senza vibrato" (or "tremolo") could produce strange results in a world where, as Spohr himself suggested, violin technique varied widely from school to school (not so much what was done, but rather what it was called and how it was achieved). We find a fascinating bit of evidence of this fact in Belgian composer Paul Gilson's *La Mer* (1891). At figure 10 in the first movement, the first violins have an isolated dotted quarter note, played with an up-bow, piano, and marked "poco vibrato mano sin." (a little vibrato, left hand). In other words, here is evidence (confirmed by others, such as Szigeti), that ornamental vibrato effects could be achieved by means other than the standard rocking of the left hand, and that this represents merely one example out of an entire repertoire of vibrato types.

It would be worth someone's time to follow this particular evidence trail, because if it holds true, it may well be that what happened over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not the adoption of continuous vibrato, but rather the *standardization* of the technical means of achieving the continuous vibrato already in place, and the gradual elimination of various alternative methods. This is also consistent with the fact that the historical opponents of left hand vibrato tend not to criticize the resultant sound so much as ridicule the visual appearance of constant trembling, which in turn conjures visions of various associated diseases and conditions. There is something to be said for an investigation into the psychology of the matter: of the relationship between what appears to be an uncontrolled tremor of the hand and the contemporaneous attitude towards certain chronic illnesses, as well as notions of tasteful comportment and dignity of bearing. In short, was not looking odd more important than sounding good?

what some believe indicates a bowed vibrato, which Spohr does not discuss). And no one seems to use the term “tremolo” in an actual orchestral score when they really mean “vibrato,” with one possible exception to be mentioned later. Even Joachim, who of all people would have been familiar with Spohr’s potential innovations in this respect, uses the word “vibrato” when asking for it specifically in his Hungarian Concerto, and not any other sort of musical sign or symbol. However, to be fair, Spohr does not propose his notational system as anything more than a pedagogical tool.

Given the fact that Spohr’s other practical musical innovations (chin rests and rehearsal numbers) were disseminated throughout Europe<sup>34</sup>, we can only conclude that his potential contribution to the vibrato issue was either atypical or simply redundant. The majority of examples cited thus far use the word “vibrato” like “espressivo” or “dolce,” to indicate the character of larger musical sections. All of these terms may also apply to single tones, but there is a big difference between this sort of flexibility, and treating vibrato as an effect applied exclusively on a note by note basis (like a modern tremolo or trill, in fact). By 1833, the date of Spohr’s treatise, something else was clearly afoot.

Remember also that Spohr does not offer his examples as definitive transcriptions of what great virtuosos do, but rather as examples to students of a “fine style” that won’t cause embarrassment in public performance. In short, like much of Spohr’s own music, his suggestions are extremely conservative, expressively “safe,” and perhaps even anachronistic. Spohr was born in 1784; he received his training through the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Rode’s Seventh Concerto dates from about 1800; Spohr’s two most famous works, the Eighth and Ninth Concertos, were written in 1816 and 1820, respectively. Yet these are the works that Spohr chooses as the acme of elegance and good style in 1833.

This is not necessarily negative criticism. Practical musician that he was, Spohr surely knew that given the level of taste and talent of the average player, Rule No. 1 in writing his treatise was the Hippocratic “First do no harm.” He certainly wasn’t going to risk unleashing on musical Europe a radical wave of wild-eyed virtuosos hell-bent on displaying their excessive vibrato. Nor, given the nature of musical pedagogy, is it unusual to see Spohr regurgitating the lessons of his own youth, passing them on to the next generation, and insisting on the validity of what he had been taught and the values he held dear.

In short, Spohr presents a textbook case (literally) of a well-known musical fact: that pedagogy often lags far behind the latest currents in composition. And why not? The fundamentals of violin playing haven’t changed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the whole

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<sup>34</sup> The score to Meyerbeer’s *Dinorah* (1859) contains the following delightful and innovative superscript: “Note to Messieurs Directors of the Orchestra: The letters of the alphabet A, B, C, etc, which have been placed at intervals throughout the score, are also found in the printed orchestral parts. When, in the course of rehearsal, where one is obliged to interrupt the playing of a piece, or where one wishes to stop and study a passage, it will suffice if the director of the orchestra indicates *at which letter, or how many measures before this or that letter*, he wishes to review, and this will avoid considerable loss of time.”

family of instruments was perfected in all of its essentials. Everything since then, protests by the HIPPLF notwithstanding, has been largely cosmetic: a longer bow; slight structural modifications; strings made of different materials. The vast majority of topics covered by Spohr, or Leopold Mozart, are just as valid today as they were centuries ago. The overriding purpose of their treatises is to teach the basics, and only give a taste of more advanced topics.

This partly explains why Spohr persists in calling vibrato “tremolo,” a terminological non-sequitur that as we have seen persisted right up through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Carl Flesch. It may be archaic, and confusing, but giving due credit to illustrious predecessors puts a stamp of authority on a new work, and relates it to long-standing traditions of performance pedagogy. It’s a form of validation. Besides, music isn’t the only field that teaches its students much that is obsolete or of merely historical interest, and it has better reason than most--namely, the ongoing viability of the “classical” repertoire. But this is also why textbooks need to be treated with the greatest caution when used as “evidence” of contemporary (or later) performance practice.

These same observations also apply to questions of pedigree and descent from conveniently categorized “schools.” Joseph Szigeti, in his marvelous little book “Szigeti on the Violin” (1969, rep. Dover), put it best:

“The neat ‘genealogical tables’ showing how twentieth-century violinists descend from this or that illustrious ‘chef d’École’ of the past are not as dependable as the authors of these books would like to make the seem. Even ‘the rare privilege’ of hearing some great representative of our art--in his declining years, it must be added--does not always enable the listener to pass on to future generations impressions that fix the place and rank and distinguishing features of players who belong to the history of violin-playing.” (p. 172)

Wise words, these, from someone who ought to know, and surely applicable in this situation. They are particularly worth keeping in mind in considering Szigeti’s next chapter, which “gives a glimpse of how critically and with what reluctance the *vibrato*--now indispensable--was regarded around the middle of the nineteenth century...” Here is that glimpse:

“When the cellist A. F. Servais (1807-66), one of the founders--along with Ch. De Bériot--of the Belgian School of String Playing, appeared in 1835 in London, he was criticized (in the *Atheneum*) for the ‘unusual manner of producing his tone’ by ‘that intense pressure of the fingers’ which has since been better understood by the term “*vibrato*”, and this was at once denounced to be ‘spasmodic and a not altogether creditable trick’. And following this, Servais’ playing was unfavourably compared to that of the English cellist Lindley, who ‘brought out all his tone like the rolling notes of an organ’ and whose tone ‘being always smooth, there was no tremulousness whatever apparent in his playing.’” (p. 173)

The value of this fascinating tidbit resides not in the fact that the English critic didn't like the foreigner Servais' playing because it differed from the local brand (so what else is new?), but rather that in 1835, almost exactly contemporaneous with Spohr's treatise, we note the existence of a method of playing that includes some version of continuous, left-hand vibrato. Presumably Servais got the technique from *his* teachers as well, and so on. As it concerns the "authenticity" question, what matters is not what appeared in print as criticism, but rather what style prevailed and what audiences enjoyed. Servais was a famous soloist in his day; had his playing been utterly repellent, this would surely not have been the case. And it was he, not Lindley, who founded a famous school of violin technique.

Of course, Szigeti does not really demonstrate that vibrato was regarded critically and with reluctance in any but this single case (and one other). In order to get a real handle on the situation, we would need to survey the response to Servais and his school over a long period of time, keeping in mind that for all the carping and whining his was the position that ultimately prevailed. Indeed, by its very nature the world of classical music gives an unusual amount of weight to the opinions of the grumpy minority, and I say this as a card-carrying member. Music history is by definition "winners history," a story written in hindsight and shamelessly, selectively edited to emphasize what we value today.<sup>35</sup> And right now "authenticity" is all the rage.

This is exactly why the HIPPLF instinctively attempts to validate its position by rewriting history. It's not enough to say "some players used less vibrato, others used more." The general absence of vibrato has to be asserted, "proven," and then extrapolated as the norm of the period, no matter how much of a logical or analytical stretch the exercise requires<sup>36</sup>. To this extent, Spohr has been the victim of a process that he would no doubt have disdained, as would any self-respecting performing musician who sees his primary task as one of delivering an accurate, expressive, and sympathetic interpretation of the composer's intentions--both as contained in the score, as well as within the wider boundaries that define an idiomatic style.

I have no doubt that Spohr's own position does not necessarily preclude the use of abundant vibrato in works different from his own in their means of expression. Accordingly, we must take very seriously the idea that much of what he says may be totally inapplicable to a great deal of music written in his own day, never mind later.

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<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Szigeti's view of "authenticity" is that of the modern virtuoso: being true to the spirit of the work by understanding the style of the period, as filtered through a modern sensibility that brings all of the technical advances and practices of recent times to bear in realizing the composer's intentions (including the right of the performer to "enhance" the printed text from time to time). He does not address the question of orchestral vibrato at all, unfortunately.

<sup>36</sup> It is impossible to overestimate the significance of this methodologically dubious practice to the HIP movement. In its most extreme manifestation it consists of the widely held delusion that one can actually "hear" the absence of vibrato in historical orchestral recordings, despite their limited high frequencies, compressed dynamics, inconsistencies of speed and (consequently) pitch, and in flat contradiction to the fact that orchestral string vibrato can't be accurately measured even in live performance (except in exceptional circumstances), never mind recordings old or new.



Spohr's warning to limit the use of vibrato needs to be seen in the context of a style in which the technique is but one ornament of many, some notated, and some not. It is particularly remarkable, then, that Spohr the teacher is so seldom compared to Spohr the composer, particularly given the fact that his own orchestral works, revealingly, remain among the most verbally blank in the music of the period.

For example, the Eighth and Ninth Concertos contain but a single "dolce" apiece, in their finales, and no other verbal direction whatsoever regarding the emotions that they express. His Fourth and Ninth Symphonies are similarly limited, and both of these are programmatically descriptive, easily lending themselves to pictorial characterization. The Ninth is a "four seasons" piece, while the Fourth, subtitled "The Consecration of Sound," is actually prefaced by a lengthy poem. Even his opera *Jessonda* has only about a half dozen "dolces" in its instrumental parts, and nothing else. Taking into consideration the kind of composer that he was, and comparing his own style to other artistic currents of the day, helps in assessing the relevance of his *Grand Violin School* to the vibrato question.

I do not, by the way, advocate "counting espressivos" any more than I support counting vibratos. It was only in the mid-Romantic period that composers began to go crazy marking their scores with verbal instructions (when orchestras had sufficient rehearsal time and corporate discipline to realize them). Still, compared to contemporaries such as Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Rossini, Bellini, and Schumann, Spohr's lack of verbal specificity is striking. Like the "New World" Symphony (previously mentioned), Spohr's scores render conscious homage to an older way of writing and thinking about music--but while the Dvorák remains a one-time example written for a specific purpose (to demonstrate that indigenous melodic material could be used to construct legitimate classical forms), Spohr made preserving what he understood as the aesthetic ideals of the past his life's work.<sup>37</sup>

This in turn explains the role of ornamentation in Spohr's music generally. He places great store, for example, not just in the usual "shakes, turns, and graces," but also in portamento, and such techniques as the changing of the fingers on the same note. It is quite telling that in the passage from the slow movement of Rode's concerto quoted above, although Spohr does not ask for vibrato after the first system, he demands it

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<sup>37</sup> Spohr's approach to tempo was similarly anachronistic, and he was proud of the fact. Witness his description of the Ninth Violin Concerto in the *Grand Violin School*: "The time in each part of this Concerto remains unchanged. The compositions of the Author seldom require the time to be increased, or decreased, to heighten the expression. Generally, only such compositions demand it which are not composed in one form, or imagined in equal measure of time." That Spohr actually believed this last bit of nonsense offers striking evidence of just how musically out of touch with certain modern (and not so modern) trends he was.

He continues: "The Scholar should rarely, and with moderation, if his feeling should induce him to it, use the means of expression already mentioned, as by any alteration in the measure of time, the whole character of the composition might be destroyed." So moderation in all things is Spohr's watchword, whether he is speaking of tempo variation, vibrato, or expressive range. A more eloquently worded ticket to artistic oblivion has seldom appeared in print.

continuously where the melodic line is comparatively unornamented. The use of vibrato stops where other kinds of ornamentation (trills, grace notes, etc) begin. So the question historians ought to be asking themselves is this: Is there any later music that closely resembles the writing that even Spohr concedes admits of continuous vibrato?

Now turn the question around: Does, say, the string writing in a Bruckner adagio more closely resemble Rode's first line of music, with its long, sustained melody, or the more filigreed second line? Or consider the previously mentioned concluding Adagio of Mahler's Third Symphony, where even before we get to the lengthy passages specifically marked to played with prominent extra vibrato, several minutes have already passed of music clearly marked as a single, continuous "molto espressivo" paragraph. This kind of texture may be unknown to Spohr, or Rode, but not to Haydn (its creator)<sup>38</sup>, or Beethoven, or Schumann (consider the Second Symphony's [1846] Adagio espressivo), or many other composers working in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

More importantly, to play such music with continuous vibrato really is consistent with Spohr's own teaching. The true issue is not how often vibrato may be used in an absolute sense, but rather how frequently, and for how long, the kind of thematic material and emotional climate that requires it occurs in the specific work under consideration. Spohr's own music, and Rode's--which they firmly believed represented the acme of tastefully restrained expressivity--offers few opportunities for the application of continuous vibrato because its moments of sustained emotion are comparatively few and far between. This doesn't mean that their music isn't attractive, graceful, or appealing, but it says nothing about what style best suits their contemporaries and successors. It only helps to explain why virtually their entire output has been forgotten, passed over in favor of music that more obviously displays greater intensity of feeling.

In any case, expressivity in Spohr is not a function of timbre and sonority as much as it is elaboration and embellishment, and it builds on the vocal technique of Baroque *opera seria*, whereby singers demonstrate their intensity of sentiment by improvising ornaments to their vocal lines on each repetition. By this definition Spohr's music is emotional in a rarified sort of way, and it doesn't need to say so by means of verbal directions printed in the score because it depends, to put it crudely, on how many "little" notes he can pack into a bar of melody. Spohr is a musical calligrapher. His critics would say he too often equates elegance of penmanship with the quality of the poetry itself. However, given his perspective on style and expression, it is easy to understand how maximal vibrato employed at the expense of other, more involved and extensive types of ornamentation might be seen as cheap, simplistic, unvirtuosic, and tasteless.

The use of vibrato in place of other ornaments, however, is exactly the sort of thing that orchestral violinists are forced to do basically by default, simply because (particularly in Spohr's day) a string section could hardly be expected to imitate, let alone improvise,

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<sup>38</sup> Check out, to cite just a few examples, the Adagios of Symphonies No. 92, 98, and 99 (1789-93), with their main themes significantly marked "cantabile." Haydn's cultivation of the "cantabile" symphonic Adagio actually dates back to the 1760s, and includes some of his earliest efforts in the medium.

the ornamental elaborations of a soloist. This is why Spohr warns orchestral players, in the perfunctory remarks that he addresses to ensemble musicians, against using any type of soloistic embellishment, mentioning specifically those that involve adding additional notes to the melodic line. But does anyone seriously believe that those gentlemen, every one of whom was chomping at the bit to become a traveling virtuoso, were not trying to play as expressively as possible using the limited tools at their disposal--one of which was vibrato?

This is where Spohr's status as a violin virtuoso counts against him. The very factors that make much of his treatise useful to budding string players of any period, make it worthless as an exemplar of orchestral performance practice in his own. Solo violin music naturally tends to be elaborate: it's in the nature of the instrument, and a practical necessity both as a measure of virtuosity and expressive intensity. But there is a big difference between works that employ a preexisting stock of standard ornaments, and the kind of writing in which great lyrical simplicity alternates with highly decorative, but original melodic elaboration. The main archetype of this kind of work is, of course, Beethoven's Violin Concerto, a piece whose musical (as opposed to ornamental) density makes Spohr's later efforts often seem extremely shallow and primitive.

Beethoven's Concerto is, by Spohr's standards, barely a composition for the violin at all<sup>39</sup>. It's great music, first and foremost, and all of its virtuosity is placed in the service of immediate emotional expression through thematic development. I'm not suggesting that Spohr either wrote or advocated playing junk. Indeed, he specifically states otherwise. However, and leaving aside the question of what Spohr would dismiss as "junk," the fact remains that there is not a single great violin virtuoso after the Baroque period who is also admired as a great composer, a fascinating statistic when one considers how untrue that statement is with respect to pianists. It may have something to do with the sheer difficulty of mastering the violin, and the special expertise called for in writing for it--one which tends to become an end in itself to the detriment of other musical considerations.

Whatever the explanation, the musical style that Spohr cultivated was, historically speaking, a dead issue a good decade or two before his passing in 1859<sup>40</sup>. Indeed, it was well on its way out by 1833, the year of the Grand Violin School, and this fact may have been one of the motivating factors that led Spohr to write it in the first place. It certainly

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<sup>39</sup> By the same token the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, the whole of which Spohr in his autobiography found "worse than any of the preceding eight symphonies," proved conclusively that "Beethoven lacks aesthetic culture and a sense of the beautiful."

<sup>40</sup> The evidence that Spohr himself was fully aware of his backward-oriented position comes in the form of his Sixth Symphony "Historical" (1840). Each of its movements has a different title: "The Bach-Handel Period," "The Haydn-Mozart Period," "The Beethoven Period," and "The Most Recent Period." The finale is a parody, and not a very good one, of the style of Grand Opera being cultivated by the likes of Auber, Meyerbeer, and even (at the time) Wagner (think of the overture to *Rienzi*). Like most such musical efforts to express scorn and distaste, the result winds up sounding merely clumsy and inexpressive, but as an aesthetic statement the work is valuable. It asks, in the most graphic fashion, the question "Why on earth would anyone take as paradigmatic of performance practice the statements of a man so patently out of touch with, and unsympathetic to, the major stylistic trends of his own time?"

would not be the first time that an artist has tried to codify for posterity a passionately held system of aesthetics when faced with its immanent obsolescence, and it explains, at least to some degree, both Spohr's attack on Paganini as well as the fact that he cites no musical examples later than his own Ninth Concerto of 1820.

Spohr's music, then, had neither the substance of Beethoven, the formal imagination and conceptual daring of the early Romantics such as Weber, Chopin, Schumann and Berlioz (never mind Wagner), nor the insane virtuosity of Paganini and Liszt. It permitted Spohr to live comfortably, to enjoy his fifteen minutes of fame, and to cultivate the admiration of the rising middle-classes of central Europe. He was deservedly popular, a superb practical musician, and by all accounts a really nice guy. But was he imitated? The music of violin-playing disciples such as Joachim owes little or nothing to his example, and important as his Grand Violin School may have been, there is no way to assess the degree to which its finer points may have been followed in real life.

To the extent that it deals with issues of style beyond the rudiments of basic violin technique, Spohr's treatise is in fact the "owner's manual" for the method of playing his own music, and an "infomercial" on the aesthetics that he valued. It passed into the currents of 19<sup>th</sup> century pedagogical orthodoxy because it retained its general utility as a primer over a period of decades. We don't throw out the entire Bible, including the Ten Commandments, because the same book also accepts polygamy. But we also don't practice polygamy, and some of Spohr's advice on matters of style was inapplicable even in his own day, never mind later.

Popularity, particularly in the world of classical music, is fleeting, and should never be equated with influence. Paganini was so jealous of his proprietary "secrets" that he refused to permit publication of his music while he was still alive. And yet, of the two greatest violinists of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Spohr and Paganini, which is more famous today, both as a performer and as a composer? However much sincere respect Spohr was accorded both in his lifetime and afterwards, history often points to a wide gulf between what people say, and what they actually do. The vibrato question forces us to confront this conundrum directly, and there is no simple answer. But one thing is certain: Spohr's contribution does not deserve the pride of place that the foes of vibrato give it merely because it suits their convenience, and can be made to say what they already assume (indeed need) to be true.

### Leopold Mozart Reconsidered

As the author of the first, and most widely quoted, formally published treatise on violin playing, Leopold Mozart's *Violin School* (1756, rev. '87) is frequently cited in support of the "vibrato should be used sparingly as an ornament" argument. Mozart did not, in fact, know the word "vibrato" as such. Like Spohr, he used "tremolo," a much less precise term with many different meanings, but his description of the technique leaves no doubt that he was referring to something similar, if not identical, to the common left-hand vibrato as we know it today. Most of the time he is quoted selectively, and in a way that reveals those doing the quoting as have already made up their minds on the issue. Why

do I make this claim? Consider what he actually says in Chapter XI “Of the Tremolo, Mordent, and some other improvised Embellishments.”

“The Tremolo is an ornamentation which arises from Nature herself and which can be used charmingly on a long note, not only by good instrumentalists, but also by clever singers. Nature herself is the instructress thereof. For if we strike a slack string or a ball sharply, we hear after the stroke a certain wave-like undulation (*ondeggiamento*) of the struck note. And this trembling, after-sound is called tremolo, also tremulant [or tremoleto].

Take pains to imitate this natural quivering on the violin, when the finger is pressed strongly down on the string, and one makes a small movement with the whole hand; which however must not move sideways but forwards toward the bridge and backwards toward the scroll; of which some mention has already been made in Chapter V. For as, when the remaining trembling sound of a struck string or bell is not pure and continues to sound not on one note only but always first too high, then too low, just so by the movement of the hand forward and backward must you endeavor to imitate exactly the swaying of these intermediate tones.

Now because the tremolo is not purely on one note but sounds undulating, so would it be an error if every note were played with the tremolo. Performers there are who tremble consistently on each note as if they had the palsy. The tremolo must only be used where nature herself would produce it; namely as if the note taken were the striking of an open string. For at the close of a piece, or even the end of a passage which closes with a long note, that last note would inevitably, if struck for instance on a pianoforte, continue to hum for a considerable time afterwards. Therefore a closing note *or any other sustained note* [emphasis added] may be decorated with a tremolo<sup>41</sup>.”

Mozart, apparently stealing from an earlier manuscript by Tartini, then goes on to give three examples of the tremolo, slow, accelerating, and fast, and offers several examples of written-out vibrato over what he defines as “sustained notes.” These range from dotted eighths to half notes, all occurring in mid-phrase, between or alternating with eighth notes. Of these examples, Mozart claims:

“I will here put down a few notes which can very well be played with the tremolo, yea, which in truth demand this movement.”

As you can see, despite the cautionary language to use vibrato only where “nature” supports the notion (whatever that means to the individual player), there is virtually no

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<sup>41</sup> This association of vibrato with sustained notes, particularly in slow tempos, became a critical timbral component of the German symphonic adagio, from Haydn and Beethoven, through Bruckner and Mahler. In the later Romantic style, particularly, where the very slow pace features long, and (by earlier standards) largely undecorated melodic lines, the absence of continuous vibrato to enrich the sound would be unthinkable. This is entirely consistent with even the most basic rules of its application as promulgated by Mozart and Spohr, both of whom emphasize the particular suitability of vibrato to sostenuto passages (as further ratified by Enescu and many other examples above).

difference between Mozart's description of the practice, and this one from Samuel Adler's "The Study of Orchestration" (1982):

"When a finger is pressed down on a string and sustained for any length of time, most string performers will use vibrato to enhance the beauty of the tone."

Members of the HIPPLF, when quoting Mozart, harp on that business about tasteless players vibrating all over the place as if they had some disease. It's a colorful image, and no doubt there were bad violinists then, as now, who overused vibrato in an effort to conceal a defective technique. This is precisely the issue that Leopold Auer addresses in his most frequently cited comments on the subject. But nowhere does Mozart deny the necessity of using vibrato often, even "continuously" in the modern sense of the term. That interpretation comes from the modern prejudice that views the idea of "only when necessary" as equivalent to "once in a blue moon," when in reality Mozart's own words flat-out state that ornamental necessity is a very frequent occurrence.

Conditioned as we are to accept virtually without question the idea of fidelity to the printed text, and to revere the work of the composer as a sort of Holy Writ, to be embellished only with the gravest reservations and as sparingly as possible, it is very difficult to take Mozart's words at face value. In one sense, it's impossible. We are all creatures of our own time, and obviously cannot bring to the act of reading the same musical experiences that he brought to the act of writing. But this doesn't mean that we can't at least be conscious of our own biases and predilections, and try to make some reasonable allowance for them. Mozart certainly had his. For example, he detested the use of harmonics (*flageolets*), which is interesting because they belong for the most part squarely in the category of "non vibrato" sound effects.

It's also worth mentioning that the vibrato effect Mozart describes, a deliberate effort to produce a sound first too high, then too low, is *not* necessarily the technique that we understand today<sup>42</sup>. In modern practice the variation from true pitch is generally lower, on the flat side of the note, and seldom higher, or sharp. This is based on the theory that the ear invariably identifies the uppermost tone heard as the fundamental pitch, so too high is always a bad thing. Mozart/Tartini's description of the natural, oscillating decay of a struck bell, while interesting, is thus both dubious science and curiously beside the point, musically speaking.

Or let me put it this way: the mere fact that Mozart wrote down his opinions, and that they were parroted by later writers such as Spohr, doesn't make him right. This is doubly true when the work in question gets cited not because of its brilliance, clarity, or penetrating insight, but because of the dearth of serious competition in its field. New and original achievements in musical expression seldom occur by sticking slavishly to "the rules," nor are they the product of conservative textbook writers. It isn't the Leopolds, but

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<sup>42</sup> Spohr, as we have seen, described the "tremolo" similarly, and this technique was evidently one of several practiced until modern times. Exactly how, when, and where these differing schools of vibrato (including Baillot's sharp-side version) arose is a subject that surely deserves further investigation.

the Wolfgangs who create lasting art (though of course the Leopolds may create the Wolfgangs!). We therefore cannot neglect the real possibility that the type of vibrato that Mozart describes, or at least the more extravagant, ornamental version of it, was different than what many violinists were in fact taught to use, and possibly inapplicable to the present discussion.

One thing, then, needs to be made perfectly clear. Modern “flat-side” vibrato, when all is said and done, is most emphatically *not* an “ornament” in the sense of a decorative addition to the written musical line. It is an enrichment, an intensifier, a means of creating tonal shadings. When members of the HIPPLF blather about it being an ornament in the Baroque sense, ask them this: “How is it any different or more significant an ‘ornament’ than, say, the timbre of the string(s) a player chooses in fingering a melody, or the choice of bowing, or the precise placement and pressure of the bow on the string, or any of the other purely technical factors that create marked variations in timbre, and which have never excited any comment at all?”

The “natural” effect that Mozart describes involves a perceptible variance from notated pitch on both sides, flat and sharp. It involves more work, more time for each oscillation because of the greater distance traveled, and in the final analysis, a somewhat different standard of intonation. The entire point of modern orchestral vibrato is to be virtually imperceptible, save to the extent that it facilitates blend and gives the tone that indefinable communicative character it would otherwise lack. The word “vibrato” from the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, when used in an orchestral score as we have already seen, is a direction to an entire section to go further still, and attempt to emulate the expressively immediate sound of a solo. All of this is frankly outside of Mozart’s scope.

Nevertheless, that Mozart was fully aware of the contribution that vibrato (in whatever form) makes in producing an even, beautiful tone is evident at several points in his treatise:

“Everyone who understands even a little of the art of singing, knows that an even tone is indispensable. For to whom would it give pleasure if a singer when singing low or high, sang now from the throat, now from the nose or through the teeth and so on, or even at times sang falsetto? Similarly an even quality of tone must be maintained on the violin in strength and weakness not on one string only, but on all strings, and with such control that one string does not overpower the other. He who plays a solo does well if he allows the open strings to be heard but rarely or not at all. The fourth finger on the neighboring lower string will always sound more natural and delicate because the open strings are too loud compared with stopped notes, and pierce the ear too sharply.” (V, 13)

Consider this passage in light of the examples cited throughout this essay, which show composers aware both of the danger of open strings and the value of vibrato in both insuring that players avoid them, while at the same time enhancing expressivity. Mozart evidently knew it as well, but the crux of his argument to this effect is not to be found in the chapter on embellishments. Although the author himself points out that he had raised

the subject previously, in fact in the Chapter just cited (V), few bother to go back and examine the points he makes earlier in his treatise. Yet they are critically important.

Mozart's Chapter V is headed "How, by adroit control of the Bow, one should seek to produce a good tone on a Violin and bring it forth in the right manner." In it, he describes the various standard bow-strokes that must be practiced assiduously by the student, describing in detail how each involves pressure applied or released at a different point along the bow during a single pass across the string--what Mozart terms the "divisions of the stroke." More than the bow arm is involved in this process:

"...it is very touching when a singer sustains beautifully a long note of varying strength and softness without taking a fresh breath. But in this case there is something special to be observed; namely, that the finger of the left hand which is placed on the string should, in the soft tone, relax the pressure somewhat, and that the bow should be placed a little farther from the bridge or saddle; whereas in loud tone the fingers of the left hand should be pressed down strongly and the bow be placed nearer to the bridge.

In this first division in particular, as also in the following, the finger of the left hand should make a small, slow movement which must not be sideways but forward and backward. That is, the finger must move forward towards the bridge and backward again towards the scroll: in soft tone quite slowly, but in the loud rather faster."

Once again, vibrato, but here a somewhat more generalized kind that the three "ornamental" varieties described individually later. This would seem to be, in fact, "natural" vibrato, that blank-canvas, purely mechanical device used for basic tone production "in the right manner." It must be so, because Mozart cannot on the one hand be cautioning players against its overuse, and on the other be describing the technique as essential to, and indivisible from, the production of a good, singing tone through mastery of the rudimentary movements of the bow across the string. As Mozart himself says a bit later: "And who is not aware that singing is at all times the aim of every instrumentalist; because one must always approximate to nature as nearly as possible."

We find this notion of "blank canvas" vibrato corroborated by Johann Joachim Quantz, in his treatise "On Playing the Flute" (1752). In the chapter "Of the Duties of Those Who Accompany a Concertante Part," paragraph 32, Quantz has the following to say of the violinist:

"As to the use of the fingers of the left hand, it is to be noted that the strength of the pressure applied by them must always be in the correct proportion to the strength of the bow-stroke. This proportion must be carefully observed. If in a hold (*tenuta*), you make the tone grow in volume, you must also increase the pressure on your finger. To keep the pitch from becoming higher, you must at the same time draw the finger back imperceptibly, or avert this danger with a good vibrato (*Bebung, balancement*) that is not too quick."



Never mind the question of identity of terminology: here is, once again, a concept of vibrato that is not by any means an improvised “ornament,” but rather a technical necessity to be used on sustained notes in order to maintain proper pitch. And Quantz seems to recognize, as Mozart does not, the advantage of keeping any variance from the true pitch on the flat side.

Even if we put aside for the moment the question of whether or not anyone actually took Mozart’s (or Quantz’s) advice in real life, and despite the fact that the former’s frequently polemical tone suggests strongly that no one was listening and that the world of music ca. 1756 was a sinkhole of bad taste and atrocious technique<sup>43</sup>, there is no reason whatsoever to maintain that the author’s position is in any way “against” the frequent use of vibrato. Just the opposite. To suggest otherwise involves dismissing much of what the treatise clearly says, and offers more than a hint of a self-serving agenda at work. This last point isn’t, alas, altogether surprising.

The period instrument movement, however much of genuine value that it has accomplished, not only has a vested interest in validating its approach through historical “evidence,” but also in making sure that this evidence differs as much as possible from whatever practice prevailed in modern times. At its most harmless, it merely wants an

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<sup>43</sup> Here is Mozart’s appraisal, from his final chapter, of the theoretical difference between solo and orchestral musicians: “Decide now for yourself whether a good orchestral violinist be not of far higher value than one who is purely a solo player? The latter can play everything according to his whim and arrange the style of performance as he wishes, or even for the convenience of his hand; while he former must possess the dexterity to understand and at once interpret rightly the taste of various composers, their thoughts and expressions. The latter need only practice at home in order to get everything well in tune, and others must accommodate themselves to him. But the former has to play everything at sight and, added to that, often such passages as go against the natural order of the time-division, and he has, mostly, to accommodate himself to others. A solo player can, without great understanding of music, usually play his concertos tolerably—yes, even with distinction—but a good orchestral violinist must have great insight into the whole art of musical composition and into the difference of the characteristics; yea, he must have a specially lively adroitness to be prominent in his calling with honor, in particular if he wishes in time to become the leader of the orchestra. Perhaps there are, however, some who believe that more good orchestral violinists are to be found than solo players. They are mistaken. Of bad accompanists there are certainly enough; of good, on the other hand, but few, for nowadays all wish to play solo.”

This statement, even if Mozart is exaggerating for the sake of the point, is quite remarkable, for he as much as admits that poor technique (or taste) is rampant, which in turn likely means lots of continuous vibrato going on, among other nasty things. Alternately, if we take his comments on the place of natural vibrato in Chapter Five seriously, then a good orchestral string section, full of “accommodating” musicians, would likely arrive at a corporate timbral ideal that includes a measure of “blank canvas” vibrato as a matter of course. Elsewhere, Mozart cautions orchestral players not to ornament the musical line according to their own whim [the fact that both he and Spohr have to say something at all raises alarming possibilities about what some performances must have sounded like!], but he offers no such qualification in considering vibrato specifically [neither does Spohr], and in any case how could he possibly advise against the use of his own basic bowing technique?

Finally, consider Mozart’s words about the need for orchestral players to “at once interpret rightly the taste of various composers, their thoughts and expression,” and apply this stricture to the musical examples cited above. Isn’t it clear that Mozart would support the notion that “the vibrato question” must be considered, not in absolute terms, but on a work by work basis as orchestral players realize the composer’s intentions, because this is what musicians in the real world are supposedly trained to do? And is this not his overriding concern in writing his treatise in the first place?

excuse to play the same stuff all over again. At its most extreme, it has attempted to replace the interpretive license of the artist with scholarly dogma. This, in itself, is probably the single most modern, wholly inauthentic way to approach the performance of early music that it would be possible to imagine. Gone is the element of taste, of what sounds “natural,” of the pursuit of an ideal of beauty defined by the art of singing. Instead, we hear an abdication of artistic responsibility abetted by a specious, demonstrably flawed historicism. One can only wonder what Leopold Mozart, never mind his famous son, would have had to say about that.

### Conclusion

A principal difficulty with interpreting these older pedagogical works as they relate to orchestral sonority lies in the fact that they are written almost entirely with the soloist in mind. Although Mozart clearly recognized and commented on the difference between solo and orchestral playing, other than the obvious caution against adding (different) ornaments at will when playing from the same part, no one distinguishes ornamentation appropriate or useful in a string section from that used by individual virtuosos. However, it is easy to understand how, if vibrato indeed began life as a type of ornament, it evolved to such a high degree in the orchestra at such an early stage. After all, it is the single decorative technique that adds no extra notes or figurations, and so can be used expressively at will by multiple players without creating appalling results.

The fact that orchestras may have employed “blank canvas” vibrato, and that the same word confusingly does double duty in representing the specifically ornamental variety, also helps to explain why other terms were sometimes used. Mahler’s “vibrando” is one such; Debussy’s “très vibrant” in the cellos at the end of *La Mer* (after figure 59) is another, as are all of the variants on the basic Italian that we have already seen. And as noted previously, Debussy also uses “vibrato Sul G” in the violins a few moments earlier in the same movement [figure 57], just like Glinka, Szymanowski, and Joachim, suggesting what Spohr confirms: that the instruction to play specifically on the lowest string might also be taken as license to use additional vibrato.

Other composers, however, use even more colorful or detailed language. In Liszt’s oratorio *The Legend of Saint Elizabeth*, you will find the violins at figure 4 of the introduction marked “espressivo” and “wogend,” which in German means “wave-like” or “rippling.” In Italian this would be “ondeggiante,” which is exactly the word Mozart uses to describe the reverberation of a struck bell or open strings in his chapter on ornamentation. Later, at figure 34 in the scene of Elizabeth’s burial, we find another remarkable direction over all four string parts (violin I and II, viola, and cello): “pp poco tremolando; NB. In dem Streichquartette mehr vibrieren lassen als tremolieren” (“In the string quartet, let them vibrate more than playing actual tremolos”).

In the cavatina that opens the second act of Rossini’s *La Donna del Lago* (1819), we find a most unusual string accompaniment in sixteenth notes (tempo: *andantino*), separated by sixteenth-note rests, marked “tremulo.” The passage and the indication appear twice. Curiously, the spelling of the term differs from that found in the rest of the score (the

standard “tremolo”), though that may have no significance. However, Rossini is always unusually precise when it comes to string sonority, and has no problem at all in asking for the standard tremolo when he wants it (and notating it accordingly). Both the context and the looseness of terminology at this period suggest that he has in mind an unusual treatment of vibrato, which, as we have already seen, he calls for frequently and in a wide variety of circumstances.

Here, then, are clear examples of an unusual, vibrato-like sonority that is distinctly different from the standard variety. All would require a certain amount of practice in rehearsal to realize their composers’ intentions, and so you can see quite plainly why most find it advisable to keep silent about these matters except in unusual cases that demand exceptional tone colors. Anyone, particularly in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whose music required multiple rehearsal stoppages for discussion and experiment would simply have little chance ever of being performed. When you consider that masterpieces such as Schubert’s “Great” Symphony were laughed off the stage and abandoned in rehearsal because of a few (well, many) string triplets in the finale, it’s easy to understand why composers might tend to use caution in making uncommon expressive demands.

That makes it all the more remarkable, and fascinating, that so many took the time and trouble (and risk) to be so specific, so frequently. The existence of ornamental vibrato supports the notion that the “blank canvas” variety existed as a thing apart, and not as an added effect (or “*affect*”). And this notion is also completely consistent with advice contained in Mozart’s and Quantz’s treatises, not to mention the observations of the young Wolfgang Mozart to his father. So if the very notion of continuous vibrato in the orchestra in 1831, as the example from Norma suggests, turns the theories of today’s HIPPLF on their heads, we would do well to keep in mind that the scores don’t lie, and that composers did not lightly make extraordinary demands on their players.

One thing is for sure: the simplistic “yes” or “no” approach to vibrato that characterizes the HIPPLF’s viewpoint hardly does justice to the rich repertoire of timbral effects that composers of all periods, both implicitly and explicitly, require of their string sections. There is no excuse whatsoever for the “one size fits all,” non-vibrato treatment of string sonority that characterizes so many of today’s purportedly authentic performances, particularly in music from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards.

The fact that clear instructions against expressivity, nuance, and/or vibrato begin appearing in symphonic music around the 1880s suggests, not just that composers were exploiting a new emotional direction in their music, but that the use of continuous vibrato already had been well-established for a considerable period of time, at least long enough so that the request to avoid it constituted something of a novelty. In this regard, I have no idea how far back we might go before notational inconsistencies start getting in the way of a relatively unambiguous evaluation of the composer’s intentions. Rossini, and the 1810s, strikes me as quite early enough for our purposes.

There’s also little question that the argument for the presence of a continuous, natural vibrato makes even more sense when applied to the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries than it

does later. For in this earlier period, the highest ideal of instrumental playing was held universally to be imitation of the human singing voice. Later, when orchestral composers began exploring expanded descriptive and pictorial possibilities, particularly in handling religious, supernatural, mystical, or philosophical subjects, they necessarily ventured into alien timbral territory.

These new sounds never replaced the traditional vocal basis of musical expression--indeed they still haven't despite the best efforts of various 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde schools of composition--but they have weakened the notion of human vocal timbre as the goal of all instrumental musicianship, and even at times substituted other concerns entirely. It is only because we no longer take the vocal ideal as seriously as our ancestors did that the "vibrato question" exists. It is a modern construct, having little if anything to do with questions of "authenticity" or correct performance practice, because the bottom line remains that for our musical forbearers, the more vocally true the sound, the more correct the playing must be by definition in music of any period, no matter what the treatises may say technically. Quantz sums up the point especially well:

"Each instrumentalist must strive to execute that which is cantabile as a good singer executes it. The singer, on the other hand, must try in lively pieces to achieve the fire of good instrumentalists, as much as the voice is capable of it." [Of Good Execution in General in Singing and Playing, par. 19]

We have come a long way, aesthetically, since the enlightenment view of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that saw man as the crowning achievement of God's creation, and the highest embodiment of nature. Music was a science, musical instruments mechanical objects, and the "art" resided in using these fabricated tools to approximate the most profoundly communicative of all nature's aural achievements, the human singing voice. The notion of "art for art's sake" did not exist. The earth and its creatures were given by God to man for his use, sustenance, and enjoyment. Music, by definition, was inherently descriptive and representational--of the various emotions--and thus subject to this "natural law."

Today, however, man is no longer seen as the glory and fulfillment of nature even by many who count themselves religious. Instead, he is an antagonist, even an agent of corruption. Accordingly, we place art on a pedestal and define it as something apart from normal life. We support it, but then at the same time largely ignore or isolate it, restricting it to museums and other cultural "institutions." We do not participate. Man is no longer worthy of being glorified by his own artistic products, and we find the confidence of prior centuries in this regard somewhat embarrassing, a misconception to be tolerated, just as a parent with superior knowledge will often smile affectionately at the misplaced bravado of a child.

This is why the "vibrato question" is a modern fiction, the creation of an "authenticity" movement operating under a wholly inauthentic set of premises. The more we continue looking, listening, and noting how composers of the past realized their particular expressive goals, the more evident this assertion becomes. Unfortunately, now that the issue has been raised, confirming the truth becomes a somewhat tiresome matter of time

and opportunity, complicated by the fact that artists of all epochs rarely see the need to codify systematically those conventions that they regard as obvious and therefore unnecessary to discuss.

Oh, and there's one more dirty little secret that the HIPPLF doesn't want us to know: in the grand scheme of things, vibrato really shouldn't be all that important. The physical characteristics of the instruments themselves, the use of gut strings, of valveless brass, and small timpani struck with wooden sticks--all of these are far more significant determinants of "period" sonority than one or two small points of playing style. Vibrato only becomes an issue when the refusal to use it constitutes an end in itself, and is taken to such extremes that the interpretation, such as it is, offers little else of note. In reality, there's plenty of room for widely varying tastes and standards, all of which can be applied to the exact same music in confident expectation of achieving attractive, idiomatic results. This is true "authenticity."

Most composers, then, were doubtless aware that whatever their interpreters did with respect to vibrato, it would likely fall somewhere in the broad expanse between reckless overindulgence and puritanical abstinence. So they simply didn't worry about it. They had more urgent matters to attend to in marking their parts. Our inquiry is thus limited by the fact that only a tiny fraction of the music actually performed in centuries past was published, or contains information relevant to this inquiry, and an even smaller proportion of that is currently available to any but a miniscule group of scholars and specialists. The scores that might tell us the most about orchestral practice at any given time may not be the most famous, or the best. Indeed, they may be moldering away in some archive or attic, the work of totally forgotten mediocrities.

Within the limitations of this essay, then, I can only suggest how the "vibrato question" might be answered, where I believe the answer is likely to be found, and what the evidence to hand suggests it might be. Ultimately it is the music itself that must tell us, and not a selection of pedagogical essays on violin technique whose impact on the historical reality of performance cannot be measured. The scores make it plain that a colorful, well regulated, thoughtfully produced, continuous vibrato was required for Romantic music from at least the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. To ignore this perfectly sensible assertion on the theory that certain orchestras or soloists, for whatever reason, may have resisted fulfilling a composer's musical demands, makes a mockery of a historical performance movement whose very notion of "authenticity" exists to serve the music by divining the composer's true intentions, and not to enshrine as doctrine the bad habits or inadequacies of the past.

At the heart of the anti vibrato argument lies a fundamental element of hypocrisy, and more than a touch of hubris. The hypocrisy stems from the viewpoint that for hundreds of years vibrato was largely absent, and that artistic habits accordingly change slowly (or hardly at all) over time. And then for no good, quantifiable reason, vibrato suddenly appeared everywhere, in a matter of a few years, and become so widely accepted as to wipe out the earlier schools of playing entirely. If this first contention is correct, the second obviously is not likely to be. The hubris, on the other hand, stems from the

assumption that late Romantic composers such as Mahler would naturally side with the HIPPLF's interpretive preferences based on the assertion that they accurately reflect what orchestras typically did (as opposed to what the music so clearly demands).

The above explanation of the "immaculate conception" of vibrato in the 1930s, and 40s looks particularly bizarre when viewed in the context of the musical reality of that time: Romanticism had been repudiated in the strongest possible terms by the twin forces of neo-classicism (Les Six, Stravinsky, Hindemith's "new objectivity") on the one hand, and Schoenberg's twelve-tone school on the other. History strongly suggests that 19<sup>th</sup> century ideals of musical expressivity and its associated techniques should have been in decline, gradually suppressed or supplanted by a playing style better suited to the emotionally cooler modern aesthetic.

And yet the HIPPLF asks us to believe that orchestras suddenly switched to a performance style that might seem unsuited to much of the new music that they were being asked to play. The truth is that a change did occur, but not in the way that the HIPPLF (or the anti-vibrato branch of it) contends. Composers in the post-Romantic world demanded, above all, rhythmic precision and accuracy of pitch, not any fundamental sacrifice in expressivity or body of tone. Stravinsky's neo-classically chaste Symphony in C of 1940, for example, asks that the violins in its slow movement play their first phrase "espressivo," the next one "dolce," the one following "grazioso" (against "dolce espressivo" in the solo oboe), and then "dolce cantabile." And these are just the opening bars.

Or consider a seminal work of the 1920s, Paul Hindemith's Concerto for Orchestra (1925), an absolute textbook illustration of the "new objectivity" that overtook much of German music in the 1920s, and found its analog in the Paris of "Les Six" and the American neo-classicists. Hindemith marks the opening "Mit Kraft, mässig schnelle Viertel, ohne Pathos und stets lebendig" (With strength, moderately quick quarter notes, without pathos and remaining lively). Shortly thereafter he writes "Nicht schleppen, ohne jedes Pathos" (Don't drag, without any pathos). It's a curious designation; surely there was no risk of pathos slipping into this particular music! Here is a perfect capsule description of the anti-Romantic reaction the swept through "serious" music in the 1920s, precisely at the time when orchestras were theoretically first discovering the joys of continuous vibrato.

Accompanying the new musical wave of the 20s and 30s came changes in notation as well. The highly detailed, colorful descriptive language of the Romantic era's scores gave way to a more restrained, "classical" approach. This wasn't an abrupt process. The Second Viennese School and the musical avant-garde continued to pursue advanced performance techniques and to mark their scores in obsessive, not to say impractical, detail. But the neo-classicists largely abandoned the recourse to verbal clutter in favor of simpler directions, and a willingness once again to let the music speak for itself through purely technical terminology about accent, dynamics, and tempo. Ironically, this means that the exact period in which the HIPPLF currently is sowing such confusion about the "vibrato question," namely, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is precisely the one in

which composers such as Berg, Mahler, Zemlinsky, Prokofiev, Strauss, Bartók, and others, offer sufficiently *specific* notation to give us the answers.

However, in the new post-Romantic aesthetic climate one common performing technique was indeed abandoned, and with it went much of the offending pathos that Hindemith and many others strove to avoid: the regular use of unmarked portamento and glissando (that is, sliding between notes). This fact has always been uncontroversial and generally acknowledged, even by the historical performance movement, which has rightly insisted that portamento be restored in performances of Romantic scores. Early recordings document this particular paradigm shift quite clearly. The slide is one expressive device which, unlike vibrato, is clearly audible and measurable despite limitations in sonic technology or the number of players involved. Unfortunately, the HIPPLF, with characteristic tunnel vision, has largely refused to consider the implications of the disappearance of portamento as it relates to the vibrato question.

Now it just so happens that portamento and glissando are intimately connected with vibrato to this extent: they often sound perilously approximate without it. Enescu's Third Sonata, for example, recognizes this fact and almost invariably specifies vibrato in association with arrival at the destination note of a slide. Nielsen's Pan and Syrinx acknowledges this same practice and gets poetic mileage out of asking for "glissandi senza vibrato." Or consider Mahler's "molto espressivo" orgy of sentimental glissandos at figure 23 in the Second Symphony's first movement, just before its ghostly coda. Even a spunky neo-classicist like Martinu, in his String Trio No. 1 (the first piece he wrote on arriving in Paris in 1924), adds a healthy "molto espressivo" to the first violin's octave glissando on e-flat in measure 10 of the first movement. The very essence of the technique entails executing a seamless transition from one pitch to another, including everything in between (or as much as possible in the case of portamento). Absent vibrato, slides tend to sound poorly tuned and excessively exaggerated.

However, portamento and glissando are also the sworn enemies of rhythmic precision. In 20<sup>th</sup> century music featuring staccato or marcato ("strongly marked") articulation, often with highly irregular or syncopated rhythms, vibrato has an important role to play in keeping the melody vivid and prominently outlined against increasingly complex accompaniments. Stravinsky's 1947 revisions to Petrushka prove just that. Toss in a healthy dose of sliding, though, and you get rhythmic soup. And so when the anti-Romantic reaction set in during the early decades of the last century, vibrato stayed because the desire to express human emotion stayed (at least the less pathos-filled kind), but portamento had to go. The result was a practical and useful "blank canvas" sonority for the Romantic and 20<sup>th</sup> century works that form the bulk of the modern symphonic repertoire.

It stands to reason, then, that continuous vibrato in orchestral string sections, or something quite similar, has a much more ancient past than the HIPPLF would ever admit. There have been all kinds of changes to orchestras over the years: to instruments, the size of the ensemble, the halls, the length of programs, but in all such cases no one can put their finger on a date and say "this is when it must have happened." So it was

with vibrato: any change, if indeed it occurred, was gradual, sporadic, and all but imperceptible. It did not happen in a vacuum, and it never started from a baseline of zero, but rather was complimented and maybe even instigated by the creation of stable, full-time ensembles playing a new repertoire, one with different stylistic and technical parameters. And with all due respect to the academicians, the standard to which all expressive instrumental tone aspires, namely that of the human voice, has never truly changed.

In the final analysis, the degree to which such an evolution (and not a revolution) is measurable cannot be determined with absolute precision. It is not a function of what string pedagogues say, or of what one can glean from an atypical sampling of surviving written and aural documents, such as a few personal memoirs or technologically challenged recordings. It is a function of what happened on the day, of what the music actually sounded like in thousands of individual concerts over a period of decades, or even centuries. This evidence may be lost, but it doesn't mean that significant facts can't be reconstructed within a reasonable margin of error.

One thing is certain: the vibrato question remains a meaningless abstraction when viewed in isolation, absent consideration of the requirements of specific works. The issue was never one of "What do the pedagogical tracts mean," and it should never have been framed that way. The real question is: How did string players understand and respond to terms such as "espressivo," "appassionato," "tranquillo," "dolce," and "semplice?" On this question the most often-quoted treatises are virtually silent, and to the extent that they are not (Spohr's "con espressione" or "dolce") they seem to support the pro-vibrato position. However, when this informational deficit is remedied through reference to scores such as that of Enescu's Third Violin Sonata, we gain a much truer picture of what really matters: not what string players may have *learned*, but what they most likely actually *did*.

Additionally, as we saw at the very beginning of this essay, orchestras (and presumably soloists) have always understood that some repertoire asks for more vibrato, some less. They adjust their technique accordingly. So to say that string sections played all music in fundamentally the same fashion, particularly at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the active repertoire already encompassed generations of music composed in very different styles, is just plain stupid. It's the unfortunate byproduct of period performance specialists trying to obtain "authentic" sounds from modern instrument ensembles. Using the limited means available to them, such as an exaggerated avoidance of vibrato, they create an ugly caricature of string sonority, not to mention a travesty of idiomatic style and of the composer's clear intentions.

So which story makes the most sense: the idea that orchestras did not acquire continuous vibrato until a few great violin soloists picked up the habit and legitimized it as an example worthy of imitation--one which swept through all of the orchestras in the world in a matter of a few short years in stark defiance of taste and tradition? Or does the following explanation seem more reasonable:



Some kind of intrinsic orchestral vibrato was likely always present. It arose as the inevitable consequence of musicians performing in groups, first as loose aggregations of disparate personalities, and then as full-time, professionally salaried performing arts organizations with a definite conception of ensemble sonority. The basic string timbre of the modern-day orchestra had its origins in the numerous theaters and opera houses of the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, where the players themselves worked in an environment that constantly reinforced, and encouraged them to imitate, the vocal ideal of instrumental tone production which (not coincidentally) formed the basis of their initial training.

This state of affairs, in turn, is documented over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as composers attempted to assert control over every nuance of instrumental expressivity, marking their scores accordingly with a rich lexicon of well-understood descriptive and technical terms. The request to use additional vibrato, the varieties of ornamental vibrato, and above all, the directive to withhold vibrato, all attest to the validity of the above hypothesis. The designation to play without expression or without vibrato, in particular, most likely originated as a theatrical effect, making its way as a special tone-color into the Romantic symphony orchestra in tandem with the rise of program music in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had become yet another tool in the composer's expressive arsenal, appearing in scores with increasing frequency.

This, then, is what the evidence shows, evidence which in both parts of this essay consists of 215 individual works by 88 composers (give or take a couple), covering a period of more than two centuries (roughly 1760 to 1983). Consider how much information these scores contain--but also how infinitesimally small their number is compared to what is actually out there--and assess for yourself the likely answers to the vibrato question, as well as the probability that many more bits of the puzzle still await discovery. Given the weight of musical and historical evidence presented thus far, I suggest that logic as well as practical good sense all support the case for the presence of intrinsic string vibrato in the orchestra at a comparatively early date.

David Hurwitz

## Citations (Composers and Works in Parts One and Two)

Bach: Orchestral Suite No. 3  
Bartók: Piano Concerto No. 2  
Bartók: Suite No. 2  
Bartók: String Quartet No. 3  
Bartók: String Quartet No. 4  
Bartók: The Miraculous Mandarin  
Bartók: Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta  
Bartók: Divertimento  
Bartók: Violin Concerto No. 2  
Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra  
Bartók: Piano Concerto No. 2  
Bax: Symphony No. 3  
Bax: Symphony No. 5  
Bax: Symphony No. 6  
Bax: The Garden of Fand  
Bax: November Woods  
Bellini: Norma  
Beethoven: String Quartet No. 10  
Beethoven: String Quartet No. 13  
Beethoven: Symphony No. 9  
Beethoven: Symphony No. 6  
Berlioz: Roméo et Juliette  
Berlioz: Grande symphonie funèbre et triomphale  
Berg: Three Pieces for Orchestra  
Berg: String Quartet Op. 3  
Berg: Violin Concerto  
Berg: Lyric Suite  
Berg: Lulu Suite  
Bizet: Symphony in C  
Bloch: Symphony in C-sharp Minor  
Boëllmann: Variations Symphoniques  
Boito: Mefistofele  
Borodin: Polovtsian Dances  
Brahms: Symphony No. 1  
Brahms: Symphony No. 2  
Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2  
Brahms: Violin Concerto  
Brahms: Double Concerto  
Brahms: Violin Sonata No. 3  
Britten: War Requiem  
Britten: Frank Bridge Variations  
Britten: Gloriana  
Britten: The Turn of the Screw  
Britten: Quatre Chansons Francaises

Britten: Violin Concerto  
Bruch: Symphony No. 2  
Bruckner: Symphony No. 3  
Busoni: Geharnischte Suite  
Catalani: La Wally  
Chabrier: Gwendoline Overture  
Charpentier: Impressions d'Italie  
Debussy: La Mer  
Debussy: La Boite a Joujoux  
Diamond: Symphony No. 4  
Draeseke: Symphonia tragica (Symphony No. 3)  
Dukas: Symphony in C  
Dvorák: Symphony No. 9  
Dvorák: Symphony No. 4  
Dvorák: Symphony No. 5  
Dvorák: Symphonic Poem Op. 18  
Dvorák: The Wood Dove  
Dvorák: Rusalka  
Dvorák: Piano Quintet No. 2  
Elgar: Symphony No. 2  
Elgar: Cockaigne Overture  
Enescu: Violin Sonata No. 3  
Enescu: Suite No. 1  
Falla: Psyché  
Falla: Master Peter's Puppet Show  
Fétis: Fantaisie Symphonique for Organ and Orchestra  
Foote: Four Characteristic Pieces After the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam  
Franck: Symphony in D minor  
Franck: String Quartet  
Franck: Piano Quintet  
Franck: Trois Chorales  
Gilson: La Mer  
Ginastera: Piano Concerto  
Ginastera: String Quartet No. 1  
Glazunov: Symphony No. 4  
Glinka: Ruslan and Ludmila  
Glinka: Capriccio brillante (Spanish Overture No. 1)  
Glinka: Waltz Fantasy  
Glinka: Kamarinskaya  
Goldmark: Rustic Wedding Symphony  
Grieg: Holberg Suite  
Hartmann: Symphony No. 4  
Haydn: Symphony No. 88  
Haydn: The Seasons  
Haydn: Symphony No. 6 "Le Matin"  
Haydn: Symphony No. 7 "Le Midi"

Haydn: Symphony No. 55  
Haydn: Symphony No. 67  
Haydn: Symphony No. 92  
Haydn: Symphony No. 98  
Haydn: Symphony No. 99  
Haydn: String Quartet Op. 74 No. 1  
Haydn: String Quartet Op. 64 No. 3  
Hindemith: Concerto for Orchestra  
Holmboe: String Quartet No. 10  
Holst: The Planets  
Holst: Egdon Heath  
Huberti: Symphonie funèbre  
Janáček: String Quartet No. 1  
Janáček: Taras Bulba  
Janáček: Jenufa  
Janáček: Idyll for Strings  
Joachim: Hungarian Concerto  
Korngold: Sextet  
Korngold: String Quartet No. 1  
Kreisler: Caprice Viennoise  
Lajtha: Symphony No. 6  
Liszt: Dante Symphony  
Liszt: Faust Symphony  
Liszt: The Legend of St. Elizabeth  
Liszt: Christus  
Liszt: Cantique d'amour from Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses  
Liszt: Chapelle de Guillaume Tell from the first "year" of *Années de pèlerinage*  
Liszt: Petrarch Sonnet No. 104 from the second "year" of *Années de pèlerinage*  
Liszt: Fantasia sur une valse de Francois Schubert from *Apparitions*  
Loeffler: La Morte de Tintagiles  
Loeffler: A Pagan Poem  
Lutoslawski: Symphony No. 3  
Mahler: Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection"  
Mahler: Symphony No. 3  
Mahler: Symphony No. 4  
Mahler: Symphony No. 5  
Mahler: Symphony No. 6  
Mahler: Symphony No. 7  
Mahler: Symphony No. 8  
Mahler: Symphony No. 9  
Mahler: Das Klagende Lied  
Mahler: Das Lied von der Erde  
Mahler: Kindertotenlieder  
Martin: Petite Symphonie Concertante  
Martinu: String Trio No. 1  
Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto in E minor

Mendelssohn: "Scottish" Symphony (No. 3)  
Mendelssohn: "Reformation" Symphony (No. 5)  
Messiaen: Turangalila-Symphonie  
Mozart: Symphony No. 40  
Nielsen: Pan and Syrinx  
Nielsen: Maskarade  
Orff: Carmina Burana  
Pierné: Cydalise et le chevre-pied  
Pijper: Symphony No. 1  
Ponchielli: La Gioconda  
Prokofiev: Classical Symphony  
Prokofiev: Symphony No. 3  
Prokofiev: The Fiery Angel  
Prokofiev: Egyptian Nights  
Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 2  
Prokofiev: Piano Concerto No. 3  
Prokofiev: Symphony No. 2  
Puccini: La Bohème  
Puccini: The Girl of the Golden West  
Raff: Symphony No. 4  
Raff: Symphony No. 5 "Lenore"  
Reinecke: "Undine" Flute Sonata  
Rheinberger: Symphony No. 1  
Rode: Violin Concerto No. 7  
Rossini: Mosè in Egitto  
Rossini: Armida  
Rossini: Otello  
Rossini: La Donna del Lago  
Saint-Saëns: Danse macabre  
Saint-Saëns: Symphony No. 3  
Schoenberg: Erwartung  
Schulhoff: Symphony No. 1  
Schulhoff: String Quartet No. 1  
Schumann: Symphony No. 2  
Schumann: Symphony No. 3  
Shchedrin: Carmen Ballet  
Sibelius: Serenade No. 1  
Sibelius: Symphony No. 4  
Sibelius: The Tempest  
Spohr: Violin Concerto No. 8  
Spohr: Violin Concerto No. 9  
Spohr: Symphony No. 4 "The Consecration of Sound"  
Spohr: Symphony No. 6 "Historical"  
Spohr: Symphony No. 9 "The Four Seasons"  
Spohr: Jessonda  
Strauss: Elektra

Strauss: Salomé  
Strauss: Ein Heldenleben  
Strauss: Der Rosenkavalier  
Strauss: Don Juan  
Strauss: Death and Transfiguration  
Strauss: Violin Concerto  
Strauss: Macbeth  
Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring  
Stravinsky: Petrushka  
Stravinsky: The Firebird  
Stravinsky: Symphony in C  
Suk: Asrael Symphony  
Szymanowski: Violin Concerto No. 1  
Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 4  
Tchaikovsky: String Quartet No. 2  
Tchaikovsky: The Queen of Spades  
Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto  
van der Stucken: Symphonic Prolog to Heine's Tragedy "William Ratcliff"  
Vaughan Williams: Tallis Fantasia  
Vaughan Williams: A London Symphony  
Varèse: Ameriques  
Verdi: Otello  
Verdi: Macbeth  
Verdi: Il Corsaro  
Viotti: Violin Concerto No. 24  
Wagner: Das Liebesverbot  
Wagner: The Flying Dutchman  
Wagner: Tristan und Isolde  
Wagner: Die Meistersinger  
Wagner: Götterdämmerung  
Wagner: Rienzi Overture  
Zemlinsky: Lyric Symphony  
Zemlinsky: String Quartet No. 2  
Zemlinsky: Der Zwerg  
Zemlinsky: Sechs Gesänge Op. 13

215 works  
88 composers