

## **Orchestral Vibrato Part Two**

### **A Critique of Current Scholarship**

As I attempted to explain in the first part of this essay, I began writing without any intention of discussing the major scholarly authorities on the vibrato question. After all, nearly 120 pages on this very specialized subject surely are more than enough. I doubt that many of even the most fanatical readers have the time and curiosity to take it all in, but I also had several additional reasons for not going beyond my initial, limited objectives:

First: Although I make no claim to being familiar with everything written on the subject, I have read, in addition to the various primary and secondary sources mentioned in the main body of this essay, the work of Frederick Neumann, Clive Brown, Robin Stowell, Robert Donington, Roger Hickman, David Milsom, Werner Hauk, Siegfried Eberhardt, and others, some of whom will be mentioned below in due course. This is a narrow field, and everyone works from the same comparatively scanty body of historical writings, treatises, memoirs, and other such sources. That is why I suggested looking at the scores in the first place as an alternative. Much recent literature is extremely self-referential, and because of its current trendiness, perhaps less than ideally rigorous. In any case, we are all perfectly able to read Leopold Mozart, Quantz, Baillot, Flesch, or Spohr and draw our own conclusions.

Second: The evidence of the scores speaks for itself. No one, to the best of my knowledge, has attempted as wide-ranging a survey as this on the subject of orchestral vibrato. In this assumption I could be mistaken, but if so, the worst that can be said is that my work has been redundant. It doesn't change the validity of the facts presented or the conclusions that arise from them. Certainly, since I am dealing almost entirely with primary sources, I feel no need to call upon the work of others in order to substantiate what those sources say.

Third: If the scores offer evidence that, whatever it ultimately means, at least benefits from the clarity of the printed page, then the scholarship on the vibrato issue, particularly as it involves the analysis of historical recordings, is simply a quagmire of subjectivity and nonsense. There is no agreed definition of terms (including "vibrato"), no consistent methodology, and no standard of accuracy to which much of today's academic work aspires--or so it seems in surveying the extent literature. This obviously poses a major problem in trying offer a coherent discussion that addresses the myriad issues raised in the various secondary sources.

Fourth: Even where I may part company with the conclusions of some members of the early music scholarly community, I recognize and respect the value of much of the work that they have done in uncovering novel ideas and approaches to the interpretation of the classics. The issue, as I have taken great pains to explain, is not so much whether variable levels of vibrato existed at different times (surely they did), but rather the fact that certain

performers and their fans have taken this information as license to commit musical murder, using the scholarship to justify performances that go to extremes far beyond what the evidence suggests is reasonable, tasteful, or idiomatic to the music at hand.

Notwithstanding this rationale, since the appearance of the main body of this essay, which has now turned into a formal “Part One,” I have received numerous queries from interested readers, some nice and some not-so-nice, asking for--or challenging me to explain--my viewpoint, both on the scholarship as well as the related matter of the use of historical recordings as evidence. On this last subject particularly, both my prior academic training as well as more than twenty years’ work as a professional music and record critic seem well suited to my expertise and inclinations.

Accordingly in this Part Two, as a supplement to the information previously presented, I offer my thoughts on the aspects of these questions that I find most relevant and meaningful. Both the challenge and the reward, for me at least, is not so much in being “right” on the vibrato question, but in trying to assemble a sensible, coherent story from a wide variety of sources, one which reasonable readers can follow and accept as probable. It is the *improbable* aspect of so much current scholarship on this issue that got me started in the first place, and I hope that you will find the following discussion closer in substance to the practical, real-world habits of composers and performers.

### **Continuous Vibrato?**

Consider the following remarks:

“It’s interesting to note from recordings of Thibaud and Casals made well over a half-century ago that, though there was a great deal of freedom as far as rubato was concerned, vibrato was used with far more refinement and discretion than one normally finds today. The same is true of the vocal tradition. Great singers of the early part of the century whom we know from recordings had fine, pure vibratos. I think there is nowadays, generally speaking, a decline of taste in the use of vibrato.”

“Which is the master and which is the servant; the vibrato or the player? Generally speaking, there are two main problems: inequality in the production of vibrato (owing to technical limitations) and lack of variety in its application.”

“Teachers don’t sufficiently stress that vibrato is a musical device--a tool that should constantly be adjusted to the demands of the music, and not just poured over everything like maple syrup over a stack of pancakes.... The maple-syrup vibrato becomes meaningless--like someone going around smiling constantly no matter what he says. It would be just as well to have no vibrato as always to vibrate in the same way.”

“Take the ‘Heiliger Dankgesang’ from Beethoven’s Opus 132. In the opening statement we differentiate the quarter-note figure from the chorale, which moves in half notes, the quarter-note figure being played with vibrato--albeit very refined--and the chorale beginning with no vibrato at all.”

“At bar 103 [in the slow movement of Op. 74] Beethoven suddenly modulates to A-flat minor and writes a subito *pp*; five bars later ‘espressivo’ is indicated. At the *pp* we eliminate the vibrato entirely and barely touch the string with the bow; the change to A-flat minor thereby takes on a hushed, almost ominous quality.”

“Sometimes playing without vibrato can create a kind of intensity of its own, as in the *pp* introduction to Beethoven’s Opus 132. Playing in this way the notes convey a mysterious sense of foreboding. The line is preserved by very legato string crossings, expressive intonation, and the alla breve motion. The vibrato is reserved for the ‘hairpins,’ and their effect is therefore all the more arresting.”

These are not the comments of period instrument specialists or scholars focusing on the stylistic conventions of prior centuries. They are the statements of members of the very modern Guarneri Quartet in *The Art of Quartet Playing: The Guarneri Quartet in conversation with David Blum* (Knopf/Cornell University Press, 1986). So let’s get one thing straight that members of the “authenticity” movement would often have us forget: They are not the only people who listen to old recordings, study and analyze the playing of earlier times, and model their interpretations to a greater or lesser extent on what we know about the most important artists of past generations. This is what *all* well-trained, properly educated string players do as participants in a living tradition of performance practice.

It isn’t the facts that are new, only the way that they are being interpreted and used by certain of today’s academics and performers; and it is the claims of the period instrument movement that if anything represent a genuine rupture with the past. As previously noted, and as the above remarks by the members of the Guarneri Quartet plainly reveal, there is no such thing as “continuous vibrato” in artfully played, traditional classical music (that is, anything not belonging to the 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde). The very term is a misnomer, like “monothematic sonata form.”

Throughout this essay I have insisted on this point, particularly in connection with orchestral music, but it’s just as true in writing for the solo violin and for chamber ensembles. Granted, there will be times when vibrato can be used continuously, but what the term really means is “used variably whenever desired *and* possible.” Given the fact that modern violinists do not and cannot use vibrato all of the time, the lack of clarity in this respect is a major defect that distorts many otherwise sensible ideas concerning the frequency of its use. After all, in order to make any quantitative comparison it’s necessary to give a detailed accounting of the objects being compared.

The failure to provide an accurate description of “continuous vibrato” creates a straw man that has the same usefulness in both the scholarly and performing spheres: it exaggerates the significance of the issue. This gives performers the opportunity both to define and justify their interpretive view in opposition to some vague, theoretical modern norm, and it gives scholars the right to claim a relevance for their studies that otherwise would be far more difficult to substantiate. After all, if the reality of the situation is that

your typical 19<sup>th</sup> century *espressivo* requires vibrato on, say, 50% of the sustained notes, and a modern continuous vibrato covers 70% of them, then who really cares? Is this difference audibly significant enough for performers to claim credit for employing a fresh new interpretive approach, or for scholars to earn the approbation of colleagues for making a major new discovery? I think not.

The tendency to oversell the meaningfulness of musicological findings is exacerbated by the alliance between scholars and performers. In itself, there's nothing wrong with this; indeed, it represents one of the most gratifying and exciting aspects of modern musical scholarship. After all, a "regular" historian cannot reenact the Battle of Waterloo to test a new theory about, say, the importance of cavalry operations to 19<sup>th</sup> century French warfare. But musicians can apply new ideas to the appropriate repertoire at will. The problems only arise when theory takes over as the principal determinant of an interpretation at the expense of other, more important and basic stylistic considerations. This is what has happened in considering the vibrato question.

Of all the myths promulgated by the current HIP orthodoxy, then, none is more misleading than that of "continuous vibrato." By implication, of course, this means constant, monochrome, obtrusive, artery-clogging, sweaty emotional excess, the musical equivalent of a high-cholesterol diet. Scholars writing principally for each other, and particularly those who are themselves practicing musicians, naturally know that this construct is nonsense. But they sometimes play along nonetheless for the sake of making their case, refraining from describing what continuous vibrato is, how it works, and the range of timbres that it encompasses.

This is particularly true of artists who ostentatiously promulgate the period performance cause in the most popular, late Romantic repertoire, finding in this gambit a useful way of drawing attention to specific interpretative elements, or even sometimes entire careers, that otherwise would fail to excite general notice. Critics play along too. It gives us something new to talk about, and spares us the effort of close, comparative listening based on a thorough knowledge of the scores. Implicit in most of the theories underlying these revisionist interpretations is the assumption that 19<sup>th</sup> century string tone, by virtue of its vibratoless basis, allowed a greater variety of tone-colors by treating vibrato strictly as an ornament.

Clearly something isn't right here.

You don't need a PhD to assert that composers want performers to bring their entire range of expression to bear, as appropriate, to everything that they play, and that string virtuosi understand this, behave accordingly, and always have. Besides, even if we grant the notion that most 19<sup>th</sup> century soloists (not orchestras, I hasten to add) operated from a non-vibrato starting point, it does not follow that continuous vibrato is inherently less expressively varied and colorful than vibrato when more infrequently used. But let's stop theorizing, and look at some concrete examples that will make the above points perfectly clear.



The above extract is the opening solo of the Canzonetta second movement from Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. We are fortunate in that not only do we have modern sound recordings to study but also videos, which really do offer the only method of investigating the subtleties of a soloist's use of vibrato with consistent reliability, even when we have the advantage of excellent sonics. If you take the time to view the live concert DVDs of Itzhak Perlman (with Eugene Ormandy) and David Oistrakh (with Gennady Rozhdestvensky) playing this passage, the results turn out to be very enlightening.

First, both players take the low D that begins each phrase of the melody on an open string, and thus without vibrato. Perlman also plays the three rising eighth-notes in measure 13 non-vibrato, but uses vibrato in the next bar on the three tenuto Ds. Oistrakh plays measure 13 with vibrato, but withholds it on the first of the tenutos Ds, introducing it gradually so as to lead into the trill in measure 15, which has no vibrato on the ensuing "small notes" in either performance (they are too quick). The half-note D in measure 16 gets vibrato from both players, but the following low D is an open string once again.

This pattern basically repeats itself as the music progresses: the sixteenths in measures 19 and 20 have no vibrato. Oistrakh withholds it from the G in measure 19; Perlman does not. Both make a characterful contrast between stopped and open strings at the low Ds in measure 20. At the climax of the melody (measures 28ff) the use of vibrato in both performances is most "continuous," but even here, particularly in the sequence of eighth-notes in measures 28-30, Perlman and Oistrakh employ a clear pattern of vibrato and non-vibrato tones as an aid to phrasing.

This, then, is modern "continuous vibrato," and as you can plainly hear (and see), it isn't continuous at all. It appears frequently, to be sure, and I'm not even going to go into the different levels of vibrato that both soloists use, from very broad to extremely minimal; but it's worth pointing out that beyond the question of just how often vibrato comes into play, both Perlman and Oistrakh are quite conscious of the need to vary the timbral color of the melody as much as possible, even if this means playing some notes on open strings

or with no vibrato whatsoever. This is what virtuoso violinists are supposed to do, no matter what period we are discussing.

Now consider Prof. Clive Brown in his article “Bowing Styles, Vibrato and Portamento in Nineteenth-Century Violin Playing<sup>1</sup>” (Journal of the Royal Academy of Music, 1988) quoting Charles de Bériot’s *Méthode de violon* (1858) as follows:

“Vibrato (*son vibré*) is an accomplishment with the artist who knows how to use it with effect, and to abstain from it when that is necessary; but it becomes a fault when too frequently employed. This habit, *involuntarily acquired*, degenerates into a bad shake or nervous trembling which cannot afterwards be overcome and which produces a fatiguing monotony. The voice of the singer, like the fine quality of tone of the violinist, is impaired by this great fault.”

Brown then goes on to cite the example on the following page as evidence of “how sparingly Bériot felt the device should be used.” Both the quotation and the example are remarkable. Nowhere does Brown point out the distinction between a “bad shake” which is “involuntarily acquired,” and a well-modulated vibrato technique. Nor does he attempt to address the heart of the issue that Bériot raises, which is the need for the artist to avoid a “fatiguing monotony” of timbre, a goal of which, as the examples of Perlman and Oistrakh make abundantly clear, serious artists are well aware in deploying vibrato to color a melodic line. And it goes without saying that Bériot is addressing the student and not the established virtuoso; the only way to get his reaction to the modern school of vibrato would be to permit him to hear an Oistrakh or a Perlman in action, and that of course is impossible.

The bottom line is that there is nothing in modern technique which is inconsistent with the ideals, or unaware of the pitfalls, outlined by Bériot above, even if we grant that vibrato is more frequently used today than would have been readily sanctioned by the 19<sup>th</sup> century treatise-writers. It would thus be logical to conclude that the distance between Bériot and today’s violinists is not as great as Prof. Brown and his colleagues would have us believe, at least to the extent that the goal of avoiding “a fatiguing monotony” is achieved in the presence of vibrato to some degree. A glance at the musical example shows this to be exactly the case, and Brown’s failure to note this fact offers telling proof of what can only be called an “anti-vibrato bias,” one that results in a singular inability to let the evidence speak for itself.

Bériot’s melody starts off with a sparing use of vibrato, but at the point at which he marks the solo “*espressivo*,” he lays it on with a gusto that is strikingly similar to what you can see for yourself in the Oistrakh and Perlman performances noted above. In all three examples, we find a characterful alternation of vibrato and non-vibrato timbres, with the former certainly used frequently enough so as to give the impression of a “continuous” singing line.

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion of vibrato in this essay parallels in more concise (and in my opinion, cogent) form that contained in Prof. Brown’s subsequent book *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900*.

I hope that I need not point out the expressive distance (and vibrato-friendly potential) between this example, the violinistic equivalent of a Czerny exercise, and the “*molto espressivo*” Canzonetta of Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto. But more significantly, Brown doesn’t either. In other words, he completely ignores the critical issue of the difference between a musical example designed so as to make (exaggerate?) a pedagogical point to a student, and the legitimate interpretive possibilities open to a certified virtuoso playing an acknowledged masterpiece of musical art.

Even the notion of a vibratoless *morendo* phrase-ending such as we find in Bériot’s melody remains very much part of modern practice. To hear and view one particularly compelling example, consider Nathan Milstein’s 1972 video of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto (with Boult), where in measure 15 of the Larghetto he concludes his first entrance, following the trill, with an exquisite fermata F-sharp, diminuendo and completely without vibrato.

**MELODY.**

*Sombre and dramatic colouring Necessary em. phrasing of vibrated sounds and the portamento in the places indicated*

Andantino con molto espress. ♩ = 92

**MELODIE**

*Couleur sombre et dramatique Emploi nécessaire des sons vibrés et des ports de voix aux endroits indiqués*

The musical score is for a piece in 3/4 time, marked 'Andantino con molto espress.' with a tempo of 92 beats per minute. It features a Violin and Piano arrangement. The Violin part is written in a single staff, while the Piano accompaniment is split across two staves. The score includes various musical notations such as trills, slurs, and dynamic markings. Key markings include 'dim' (diminuendo), 'cresc' (crescendo), '2e Corde' (second string), and 'morendo' (fading out). The score is divided into two main sections: 'MELODY.' and 'MELODIE', each with a descriptive note in French/Italian. The 'MELODY.' section includes a note about 'Sombre and dramatic colouring' and 'Necessary em. phrasing of vibrated sounds and the portamento in the places indicated'. The 'MELODIE' section includes a note about 'Couleur sombre et dramatique' and 'Emploi nécessaire des sons vibrés et des ports de voix aux endroits indiqués'. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 3/4.

In truth, it's possible to read these historical treatises in several ways, because most are simply of two minds on the subject of vibrato. On the one hand, they enthusiastically endorse its expressive qualities and demand that the student learn its various techniques. Then, having asked budding virtuosos to do all of that work, they caution them in the most dire terms against using their new-found facility to excess. In short, they behave exactly like textbooks always have, and we find the same caution repeated over and over with respect to many other topics aside from vibrato. Baillot, for example, in *L'Art du violon* (1835) gives this warning concerning use of the imitative possibilities of the various individual strings:

“Having presented the resources that can be found in the various timbres of the four strings of the violin, and the advantages that can be drawn from them, we must warn students against the abuse of these sorts of effects...”

Or consider this, on sliding:

“Expression through fingering must be employed carefully and with delicacy, as must all expressive detail. The violinist will therefore avoid using it too often, and will also avoid sliding with either too much force or the slightest affectation.”

And this, on tempo rubato:

“The *tempo rubato* makes a grand effect, but by its very nature it would become tiring and intolerable if used often. It tends to express uneasiness and agitation, and few composers have notated or indicated it; the character of the passage is generally enough to lead the performer to improvise it according to the inspiration of the moment. He should use it only in spite of himself, so to speak, when he is carried away by expressiveness; this makes him appear to lose the beat and to assuage himself thus of the trouble obsessing him.”

On the technique of string-crossing known as *bariolage*:

“*Bariolage* is not always indicated in the music. It should be used only very sparingly and only in certain passages which lend themselves to this string crossing, and to this mixture of fingered notes and open strings.”

Finally, of “effects” in general (including unisons and octaves, harmonics, use of the mute, pizzicato, etc):

“Whatever the nature of these effects may be, they give a piquant variety to the composition; some of them can even serve as a pleasing episode within a cadenza. If they are employed too frequently, however, they soon dull the senses and even destroy at its source the pleasure they should be giving. They are precious gems whose rarity determines their price; if they are abused even the least little bit, they become an indulgence which ends up undermining talent.”

(All of the above examples are taken from Baillot: *The Art of the Violin*, tr. Louise Goldberg, Northwestern University Press, 1991)



We could go on and on, moving from one pedagogical work to the next, each of which has its own special take on the repertoire of violinistic dos and don'ts, but I am sure that you get the point. Everything must be poised, tasteful, restrained, the emotion reserved only for those climaxes of singular passion. But wait! I hear you cry. Aren't Tchaikovsky and his contemporaries Romantic composers whose music expresses the very soul of passion most of the time? Didn't Brahms marry formal discipline to remarkable intensity of feeling in his symphonies and chamber works? Well, yes, they did, and so we see that the "classical" ideal of the textbook is no more applicable to what great works of art regularly express than textbook theories of form accurately reflect compositional reality in that area.

This doesn't mean that Baillot and his fellow treatise-writers offer nothing but a collection of proscriptions and inhibitions. At one point he notes: "A confusion well presented is often an artistic effect...if it results from work and inspiration, and if the artist uses it without being obliged to think of the means he is using." In other words, some things can't be accurately notated and taught in a textbook<sup>2</sup>. They depend on the passion of the moment, and the emotional qualities of the individual work being played. But in general, both the treatise-writers' own music as well as their written pedagogical methods parcel out expression one teaspoonful at a time.

Staying with the example of the Canzonetta from Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, consider this fact alone: that the solo violin part is designated as muted for the entire movement. Does this "dull the senses?" Does the famous pizzicato scherzo from the same composer's Fourth Symphony "destroy the source of pleasure" that this effect should produce because it persists through the whole piece? Either such advanced music from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cannot exist in Baillot's system of aesthetics at all, or his remarks need to be taken only as very general observations that may or may not be applicable to individual works, however forcibly they may be expressed.

Furthermore, as noted in the main essay, none of the contemporary treatises addresses the relevance of these various rules to orchestral playing. They are entirely directed toward solo work in concertos or chamber music. The use of strings as accompaniment, whether to voices or other instruments, constitutes a field unto itself, one that isn't so much ignored as it is taken for granted to the extent that a soloist must be able to do everything an orchestral player can, technically, and then some. Nevertheless, one has only to leaf through a Rossini opera to understand that when orchestral strings take a subsidiary role, colorful effects such as pizzicato, muting, ponticello, col legno, and others have both a different purpose, and may be used far more extravagantly when they are not designed as the primary focus of the listener's attention.

It is quite clear, then, in considering these treatises *as a whole*, that the cautionary language used with respect to vibrato is not unique, but generic. And as in the case of

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<sup>2</sup> Baillot's remarks in his chapter on "Tone" occur in the context of his description of *tempo rubato*, but they immediately precede, and are just as applicable to, the ensuing discussion of vibrato in the same section. In both cases, Baillot offers musical examples which he stresses are only approximations, pointing out that "all passionate expression...loses much of its effect if executed literally."

Bériot, the musical examples that Baillot chooses sometimes seem to contradict the verbal advice. Here, for instance, he offers an illustration of the left-hand vibrato theoretically used by Viotti himself in a comparatively unemotional minuet from one of his string quartets:

Viotti, String Quartet in G Major, G. 114 (White II:15). 2nd movement, entire Minuet.

Menuetto comodo

The musical score is for a minuet in G major, Op. 114, No. 15 by Giovanni Viotti. It is in 3/4 time and consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a piano (p) dynamic and the instruction 'somewhat softly'. It features a wavy line above the notes indicating vibrato. The second staff continues the melody with a piano (p) dynamic. The third staff features a forte (f) dynamic followed by a fortissimo (ff) dynamic. The piece ends with a 'segue' marking.

Once again the use of vibrato, if carried through the entire movement in the fashion indicated above, would hardly differ in quantity from that found in Oistrakh and Perlman's handling of the opening of the Canzonetta of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto--and this without any consideration given to the degree of emotional intensity appropriate to the latter work's period or style. And yet we find Baillot confidently quoted by Brown and others in support of the "only when absolutely necessary" school of vibrato. This strikes me as a flagrant disregard of what Baillot's (and Bériot's) actual musical examples tell us, not to mention the universally accepted, overarching concept that the first responsibility of the performer is to submit himself to the expressive demands of the composer.

So if Baillot could state that "noise and confusion begin where music ends," then we might equally validly note that "art begins where mere schooling ends." To cite these sources without acknowledging the very real and obvious tension between what they say and what genuine artists (and not-so-genuine artists) were likely doing *in specific works*, particularly as the 19<sup>th</sup> century wore on and same treatises remained in general use, is an exercise in intellectual shallowness. I will return to this topic a bit later, towards the end of this essay. For now, let's just say that if scholarship seeks to serve as a basis for interpretation in the "authentic" manner, it has an obligation to quantify to the extent possible the degree of legitimate difference between modern technique and that of prior eras. I submit that in this respect it has failed miserably when it comes to vibrato.

Whether this constitutes a sin of omission or one of commission I'm not prepared to say; but either way, the evidence suggests that the audible gap in the use of vibrato between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is not nearly so wide as either the academic community or some of today's more radical "historically informed" performers would like us to believe. Both groups have every reason to exaggerate the significance of their purported

discoveries, and the practical result has been a spate of interpretations that fall exactly into the trap that Bériot describes, only at the opposite end of the aural spectrum. The virtual absence of vibrato results in just as much “fatiguing monotony” as does an unbridled excess.

### **Misuse and Misreading of the Evidence**

*Why does written instruction find itself in opposition to practical instruction? It is to be noted that all tendencies have their origin in the atmosphere of a certain period. As regards the “classical” Methods that I have seen I would say that they do not represent any period, in that their authors, without further research, have contented themselves with noting down the out-of-date “laws,” purposely ignoring the innumerable technical formulas of our times, under the pretext of their being “exceptions” or the result of “individual license.” If I attack this absence of pedagogic progress it is because of the personal conviction that certain “rules,” considered at one time indispensable for perfect execution, are not only useless, but might in our day be considered nefarious.*

---Pablo Casals, introduction to Alexanian’s *Complete Cello Technique* (1910-14)

Casals makes an excellent place to begin this discussion, because he is often viewed by the period performance folks as a “transitional” figure when it comes to vibrato, the example most frequently cited being his refined use of it in that celebrated recording of the Dvorák Cello Concerto with the Czech Philharmonic under George Szell. Robert Philip sums up this view nicely in *Early Recordings and Musical Style*. He writes:

“Of all the string-players who lived through the change from the traditional to the modern approach, the one who most succeeded in combining the virtues of the old and the new styles was the cellist Casals. Casals’ view has already been quoted, that vibrato should be used most of the time, but that it should vary in character from ‘spaced and supple’ to ‘rapid and nervous’, depending on the musical circumstances. Recordings shows that the variety of his vibrato was indeed one of the keys to the unique quality of his playing.” (p. 105)

Philip is one of the many writers on this subject whose work combines a fascinating amount of research and information gathering with some truly second-rate analysis. As Casals’ own statement at the head of this section shows, he did not view himself as a transitional figure with a sentimental attachment to certain technical rules of previous centuries. He was a self-described, card-carrying progressive who was perfectly conscious of the fact. The treatise by Diran Alexanian for which he wrote the introduction--“based on principles that I myself accept,” as Casals further claimed--has this to say about vibrato:

“As a general rule one should abstain from using the vibrato only in certain rapid virtuoso passages, where it is absolutely out of the question to give an individual color to each note, or again, in musical situations requiring, according to the taste of the player, a dull sonority; and finally, in any case where having to play a part belonging to the harmony

(bass or middle voice), one might fear, by giving life to it, to interfere with the bringing out of the melodic voice.” (Alexanian, p. 97)

In order to show that Alexanian’s dictum isn’t an exercise in abstract aesthetic theorizing but is based on real-world compositional and performance practice, I offer below an extract from Gabriel Pierné’s *Cydalise et le chevre-pied*, Suite No. 1 (a work not cited previously in Part One). Here, as you can plainly see, the melody is given to the solo clarinet *piano, espressivo et tendre*, while the pianissimo divided cellos, muted and *sans expression*, have the very carefully balanced accompaniment. This is clearly a situation where, as Alexanian suggests, vibrato would be inappropriate. Too rich a timbre, particularly given the indicated subtle variation in dynamics, risks upstaging the clarinet’s gentle principal tune.

The fact that Pierné takes pains to mark the cello part “without expression” shows, yet again, that some degree of coloration in the form of vibrato would have been the norm at the time of composition, in this case 1915--contemporary with Alexanian’s treatise and Casals’ maturity. This distinctive texture persists for a full 27 bars. Pierné’s is a particularly apt example, because aside from his work as a composer he was a conductor of distinction, leading the Concerts Colonne Orchestra from 1910 to 1934. Thus, like his exact contemporary Mahler, his scores combine a modern sensibility with a keen practical understanding of how orchestral musician behave. You can, by the way, actually hear (or rather, *not* hear) Pierné conduct this very passage on his 1931 recording with the Colonne Orchestra.

### Pierné (1863-1937): *Cydalise et le chevre-pied* Suite No. 1

40 Andante (con eleganza) 1<sup>re</sup> Solo *ten. ten. ten. ten. ten.*  
Clar. 1 *p espr. et tendre*

40 Andante (con eleganza) (54 =  $\text{♩}$ )  
1<sup>re</sup> Harpe *Solo mf dim. p*

1<sup>re</sup> Vols  
2<sup>de</sup> Vols  
Altos

1<sup>er</sup> pup.  
2<sup>e</sup> pup.  
3<sup>e</sup> et 4<sup>e</sup> pup.  
C. B.

Sourdine *arco*  
Sourdine le 1<sup>er</sup> du 2<sup>e</sup> pup. *arco*  
*pp (sans expression)*  
*pizz.*  
*p (léger)*

Alexanian's is not just a perfect definition of Casals' approach to tone-color, as Philip describes it above, it also constitutes the ideal definition of modern continuous vibrato--not only in terms of what other noted pedagogues such as Carl Flesch say, but also as it relates to what all virtuosos do (or believe they do). Recall the remarks of the Guarneri Quartet previously cited. I challenge Philip or any other period performance specialist to find any modern string players of acknowledged genius whose fame rests on their claim to apply vibrato uniformly under all circumstances, irrespective of the repertoire or the emotional climate of the music in question, so as to create a monochrome timbral palette.

The very notion is silly, but not as silly as Philip's conclusion: "Unlike most players, whose vibrato makes the tone sound homogeneous (as d'Aranyi and others complained), Casals uses vibrato to make his tone seem even more varied in character than it could have been without vibrato" (pp. 105-6). Well golly, frequently applied vibrato can actually be used *by degrees* intelligently, colorfully, and expressively. What an astonishing notion! And who are the "most players" of whom Philip speaks? No doubt there were some who used lots of vibrato and sounded rich-toned and boring, just as there were some who didn't use vibrato so much and sounded thin-toned and boring. All this proves is that not all string players are top-notch artists, and the use of vibrato changes nothing in this regard. What do Philip and his crowd believe continuous vibrato is supposed to do--turn a bunch of ill-trained violinistic frogs into sweet-toned musical princes?

The principal weakness in Philip's argument, one shared by many of his colleagues and which crops up time and again, is that Casals is not being compared to any exemplars of modern vibrato in order to define either anecdotally or via recordings their respective stylistic parameters. Rather, his personal art finds itself set against a caricature, an abstraction of a type of vibrato that has never existed among superior artists, whether in Casals' day or ours. But then, Philip has no way to get around an insurmountable problem.

The very notion of the performance practice of an entire era presupposes an average of what typical players did, whereas major careers and the publicity that attends them, including ultimately the making of recordings (particularly when the technology was still in its infancy), enjoyed special privileges because they were the greatest, most distinctive, most individual talents. In other words, Casals doesn't differ from his less timbrally interesting colleagues because of his refusal to abandon elements of an earlier style. He differs from them because he's the greater artist.

Casals also lies at the heart of another controversy, one that truly reveals the shallowness and duplicity that colors much of the HIP position on vibrato. This concerns a comment made by Arnold Schoenberg on hearing the a broadcast performance of the Dvorák Cello Concerto. Here is Schoenberg's remark in full, bits of which sometimes turn up in scholarly essays, usually selectively quoted or taken out of context:

"Vibrato has degenerated into a mannerism just as intolerable as portamento-legato. Even though one may at times find the latter unavoidable, and admissible for the purposes of

lyrical expression, its almost incessant use even for intervals of a second is as reprehensible technically as from the point of view of taste.

But I find even worse that goat-like bleating used by many instrumentalists to curry favor with the public. This bad habit is so general that one could begin to doubt one's own judgment and taste, did one not occasionally have the pleasure, as I did recently, of finding oneself supported by a true artist. I listened on the radio to Pablo Casals play the Dvorák Cello Concerto. Extremely sparing vibrato, exclusively to give life to long notes, and carried out with moderation, not too quickly, not too slowly, and without detriment to intonation. *Never* that sentimental portamento...." [*Style and Idea*, p. 346]

Is this an outright condemnation of continuous vibrato? Let us leave aside for now the issue of Schoenberg's ability accurately to perceive what Casals actually does via a 1940 radio broadcast (and unless played live, in a technically mediocre 1937 recording). The obvious point is that Schoenberg makes a distinction between what the best artists do, and the pandering of inferiors to the debased tastes of the public. As you will see in reading through this essay, neither Schoenberg's elitism nor his complaining about a heavy vibrato's popular appeal is unique to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's a lament easily traceable all the way back to the 1600s, if not before. More to the point, it is obvious that Schoenberg objects not so much to the frequent use of vibrato, but rather to the tone quality resulting from an excess of the wrong kind.

Nevertheless, you could make an argument that Schoenberg was no fan of vibrato. Perhaps this was Roger Norrington's intention when, in an article printed (to its everlasting shame) by the New York Times, he reduced Schoenberg's highly specific diatribe to the following sound byte: "Schoenberg likened vibrato to the unpleasant sound of a Billy-goat." That's it. The obvious problem with this formulation is that it materially distorts what Schoenberg actually says. All vibrato has miraculously become equally distasteful, precisely the opposite of Schoenberg's original point, and because Norrington considers portamento valid (in his own performances), he declines to so much as hint that Schoenberg's strictures are aimed as much at the former as at the latter.

That Norrington has no interest in Schoenberg's true position with respect to vibrato becomes even more obvious in considering an earlier essay in the same volume, *Style and Idea*, in which Schoenberg sets out in detail, and with full approval, the aesthetic argument in favor of its continuous use as intrinsic timbre:

"All the same I find it more important to note down for once this correct idea (I have already said it to many people, often, but never put it down). So:

The basis of what we feel to be a living, beautiful, warm tone is a certain impurity. Where for once we can see quite clearly, can distinguish beyond all doubt, artistic enjoyment comes to an end, remarkably enough(!). Now, is it that what is pure, the ultimate discovery, is already so clarified that one has to destroy its purity (by admixture) in order to establish any contact with it; or is it that since the material (even, if one may say it, the

material of ideas) is faulty, it calls for touching-up, which throws the true relationships in shadow and makes the defects invisible?

In any case, in music the interest in wholly pure tones is less great than one ought to suppose. At least, practically speaking—even though theoretically (as I have hinted) one would tend to assume the opposite....

Here...I should mention just two phenomena which, so far as I know have not been explained (see Riemann)<sup>3</sup>: 1. Vibrato. 2. Choral sound.

Both, in my view, are based on the same principle: instead of a ‘single’, ‘pure’, ‘isolated’, ‘stiff’, ‘clear’, ‘lifeless’, ‘definitive’ tone there appear many tones of assorted pitch (‘more colorful’, ‘louder’, ‘more rounded’), whose combined effect is ‘lively’, ‘accessible’, ‘*living*’, etc. This mixture (as the whole idea implies) is *impure* in point of pitch, tone-color, loudness, etc.

First, *vibrato*—it might be best to discuss the violin, since the practical application follows relatively easily here. To even the unpracticed ear, there is a striking difference in sound between ‘open’ and ‘stopped’ strings. And one can easily establish that some violinists have a ‘beautiful’, ‘warm’ tone, while a ‘sour’ tone, which also sounds ‘impure’, ‘cold’, ‘unattractive’, has no vibrato, or little, or the wrong kind.

But what is vibrato on stringed instruments?

Whereas the ‘open’ string shuts off its far end with a hard, ‘stiff’ piece of wood, giving a ‘sharp demarcation’, in the case of the ‘stopped’ note this marking-off is done by the ‘soft’, ‘movable’ finger, giving less sharp demarcation. So absence of vibrato will not mean a pure tone, because of this indefinite demarcation. The note need not actually be out of tune, but its intonation is unconvincing. There will, in addition, be a vague tremor on the part of the finger. So to touch up the impurity of this lifeless tone one uses vibrato.... This makes the tone ‘living’, ‘interesting’, ‘lively’, ‘warm’, and all the rest of it.” [*Style and Idea*, pp 149-50]

The above analysis offers a perfect description of what I call in Part One of this essay “blank canvas” vibrato, and as you can plainly see, Schoenberg recognizes, understands, and approves of its practical necessity. How could he not? The evidence, as he points out with relentless specificity, lies in the language used historically to differentiate tones that employ vibrato on stringed instruments from those that do not. These descriptors are hardly unique to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They lie at the very heart of the centuries-old requirement that all musical instruments imitate the communicative immediacy of that oldest and most important of all instruments: the human voice.

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, as you will see below, Schoenberg was incorrect. Vibrato was being explained at precisely this time in some detail by Dr. Carl Emil Seashore in his pioneering work in the psychology of music.

The fact that certain members of the HIP community have attempted to challenge convention with their own, contrary collection of adjectives (such as “artery-clogging,” “heavy,” “thick”, and “muddy”) which they employ to describe traditional timbral ideals, changes nothing. After all, while modern audiences may be persuaded to accept the new vocabulary the issue is not what listeners today allow themselves to believe; it is what audiences in times past demanded, and what artists accordingly offered them. And to carry this analysis even further into the realm of actual performance, which type of tone quality, “living” or “dead,” “vocal” or “mechanical,” do you think any sane violinist would choose to cultivate in any period in history?

Schoenberg, understands what so many intellectually sterile occupants of the corridors of academe do not: that when it comes to music, what governs the practical behavior of performers is *how the end result really sounds*. Indeed, you might well argue that only the peculiar circumstances of music in the modern area—that fact that musicians get paid (and even encouraged) irrespective of the appalling quality of some of the sounds that they make--have permitted vibrato-less playing to flourish. If, as in centuries past, players still starved to death or took up other work when no one wanted to listen to them, I suspect this entire controversy never would have arisen, and to this extent we see quite clearly that the current view of vibrato is entirely modern and anti-historical, however carefully it may be draped in the trappings of “authenticity.”

Be that as it may, from this survey of the broad range of Schoenberg’s thought on the subject, we can conclude that his objections to vibrato solely concern the particularly gross, exaggerated variety. If there is any Billy goat-like bleating going on, then it’s coming from characters like Roger Norrington. Based on the foregoing, in Schoenberg’s praise of Casals’ playing it would be perfectly reasonable to assume that the vibrato he describes—that is, the type being used audibly and selectively “only on long notes”--belongs to the more obvious variety that functions as expressive ornament, while that fundamental to good tone production, as Schoenberg defines it, may be taken for granted (even assuming that it could be detected as vibrato in the first place).

What then does “typical” for the early 20<sup>th</sup> century sound like? Certainly not Pablo Casals. If Robert Philip’s more valid remarks on his playing mean anything, they are truisms. The same observation applies to Schoenberg. Great string players always vary their tone color and apply vibrato intelligently and tastefully. Lousy ones do not. *Plus ça change!* As evidence of the specific idea that Casals’ selective and varied use of vibrato was in fact a remnant of the “old school” practice of limiting its application, Philip’s analysis stands beyond the pale of logic.

Unfortunately, it’s a kind of thinking that’s not as uncommon as it ought to be in serious scholarly work on the vibrato question. More to the point, if conclusions about vibrato can go so completely awry in considering a major 20<sup>th</sup> century artist who left a substantial recorded legacy, you can only imagine how confused and distorted the thinking must be in considering the subject to which we now turn our attention: the attempt to quantify the presence of vibrato in much earlier periods and extrapolate the results forward into our recent past. I offer into evidence the following archetypal example.



In an extremely interesting article entitled “The censored publications of *The Art of Playing on the Violin*, or Geminiani unshaken,” appearing in the journal *Early Music* (1983), Roger Hickman describes the fact that when the Italian virtuoso’s treatise was published in some later editions, passages advocating the use of continuous vibrato were conspicuously deleted. This interesting observation is then used to set up the basic hypothesis that a sparing, purely ornamental use of vibrato was the norm. Now it should be obvious that, fascinating as the evidence may be, no such conclusion necessarily follows.

Hickman observes that Geminiani’s position finds no support in other important treatises. As we will see shortly this is untrue, but in any case he is not directly attacked or challenged in the literature that Hickman cites. Early music scholar David Boyden (see below), in his preface to the facsimile edition (OUP, 1951) of Geminiani’s *The Art of Playing on the Violin*, notes that “Geminiani’s expressive ideas are not unique among violinists of the time; on the contrary, they were probably quite prevalent, especially among the Italians.” Indeed, we do not know why the offending passages were deleted. Nor, when all is said and done, can we ignore the very real evidence (from Leopold Mozart and others) that the effect that Geminiani describes was commonplace. After all, the Bible denounces the sin of onanism, but everybody commits it nonetheless<sup>4</sup>.

More to the point, when it comes to the question of orchestral vibrato, and solely on the basis of the contention that Geminiani is the only major authority who advocates its continuous (solo) use, Hickman notes:

“...the following observation by David Boyden concerning the use of vibrato before 1756 continues to be valid until the end of the [18<sup>th</sup>] century. ‘*Vibrato was generally restricted to certain contexts as an ornament. It was also primarily the property of advanced players and soloists. It is unlikely that orchestral players used it at all.*’”

First of all, why until the end of the century? By what rule does musical change occur in such a tidy fashion? Hickman would have us believe that on January 1, 1800, the violin playing world woke up and said, “OK, now we can use vibrato.” We already know that Rossini was asking for it in the orchestra in the 1810s, a fact which suggests its presence much earlier. Brown, whose knowledge both of this period and the evidence of the scores is generally excellent, also has a difficult time dealing with the frequent request to use vibrato in Italian music during the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps this is why, despite citing examples drawn from Meyerbeer’s *Il crociato in Egitto* at several points in his book *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900* (OUP, 1999), he neglects

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<sup>4</sup> And fascinatingly, just the opposite happened in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the publication, contemporaneously with the German edition, of the English-language version of the Joachim/Moser Violin School. The latter offers a more enthusiastic treatment of vibrato, and in this case, unlike the situation with Geminiani, both editions seem to have had the imprimatur of the authors. Styra Avins gives an interesting account of this matter in her contribution to *Performing Brahms* (Cambridge, 2003).

to mention that “vibrato” appears over the vocal parts with an enthusiastic persistence that would have driven the treatise-writers crazy.

In fact, all three writers find themselves confounded by a serious methodological issue, one which afflicts Boyden, and by extension Hickman, most acutely. On the one hand, Boyden claims that “Geminiani’s attitude towards the vibrato is prophetic of the future.” On the other, he maintains that the Italian master’s ideas were “probably quite prevalent.” Given the fact that this latter assertion is likely true (most practical guides by their very nature summarize and emphasize historically accepted knowledge and techniques), the former statement is only pertinent inasmuch as *we know what happened later*. There is no evidence that Geminiani intended to be anything other than current by the standards of his own time, on vibrato or any other issue. In other words, the position of Brown, Hickman, and Boyden is based on a fundamental assumption that the past must necessarily be significantly different from the present. Remove this assumption, and the evidence reads quite differently.

Robert Donington does just that in his book *String Playing in Baroque Music* (Scribner’s, 1977) arriving at a very different view that both Hickman and Brown vociferously oppose. Donington claims:

“On the one hand, a conspicuous vibrato serving as an expressive ornament on selected notes; on the other hand, an inconspicuous vibrato serving as natural colouring on most long or moderate but not necessarily short notes: this is what the baroque authorities seem sometimes to have prescribed, and sometimes taken for granted. They may not all have thought quite alike; but in the main, when they advised only an occasional or ornamental use of vibrato, they seem to have been thinking of the conspicuous use (both of the two-finger and of the one-finger varieties), while taking the more or less continuous but inconspicuous use for granted. And when they advised the more or less continuous use of vibrato, they certainly were not thinking of the conspicuous and ornamental use (which would be artistically intolerable if thus continued), but of the inconspicuous yet colorful use which comes naturally to the voice and the strings.”

This construct, aside from its basic reasonableness and practicality, is exactly what the scores examined in Part One of this essay show to be the case, at least from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, suggesting in turn that composers were simply beginning to notate a practice much older still. It is also consistent with Wolfgang Mozart’s famous letter previously cited, the contents of which are paraphrased by Brown so as to suggest something a bit different from what Mozart actually says. In his aforementioned mostly splendid and admirably compendious book, Brown paraphrases Mozart’s observation about “the natural quivering of the voice at moments of emotion,” which in turn suggests that Mozart is describing an ornamental sound used *in extremis*.

However, those “moments of emotion” are Brown’s, and not Mozart’s, who merely observes that the human voice quivers naturally by itself, period (in other words, continuously or spontaneously as necessary). I am not accusing Brown of any deliberate intention to mislead. Rather, this is simply further evidence of a bias that refuses to

accept any possibility other than that of vibrato's limited, ornamental application, and so reads back into the evidence that specific perspective. Hickman also appears stuck in a similar theoretical rut. In taking Donington to task, he states (somewhat hypocritically in my view, given the above analysis):

“One finds no support for [Donington's] position in the violin treatises examined in this study. There is no theoretical bifurcation of vibrato into ornamental and colouring functions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.... Lacking any solid support from 18<sup>th</sup> century documentation, Donington's theory rests on the arguments that early 20<sup>th</sup> century violinists played with a continuous vibrato, although in their theoretical writings they advocated a limited use, and that a pure string tone is a dead tone. With these arguments Donington steps into treacherous territory. One of the basic tenets of the study of performance practice is that 20<sup>th</sup> century tastes and techniques cannot be used as evidence of 18<sup>th</sup> century practices.”

Hickman is wrong on all counts. As noted previously in this essay, and leaving aside for the moment the evidence of the scores, both Leopold Mozart and Quantz suggest uses for vibrato that have a purely technical or “coloring” function. Mozart's complaints about the quality of both orchestral musicians and soloists, Spohr's observations on the fact that violinists in an orchestra tend to come from different schools and so play in different manners, and plenty of the other evidence cited thus far from Forsyth to Richard Strauss all support the idea of an intrinsic vibrato “color” to orchestral string tone, and most likely quite often to solo tone as well (see also, for example, Szigeti's remarks on the subject, and particularly the last section of this essay). The evidence is there, even independently of the scores, for those who wish to see it.

To take another example, in his book *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (University of Toronto Press, 1999), Prof. James Stark finds evidence of continuous vocal vibrato in the 1630s writings of Giovanni Battista Doni, who also makes explicit the connection between the voice and the violin. Doni's remarks, like so many in these treatises, take the form of a complaint against prevailing practice. He writes, “Likewise, the constant raising and lowering of the voice, which imitates the sound of a string of a violin which is played with a bow, with the finger swinging up and down in approximately the same manner, has too much of the feminine, and is only suitable to the female... Likewise, in the castrato it is more tolerable. (p. 127).”

Moreover, even though Geminiani advocates continuous vibrato, Hickman is surely naïve when he assumes that because “Geminiani describes only a single ornament,” all vibrato must therefore have sounded and been played in exactly the same manner. Brown would disagree there. His description of the various types of vibrato is quite meticulous. Carl Flesch states unequivocally that “A totally satisfying vibrato...does not draw attention to itself but rather merges with the sound itself and bears the same relationship to it as the fragrance bears to the flower.” (*The Art of Violin Playing, Book One* [1923]). And we

have already seen that the treatises of Mozart and Spohr describe several differing species of vibrato-as-ornament<sup>5</sup>. Even David Boyden disputes this notion:

“Several years earlier, in his *Rules for Playing in True Taste* (Op. VIII), Geminiani not only makes the same remark [advocating the use of vibrato “as often as possible”], but emphasizes it by distinguishing between the incipient continuous vibrato, recommended for the violin, and the vibrato as a specific ornament which he finds more appropriate to the German flute.”

Geminiani himself, in any case, explains exactly why he does not distinguish between different levels of vibrato in his treatise when he unambiguously states, “This cannot possibly be described by Notes as in former Examples.” Indeed, Geminiani’s refreshing frankness in this regard goes a long way towards elucidating the confusion and inadequacy of later attempts to systematize and notate the actual sound of vibrato, and also the reason so many treatises either ignore it or treat it with such trepidation. Finally, Hickman’s warning about reading back into 18<sup>th</sup> century practice modern tastes and techniques is only valid inasmuch as the provenance of those tastes and techniques is not known or adequately described. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the violin already had a long and settled pedagogical history, much of which remains perfectly valid today.

Donington’s theory in any case isn’t so much based on what early 20<sup>th</sup> century violinists do, but rather on a close reading of treatises not just from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but from the late 17<sup>th</sup> as well, as part of larger body of learning consistently applied over time. A true “applied musicologist,” he has bothered to consider the practical implications of what the treatises say in terms of actual performance, and more significantly, to give due weight to those questions of interpretation that will always remain the province of the individual player as the exponent of specific musical works. This rescues Donington from the tendency to exaggerate the significance of the inconsistencies and variations found in the written sources; and although it necessarily brings an element of subjectivity into the equation, it still remains a far better solution than a strict literalism that results in artistic nonsense.

Another advantage to Donington’s way of thinking (which, by the way, by no means advocates for baroque or classical music the use of “continuous” vibrato in the modern sense) is that he sees no inherent contradiction between Geminiani’s viewpoint and that of his colleagues. They are simply describing different aspects of the same phenomenon from their own individual viewpoints, and Donington wisely makes due allowance for the imprecision and vagueness of descriptive terminology that characterizes much of the writing on music of the period. This not only makes a great deal of sense, it avoids the artificial necessity of treating Geminiani as some sort of musical aberration on the vibrato

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Spohr’s verbal description of vibrato generally as an *imperceptible* variation from notated pitch stands in stark contrast to the four notated examples of ornamental vibrato, which vary significantly in speed and width (they would have to in order to be audible as ornaments and distinguishable from one another). This only gives further credence to the notion that, practically speaking, Donington’s view is the correct one.

issue alone. The fact that he was one of the most highly respected and widely praised performing artists of his day suggests that he surely belongs much closer to the mainstream than Hickman would willingly admit.

At bottom, Donington bases his theory on the fundamental agreement of all authorities that an expressive instrumental timbre is one that most closely imitates the human voice. Brown outwardly pays lip-service to this concept, and then effectively undermines it in his book by citing an impressive series of vocal treatises, and noting that the cautionary remarks on vibrato there are quite similar to what we find in contemporaneous writings on violin technique. This is quite true, but there is one big difference which Brown chooses to ignore that Donington does not: *the fact that all voices have a natural level of vibrato while the violin needs to create one artificially*. When the vocal treatise-writers warn of the perils of excessive vibrato, they are speaking of the potential for genuine physical harm to the singer's instrument, and the ease with which a well-modulated human voice deteriorates into an intonationally challenged wobble.

"...singers whose interests are vitally concerned in maintaining the health and soundness of their vocal instrument, will at once comprehend the importance of guarding it from injury. The singer should shun all excesses whatever, whether of diet, habits, or general conduct; for every one of these must produce injurious effects. A voice may be also seriously impaired by too frequently using the high notes in both chest and head registers, by exaggerating the *timbres*, and the force of the high notes (the somber quality requiring more exertion than the clear); by loud and continued laughter; by animated discourse, &c.; all of which excesses cause temporary fatigue to the organ--and, if often renewed, will inevitably destroy it." (Manuel Garcia, *New Treatise on the Art of Singing*)

Vibrato, according to Garcia (who is Prof. Brown's favorite 19<sup>th</sup> century authority on matters vocal), belongs to a large category of effects falling under the general category of "expression added to melody." These are all two-edged swords. On the one hand, "The human voice deprived of expression, is the least interesting of all instruments." On the other hand, "Our present task becomes here extended; we touch upon the more hidden resources--those irregular and seemingly defective means which musical science allows, or even recommends, to be used under the inspiration of a bold and passionate movement." So vibrato, shading of timbre, changes in facial expression, modifications of regular breathing and articulation, variations in intensity, and other such options are both artistically necessary as well as physically risky.

There is no exact equivalent in the world of violin-playing to the razor-thin line a singer walks between giving oneself up to the sheer force of expression through melody, and the potential to commit vocal suicide. No violinist ever destroyed his technique or his instrument by playing too many high notes (never mind talking too loudly or laughing too hard). There is no story in the annals of string virtuosos comparable to that of Maria Callas, or the countless other, less spectacular and tragic examples of vocal burnout. Part of what makes the human voice so special, so communicative, is that element of danger which listeners instinctively recognize and respond to at moments of deep emotion.

Finally, although it may seem obvious, why do all of the writers cited thus far fail to address one of the single most important questions influencing vocal technique and ornamentation: the fact that singers must pronounce actual words? Manuel Garcia certainly understands this critical point:

“Sounds, unlike words, convey no distinct ideas; they only awaken sentiments: thus, any given melody may be made to express many different emotions, by merely varying the accentuation. An instrumentalist enjoys great liberty with regard to expression, as well as ornament; and--if we expect certain accents belonging to progressions, appoggiaturas, sustained sounds, syncopations, and melodies of every emphatic rhythm--a performer is at full liberty to give an air any tint or expression he pleases, if it correspond with the general character of the piece. In vocal music, the choice of effects is more limited, as they are partly dominated by those musical accents we have just enumerated; by long syllables, which always prevail in vocal pieces; and by the *expression* that words demand, which governs the general character of the melody.”

Here, in a nutshell, is the distinction between vocal and instrumental music. A singer must learn to contain and parcel-out emotion, assisted by a vibrato which is naturally variable but an omnipresent component of the voice, all constrained by the meaning of the sung text. A violinist, in contrast, must first acquire a cantabile timbre from a basis of zero expressivity (in vocal terms), and from there find ways to imitate artificially the various levels of emotion of which the voice is capable, applying them with “full liberty” to a textless melody. This is the correct context in which the instrumental treatises must be read, analyzed, and understood.

It beggars belief that violinists themselves were not at all times fully aware of these very basic points, particularly if writers such as Manuel Garcia discuss them explicitly, and the instrumental treatise writers essentially took their cues from the voice pedagogues (as Prof. Brown suggests). Donington recognizes this fact and adapts his theory of vibrato accordingly, on the perfectly reasonable assumption that both scholars and musicians of the day did the same. Indeed, the very nature of instruments as opposed to voices meant that they had no choice, so why waste time pointing out the obvious? Unfortunately, the current orthodoxy makes no such accommodation, often with singularly uncomfortable results.

Prof. Brown, in particular, struggles with his evidence in order to assert that violin technique until the 20<sup>th</sup> century had as its basis a non-vibrato timbre, an attitude that when viewed in context and regarded as anything other than a generic comment on the physical nature of the instrument, stands in flat contradiction to the aesthetics of prior centuries. Here, for example, is Manuel Garcia’s ideal: “*That sound is especially to be preferred, which is round, ringing, and mellow.*” Note the “ringing” quality, precisely the tone-color which Tartini, Mozart, Spohr, and practically everyone else claim that vibrato expressly imitates. This is the natural, *unembellished* timbre of the well-trained voice, and all other ornaments stand as additions applied atop this foundation.

This concept is confirmed by the work of Dr. Carl Emil Seashore, perhaps the most highly respected pioneer in the field of the psychology of music, and one of the first scientists to investigate the facts surrounding vibrato in the 1920s and 30s using specially designed equipment. In his seminal book *Psychology of Music* (1938), Seashore discovered, based on studies of recordings by more than two dozen of the most famous singers of his day<sup>6</sup>, that “all recognized professional singers sing with a pitch vibrato in about 95 per cent or more of their tones. Sustained tones, short tones, portamentos, attacks, releases, and other forms of transitions in pitch carry the vibrato.... Great singers, teachers of voice, and voice students who are opposed to the vibrato and profess not to use it, do exhibit it in their best singing.” In other words, vibrato is entirely intrinsic and unavoidable.

In reality, what everyone seems to agree is that both violin and vocal performers need to avoid a *bad* vibrato timbre, surely an uncontroversial position then as now. The frequent use of ornamental vibrato is not so much condemned in and of itself, but rather to the extent that habitual or excessive use will *certainly* ruin the voice, and *may possibly* contribute to a degenerate instrumental technique. Presumably sometimes it did, and sometimes it didn't. Warnings such as these are certainly valid as precautionary measures to students of the craft, but hardly as an indication of real-life performance practice. Just the opposite: the need for frequent cautionary language presupposes the existence of the problem, and thus the widespread use of vibrato.

Carl Flesch summed up the whole situation perfectly when he said:

“As far as we, teachers, are concerned, our obligation is to instruct the student in the mechanical prerequisites for a correct vibrato. Based on this, the student will instinctively prefer that type of vibrato which is most in keeping with his personality, be it full of temperament and impetuosity, or contemplative and temperate. We must convince him of the idea that vibrato should never be used in a habitual manner, but should always be the consequence of the heightened need for expressivity. This, in turn, must be based on the content of the piece which is to be performed and interpreted. From this artistic point of view, the ideal vibrato is one which permits a great deal of variety, and which, because of its mechanical perfection, allows us to encompass a scale of feelings ranging from the softest, almost inaudible to the passionate and intensely moving.” (*The Art of Violin Playing, Book One* [1923]).

Flesch's role in the vibrato debate is an interesting one. On the one hand, he is often cited as an authority on the vibrato of famous violinists of his day, particularly by those authors wishing to demonstrate its modest use in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, his actual views on vibrato, and its relationship to violin pedagogy in general, are ignored almost completely, thereby casting the merely anecdotal evidence in a demonstrably false light. Like Leopold Mozart, Auer, and others, Flesch should by no means be turned into an opponent of vibrato; he was an opponent of boring, mindlessly “pretty,” monochrome

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<sup>6</sup> Including, among others, Schumann-Heink, Galli-Curci, Caruso, Rethberg, Martinelli, Ponselle, Chaliapin, Jeritza, Tetrazzini, Tibbett, Gigli, and Homer, to list only the best known today.

vibrato, just as he disdained the less colorful, thin-sounding vibrato of the Joachim school in the hands of anyone but Joachim. His view on the necessity of some form of intrinsic vibrato could not be more simple, clear, or cogently expressed:

“Even the greatest violinistic genius will play out of tune without a leveling and corrective vibrato.” (*Memoirs*, p. 21)

Thus, the issue is not so much how often vibrato is used, but how often the *same kind* of vibrato is used. Szigeti expresses similar concerns, quoting Flesch, in his autobiography *With String Attached* (1947). The aesthetic justification for the cautionary language, then, speaks for itself. The budding virtuoso must not allow his ability to produce a beautiful tone through vibrato lead to the disregard of other, equally or more important musical qualities.

That said, we have no way of knowing just how often vibrato-prone violinists “went wrong.” To use a simple analogy, all drivers are warned that speeding is illegal. Most do it anyway, to a greater or lesser degree, and most never get caught. That doesn’t invalidate the warning that if you drive over the speed limit too frequently you may get in trouble with the law, or even cause an accident and hurt yourself. Nevertheless, it’s a huge mistake to confuse safety advice that dwells on the worst-case scenario with actual behavior, which is a function of the risk vs. reward calculation of individual drivers.

So to return to our original subject, are the risks and rewards of using vibrato (the good kind) identical for both singers and violinists--the latter unconstrained either by the potential for physical damage to their instrument, or the limitations on expression imposed by the need to articulate a verbal text? If not, then the behavior of each group will certainly differ accordingly, and it is the job of scholars like Profs. Brown, Hickman, and their colleagues to quantify and explain those differences. Merely pointing out similar language in vocal and instrumental treatises as support for the assumption that actual practice must also have been essentially identical hardly addresses this issue satisfactorily--in simplest terms, it’s nothing more than an intellectual copout.

Beyond that, there is more than a touch of “old wives’ tale” superstition in much of the advice concerning vibrato in these 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century treatises. The notion that a mere oscillation of the left hand easily turns into an ugly, uncontrollable tremor, just as a singer’s voice acquires a disconcerting perpetual wobble, has about as much basis in fact as the myth that you shouldn’t go swimming for at least an hour after eating or else you’ll get sick (which doesn’t mean that some people don’t believe it). Nothing prevents a properly trained violinist from keeping the wrist and fingers steady, unless he or she truly has a neuromuscular disease of some sort. The decision to use vibrato is always a conscious act, never an involuntary motor reflex.

Indeed, Flesch states categorically that the most common symptom of old age and a decline in technique in a violinist is that their vibrato “dries up.” Both Joachim (whose hands were also crippled by gout) as well as Sarasate, two artists with a very different approach to vibrato, suffered from this problem. This in turn begs the question of how to



interpret the evidence of their recordings, and it also stands as the direct antithesis of the reality with singers. Voices lose control and become more tremulous as the age<sup>7</sup>, while the timbre of violinists becomes stiff, thin, and inexpressive. The former group falls victim to its natural vibrato, the latter loses the muscular coordination necessary to produce it at all.

As further proof of his doggedly illogically literal interpretation of the evidence, both in the essay previously mentioned and in his book, consider two additional points that Brown claims support his views:

1. Some 18<sup>th</sup> century fingerings advocate the use of open strings and natural harmonics, which Brown feels is inconsistent with a continuous vibrato timbre. That this opinion is fallacious should be obvious from the examples of Oistrakh, Perlman, and Milstein previously cited. Nor need we leave the 19<sup>th</sup> century to find further evidence: consider the solo passage from Joachim's Hungarian Concerto cited in Part One, which specifically calls for vibrato *and* incorporates an open G. You can see a similar example in Mahler's *Das Klagende Lied* (1880 original version) in the orchestral violins at the end of *Waldmärchen* (a few bars before figure 45).

In order to see this point with particular vividness, below you will find an extract from the first movement of Ravel's String Quartet (1903). The use of "vibrato" there accomplishes several things: it makes the second violin stand out more prominently from the texture; it tells the player, who had been executing a series of loud, rapid arpeggios presumably without any vibrato at all, to resume an expressive, singing timbre; but most importantly, it counters any suggestion that the violinist should worry about blending vibrato and non-vibrato tones on account of the open-string low Gs, one of which is comparatively lengthy in duration. Ravel, who was nothing if not efficient in his scoring, conveys all of this with the single word "vibrato," a word which appears nowhere else in the quartet--not because he doesn't expect it elsewhere, but rather because he conveys the most useful information using the term in this particular place.

The truth is, most composers don't really care if there are conflicts between expressive markings and the occasional note or phrase<sup>8</sup>. What matters is realizing the general character of the entire passage. Furthermore, once we banish from our consciousness the myth of "continuous" vibrato fabricated by the authenticity movement to justify going to the opposite extreme, we see that practicality and good sense govern what composers usually expect their performers to do. Obviously, at this moment in Ravel's String Quartet, it was more important to use the open G than it was to have vibrato on every

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<sup>7</sup> There is hard evidence for this fact in the form of the 1998 study "Age and Voice Quality in Professional Singers." Three Swedish scientists, Johan Sundberg, Marie Niska Thörnvik and Anna Maria Söderström, analyzed the vibrato of twenty famous operatic voices through recordings made over the extent of the artists' careers. The study was directed solely at the quality of vibrato, not the frequency of its use for ornamental or expressive purposes. As the singers aged, measurements showed that their vibrato grew both slower and wider; that is, it became increasingly prominent and closer to the dreaded "wobble."

<sup>8</sup> One exception is Richard Strauss in *Elektra*, as cited in Part One of this essay, where he specifically asked for vibrato and defines it as the avoidance of open strings.

single note, but the presence of open strings in this passage doesn't mean that there's any logic in suggesting that vibrato otherwise should be avoided.



It is here that we feel the lack of a simple definition of “continuous vibrato” most tellingly; for Brown’s assertion begs the question of to what standard his examples are being compared. If Donington’s view, that a non-vibrato string tone is “dead,” entails an element of subjectivity in the form of personal taste, is this not equally true of Brown’s position? In reality, it is perfectly reasonable to interpret the use of isolated non-vibrato timbres as a means of adding color and contrast to a vibrato-prone canvas, particularly if the use of, say, natural harmonics solves an otherwise intractable problem of fingering (as several treatises note, and as is often standard practice, particularly among cellists). Furthermore, Brown himself describes several forms of vibrato besides the well-known left hand variety; an open string or natural harmonic note need not remain “uncolored.”

Indeed, it is even possible to add vibrato to harmonics. Simply refer to the finale of Shostakovich’s Piano Trio Op. 67 (No. 2), where at figure 105 he specifically requests this effect from both the violin and the cello. Enescu’s Third Violin Sonata uses it too, and Flesch recommends vibrato to help in correcting finger placement errors that prevent the harmonic tone from sounding. Wieniawski’s *Souvenir de Moscou* (1853) features the solo violin in a series of artificial harmonics marked “*vibrato*” as well<sup>9</sup>. Finally, Henry C. Lahee wrote in 1899 of Willie Burmester (a Joachim pupil), “He plays harmonics with a vibrato....” (*Famous Violinists of To-day and Yesterday*, L.C. Page and Co.)

<sup>9</sup> And if you want to hear a true “ornamental vibrato” that’s actually audible in an historical recording, listen to Jan Kubelik’s rendering of the passage in question on Pearl.

With respect to orchestral harmonics, consider that the cello part in Borodin's Polovtsian Dance No. 2, previously discussed in Part One, climaxes with a notated harmonic despite that fact that the entire line is specifically designated to be played "*cantabile e vibrato*." And as noted in the main essay, there is in fact a manner of using sympathetic vibrations on adjacent strings to create vibrato where none would otherwise be possible, and this applies both to open strings as well as natural harmonics. That these techniques may not be mentioned in contemporary treatises hardly suggests that they were not in use, and not part of the equally significant oral tradition of teaching passed on from teacher to student, (recall Casals' observations at the head of this section).

The problem, in any event, needs to be examined on a case-by-case basis with reference to specific works, and not reduced to sweeping generalizations. One wonders, for example, how Prof. Brown would explain the implications for early performance practice of the following exchange in *The Art of Quartet Playing: The Guarneri Quartet in conversation with David Blum*:

*Soyer: Casals, of course made frequent use of open strings. He liked a clear, open sonority.*

*Blum: His vibrato had a purity which enabled him to pass from an open string to a stopped note without a change of color.*

*Steinhardt: Exactly! One has to be very careful about what surrounds an open string<sup>10</sup>. In the theme of the variation movement of Beethoven's Opus 18, No. 5 I'll usually play the upbeat with an open A. But on the repeat, for the sake of variety I'll play the upbeat on the D string, where it has a more veiled quality. The vibrato on the F sharp will vary accordingly. The first time it will be narrow and slow to match the open A; the second time it will be linked with the vibrato of the upbeat.*

Perhaps most significantly, Brown fails to explain how the examples he cites are consistent with the strong advice contained in historical treatises to avoid open strings and harmonics generally in melodic cantilena. If everyone was ignoring Leopold Mozart and his colleagues on this issue, then how can we know that their strictures to limit vibrato were also being followed? Flesch also recalls that Nikisch forbade his players the use of harmonics or open strings in expressive passages, suggesting in turn that they were using vibrato as well (otherwise, why bother?). In short, this bit of "evidence" raises more questions than it answers, and once again serves as a reminder that it's a big stretch to move from the reasonable proposition that vibrato may at one time have been used less than it is today, to the blanket assertion that non-vibrato was the timbral "norm."

2. Brown actually refers to two examples discussed in Part One of this essay, Franck's String Quartet and Elgar's Second Symphony, where the limited use of the word "vibrato" (he claims) constitutes evidence of a predominating non-vibrato string tone.

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<sup>10</sup> Consider this remark in light of what the example from Ravel's quartet just revealed.

However, as we have already discussed extensively, the evidence of the scores post-1945 proves this assertion to be nonsense. It is beyond dispute that there is no inconsistency between an intrinsic vibrato timbre and use of the more prominent, ornamental variety. Brown, who otherwise shows himself to be highly sensitive to details of notation and score markings, spends no time at all examining the larger context that reveals quite clearly why both composers wrote as they did in the above two cases. It's a lapse that can only be explained by a blind refusal to consider that vibrato functioned as more than just an ornament during the period in question.

In fact, Brown effectively skewers his own argument when discussing specific examples of notated vibrato, and in particular the <> sign, which he identifies as an indication to give an ornamental vibrato emphasis to individual notes--at least in the works of Viotti, Rode, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, and others familiar with the notation. This is not exactly news. Elgar also uses it frequently, and so does Mahler (witness the lyrical second subject of the Second Symphony's first movement). Brown claims:

*Of course, a composer's intention, as indicated by this sign, that certain notes should be played with vibrato does not preclude its use elsewhere; it merely means that those notes must have it. But it is also true that this indication becomes virtually meaningless if every possible note has vibrato.*

This last sentence contains a major lapse in logic. It presupposes, first, that there is a school of vibrato that insists that it must be used on "every possible note," an idea which, as we have already shown, is ridiculous as it applies to the best players at any period whatsoever. Brown also assumes incorrectly that all vibrato is timbrally equal and therefore expressively monotonous, no matter what the score requires or the artist does. Even Brown's own sources, such as Spohr and Leopold Mozart, would call both of these assumptions fallacious. But perhaps the most solid evidence of this fact comes from that "continuous" vibrato apostle, Fritz Kreisler.

If you look at the score of Kreisler's Caprice Viennoise, at the point that the principal theme in three-quarter time enters, you will find the indication "*dolce e vibrato*." Aside from the interesting fact that Kreisler associates vibrato with an *echt*-Viennese style, you can listen to any of his recordings of this particularly characteristic bonbon and hear vibrato in the introduction, before this passage begins, and in the *espressivo* immediately following. Does this fact make Kreisler's "*dolce e vibrato*" meaningless, as Brown suggests it should? Must "continuity" of vibrato equal timbral sameness at all times? Would the music sound somehow better or more expressively varied if Kreisler withheld vibrato other than where specifically indicated?

This example makes particularly clear just how distant Brown and his colleagues are from what violinists actually do (or likely did), not to mention how music is perceived by listeners. It would be interesting, for example, if Professor Brown could quantify in unambiguous terms the gap in musical "meaningfulness" between the occasional use of vibrato in a predominantly non-vibrato texture, and the occasional employment of additional vibrato in a predominantly vibrato-prone texture. The situation is exactly

analogous to the placement of a sforzando accent in a piano or forte context. Players (and listeners) simply adjust to the expressive baseline. It's the contrast that matters. The fact that the music may require a sustained level of loudness or softness does not preclude the use of accents or tonal shadings, any more than an intrinsic level of vibrato militates against a similar "vibrato accent" on individual notes such as Brown describes.

Actually, we have irrefutable proof attesting to the validity of this contention. Here it is:



The above extract comes from Elgar's Cockaigne Overture (at Figure 3). It shows the entire string section, basses excepted, asked to play "vibrante," that is with "continuous" vibrato, while at the same time Elgar adds an additional emphasis with a few select <> signs under certain notes. As you can plainly see, the use of such indications is entirely contextual. It doesn't matter if the orchestra is playing with lots of vibrato or none at all. Accents such as these, whether regulating dynamics, timbre, or as here some combination of the two, may be used to add more of whatever quality is already present. There are vibrato indications covering both large musical paragraphs and single notes, just as we see Elgar also using sforzando accents within the overall fortissimo dynamic.

Elgar's example is hardly unique:

This image shows a musical score extract from the Adagio of Mahler's Fourth Symphony. It features five staves for the string section (Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Violas/Celli, and Cellos). The score includes various performance instructions such as 'p' (piano), 'pp' (pianissimo), 'f' (forte), 'ff' (fortissimo), 'cresc.' (crescendo), and 'vibrando'. There are also dynamic markings like 'p' (piano) and 'p' (piano). The extract is numbered 210 at the bottom left and 215 at the bottom right. The bottom center has the text 'U. E. 952 W. Ph. V. 214'.

The above extract comes from the Adagio of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, and shows exactly the same *modus operandi* as does the Elgar (you can find it again in the Finale of the Third and the Adagietto of the Fifth). Remember, we are not even considering the use

of <> alongside any of the numerous verbal directives that would also ask the player to use “continuous” vibrato, including *sostenuto*, *espressivo*, *agitato*, *dolce*, *appassionato*, and many others described in this discussion’s first part. It is thus particularly ingenuous of Brown in his essay to quote the opening of Brahms’ Third Violin Sonata:



...without commenting on the use of <> within the context of the general *espressivo*. Indeed, the above example (Brown omits the second line) makes clear that the use of the hairpin necessarily takes in more than a single note in all but the slowest tempos. In Brahms’ case, the swell/vibrato effect clearly begins on the dotted half-notes in its first occurrences, takes in five notes in the first bar of the second system, and three notes thereafter. Or consider this example from Joachim’s Overture, Op. 13:

The first and second violins have a general *espressivo*, and all of the hairpins occur within the context of a gradual crescendo—that is, they are dynamic inflections atop a dynamic inflection, just as the vibrato that comes with them occurs in addition to the previous *espressivo*. And does anyone seriously want to suggest that in the first and third bars of the above example, the second violins would refrain from using extra vibrato in connection with the <> marking simply because it encompasses more than a single note? I wouldn’t bet on it. Or consider the following example from Grieg’s unfinished Quartet in F major (1891). Grieg, like so many of his Scandinavian contemporaries (Gade is

another) was trained in Mendelssohn's Leipzig school, one of the performance traditions that Brown notes employed the hairpin as a specific vibrato accent:



The motive in the third and fourth bars is clearly a variant of that in the first and second bars. And if extra vibrato is present on the initial slurred quarter-note, it should be just as evident on the corresponding trio of eighth-notes. Thus, all four bars contain at least one moment of notated vibrato, and *that*, rather than having it on every single note, is far closer to what “continuous vibrato” really means in practice. The presence of ties and slurs, the shape of the phrase or motive, sequential repetition and variation, and of course expressive intensity generally, all play a significant part in determining where the dynamic and vibrato emphasis occurs, and how often.

Actually, Brown's principal source, Baillot, characterizes the <> as a special case of *slow* vibrato, and then proceeds to describe other types as well (e.g. the Viotti minuet previously cited). One of these is a combination of *portato* (a dynamic pulsation with the bow) and quick finger vibrato. Baillot uses as an example a sonata for violin and continuo by Leclair, but you can find it notated even as early as 1730 in the *orchestral* string parts of the *Qui tollis peccata mundi* from Zelenka's *Missa Gratias agimus tibi*:



Here vibrato appears in all of the upper strings plus continuo (not shown), and also later in the solo flute. While obviously distinct from the <> sign, it's perfectly clear from this example that orchestral vibrato was hardly unknown dating back to the Baroque period, and that the injunction to orchestral players to refrain from ornamenting their lines obviously did not apply to purely coloristic, non-melodic embellishments. You will understand the full significance of this point in just a moment.

For the most part, the hundreds of scores surveyed in preparing both parts of this essay actually reveal the hairpin accent to be used most frequently over small groups of notes, often three in number (as in the Brahms violin sonata above), rather than just on single tones. There are good practical reasons for this, particularly when the composer needs time for the dynamic and timbral coloration to make its proper effect in quicker tempos, or over larger phrases. This use has a venerable history of consistent application throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century right on up through the 20<sup>th</sup>. The following two examples bracket almost exactly one hundred years of its typical employment:

Méhul: Joseph (1807):

Schoenberg: String Quartet No. 1 (1904-5):

Interestingly, both of the above examples show a use for the <> accent in subsidiary voices, as accompaniment, which is a possibility that neither Baillot nor Brown consider at all. Nevertheless, it is critical to our inquiry because it demonstrates the dual nature of vibrato, not just as melodic ornament, but as a subordinate tone-color or texture. It serves exactly the same purpose in the Zelenka Mass as well, where the strings accompany the full chorus. So the fact that early sources only address the notion of vibrato as solo embellishment does not mean it could not or did not exist elsewhere, as these extracts self-evidently show.

I mentioned in the first part of this essay that “continuous” vibrato, if indeed it represented something new, must have arisen as a result of the demand of Romantic composers for continuous expression. In the following example taken from Hugo Wolf’s



String Quartet in D minor (1878/84), we can see that process happening with particular force solely in terms of the hairpin accent:

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a string quartet. Each system consists of four staves (treble and bass clefs). The notation is heavily annotated with dynamic markings and hairpin accents. The first system includes markings such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *pp*. The second system features *f*, *p*, *mf*, and *pp*, along with the instruction *espressivo*. The third system shows *pp*, *cresc.*, and *p*. Hairpin accents (double-headed arrows) are used extensively to indicate crescendos and decrescendos throughout the score.

Brown's  $\diamond$  sign thus needs to be viewed within the context of an explosion of score markings generally, verbal and otherwise, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these, as we have already shown, encourage the use of vibrato, always keeping in mind that even such obsessive detail as we see here still leaves plenty of room for the performers to add their own personal touches. As composers sought to impose their will on musicians increasingly well-equipped to render their parts with a high level of coloristic specificity, it's easy to understand how a free hand with vibrato necessarily follows.

Thus, in heavily notated early 20<sup>th</sup> century German scores such as those of Mahler, or the Second Viennese School and its contemporaries (Schreker, Zemlinsky, Korngold, and others), we find  $\diamond$  (and everything else) used with increasing frequency. And yet this is exactly the period about which many of today's theoretically serious scholars, as well as

their performer-friends like Roger Norrington, maintain that vibrato was still seldom used--despite the blindingly abundant evidence to the contrary.

Unsurprisingly, Brown's blinkered view of the whole vibrato situation prevents him from extracting the most interesting and salient facts from his own analysis. It's difficult to believe, for instance, that in his essay he utterly fails to address the issue of what his discovery says about orchestral performance. Aside from the above-cited cases, a random glance at such chronologically and stylistically diverse music as Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony, Schumann's Symphonies Two and Three, Brahms' First and Second Symphonies, Bruch's Second Symphony (cited in Part One), Grieg's Holberg Suite, Janáček's Idyll for Strings, Wagner's Rienzi Overture, Glinka's Kamarinskaya, or the central Romanza of Joachim's Hungarian Concerto, all show their composers using Brown's hairpin accent *in the orchestral string parts*, reflecting the conviction that a professional, well-rehearsed string section could (and should) do anything that a solo can. This expectation tracks the rise of virtuoso technique in the Romantic period generally, a trend that applies to ensembles no less than to instrumental soloists.

Now of course we know from the first part of this essay that the actual word "vibrato" appears in orchestral scores going back at least to the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Haydn even used <> in his "London" symphonies of the 1790s (see the opening of No. 102), but the important point to keep in mind here is that Brown has shown, albeit inadvertently, that orchestral players in the theoretically vibrato-free German tradition of Spohr and Joachim certainly did *not* normally eschew vibrato in actual performance. There's no doubt about it. Furthermore, the use of vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> century German school (and beyond) was so common that it merited a notational convention used widely enough to be retained in published scores. Or let me put it this way:



Can anyone seriously suggest concerning the above passage from the first movement of Brahms' Violin concerto, that the soloist is supposed to use vibrato at the <> signs but the first violins and violas should not, in a passage that echoes the exact musical phrase of the solo and is specifically marked to be played *dolce*? Hopefully this example illustrates graphically just how absurd the theory is that orchestral players actually made a point of avoiding vibrato. Furthermore, what Brown also does not tell us is that yet another of the uses of this hairpin accent is to insert a touch of vibrato, or ensure continuity of timbre, in

quick movements and passagework where it otherwise might not seem practicable. The following excerpt from the solo line in the finale of Elgar's Violin Concerto (written for and premiered by Kreisler) makes this point very clearly:

The image shows a musical score excerpt from the finale of Elgar's Violin Concerto, measures 73 through 76. The music is written for a solo violin in G major. Measure 73 begins with a tempo change to *a tempo* (poco meno mosso) and the instruction *cantabile e vibrato*. The melody is marked *p* (piano) and includes a crescendo. Measure 74 continues the melody, marked *cresc.* and *f* (forte). Measure 75 features a *poco allargando* tempo change and a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The melody is marked *p dolce* (piano dolce). Measure 76 returns to *a tempo* (comodo) and *poco meno mosso*, marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Here, after the clearly marked “cantabile e vibrato” lyrical tune, Elgar wishes the solo to preserve an expressive timbre despite the lack of melodic interest in the ensuing, more purely technical and virtuosic (yet still *dolce*) continuation of the musical paragraph. The <> sign functions similarly in the Brahms concerto where, in the two bars immediately following the passage cited above the solo violin has a high harmonic (normally non-vibrato) but the orchestral violins and violas have another hairpin accent, thus preserving the intrinsic warmth of tone that Brahms obviously relishes. It’s an amazingly sensitive touch typical of this always fastidious composer.

These observations beg the obvious question of what further habits of notation typically called forth vibrato. One intriguing possibility lies in Rossini’s use of the closed-end accent (an accent or crescendo sign in the shape of a triangle, rather than with one side left open). In the example cited below, from the opening of the overture to *The Barber of Seville*, you can see very clearly that the accent occurs exactly where a modern player would add the first touch of vibrato to the tone in tandem with the general diminuendo. Rossini employs this type of accent/dynamic marking ubiquitously throughout his work (his contemporaries also use it), often at precisely this sort of juncture: on long notes in the middle or at the end of otherwise quickly moving phrases. This is entirely consistent with the use of vibrato described by Tartini, and subsequently by Leopold Mozart, and I wouldn’t be a bit surprised to learn that it had for Italian players much the same meaning as <> had for the Germans and the French.



We find even further evidence for this hypothesis in the overture to *Tancredi*:

Violini I

Violini II

Viole

Vc.

Cb.

In this example, the use of the closed accent exactly mirrors the hairpins that we find in Pierre Rode's *Caprices*, composed at exactly the same time in the 1810s, and one of the main sources that Brown cites in his article. Compare accents in the violins and cellos in the Rossini extract above with the following from Rode's Fifth Caprice:

The existence of local notational traditions such as this explains how vibrato must have spread through orchestras in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Players from one school necessarily adapted their use of vibrato to the conventions of the music before them, as they felt proper. Ultimately, the question of whether the composer used the "Rossini accent," Rode's hairpin, or just a normal sforzando or > became irrelevant. All might be seen as an encouragement to use vibrato depending on the emotional character of the music at hand. As Brown admits, "there can be no doubt that vibrato and accentuation of *all kinds* were closely linked in nineteenth-century violin playing."

You may find this analysis overly hypothetical, but there's a difference between bald speculation and deduction based on demonstrable fact. We know that different types of accents encouraged the use of vibrato. We know, as revealed in Part One of this essay,

that orchestras in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries often consisted of players from a broad and diverse range nationalities, schools, and performance traditions. Our conclusions thus arise from applying these facts to the situation at hand. The only significant assumption underpinning these observations is that “continuous” vibrato arose from “ornamental” beginnings, a proposition that really misstates the question as soon as we realize that, practically speaking, there is no such thing as “continuous” vibrato. It’s always a matter of relative quantity given the possibilities presented by the music at hand.

Ultimately, the accent that we find in the critical edition of *The Barber of Seville* became a simple decrescendo in the editions that are most familiar to us, published later in the century:

The image shows a musical score for the 'Andante maestoso' section of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. The score is written for four string parts: Violini (Violins), Viole (Violas), Violoncelli (Violoncellos), and Contrabbassi (Double Basses). The tempo is marked 'Andante maestoso'. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is divided into four measures. The first measure shows a decrescendo from *ff* (fortissimo) to *pp* (pianissimo). The second measure shows a crescendo from *pp* to *ff*. The third measure shows a decrescendo from *ff* to *pp*. The fourth measure shows a crescendo from *pp* to *ff*. The notation includes various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

Does this in turn mean that there was no need to ask for vibrato as well because its use had by then become ubiquitous, or were the publishers simply removing a local notational convention that had either died out or which would have been unfamiliar to players outside of Italy? We don’t know, but this is the sort of question that Applied Musicology should, and when it’s working properly, does try to answer. Unfortunately, the editors of the new critical edition of Rossini’s works have yet to come up with a definitive explanation for the difference between the closed accent and the ones more familiar to us.

One final point before leaving this interesting digression: it makes sense that Rossini, who uses the actual word “vibrato” in his scores to describe both brief outbursts and longer phrases, would have at his disposal a notational device for this purpose as well, particularly one suitable to rapid tempos or very short notes. Aside from being a composer of almost fanatical precision when it comes to marking his parts, this is exactly what the extract from Elgar’s Violin Concerto also shows. Both examples are consistent with our observation that musical instructions come in both words and symbols, some of which pertain to large sections, and others to single tones, motives, or phrases.

Treatise writers, while often noting the existence of differing schools of performance throughout the Europe of their day, generally refrain from listing specific markings associated with vibrato. Baillot is a noteworthy exception. Perhaps they did this so as to avoid being constrained by notational customs that would limit their works’ international

marketability. Spohr actually says that notated vibrato is a convention belonging to earlier times (as we saw with Zelenka, and you also find it in composers such as Gluck). Instead, both he and Mozart describe the *circumstances* where vibrato would be most appropriate (“ringing” tones such as sforzandos, long or sustained notes such as tenutos or fermatas, and sostenuto passages).

Let us take a moment to recall Spohr’s own words, previously cited in Part One:

“This *tremolo* is therefore properly used in 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.”

Here is evidence every bit as dispositive as Baillot’s little wavy lines over the  $\langle \rangle$  sign that Brown cites, and yet we do not find him illustrating Spohr’s words with evidence from scores of sforzandos or accented tones, let alone “passionate passages.” The reason is obvious: music, particularly Romantic music, simply abounds with such indications. On the other hand, it suits Brown’s thesis to pick only a single type of accent in order to support his claims regarding the relatively infrequent appearance even of ornamental vibrato. This doesn’t mean that every instance of such notation automatically produced a vibrato response from the player, but what matters is that these moments invite its use, with the primary factor determining frequency being the inclination of the individual artist--or artists (in orchestral music).

Accordingly, a passage such as this lyrical melody from the Andante of Mendelssohn’s Reformation Symphony (1832), with its rich diversity of accents (including  $\langle \rangle$ , sforzando, and *>*):



...invites just as much vibrato, tempo permitting, as might typify any performance today. Oh, and did I mention that the entire passage is also marked *dolce*?

Once again, the Mendelssohn is not an isolated case, merely an obvious one. Here is another, from the Adagio of Rheinberger’s Florentiner Sinfonie, Op. 87 (1875):



This extract contains just about every excuse for vibrato discussed thus far, and in abundance: the hairpins, regular “>” accents, “ringing” sforzandos, sustained notes—even a nice, sonorous, *sf* pizzicato in the basses. “Continuity” in the use of vibrato arises in this case from an accretion of tiny expressive details that suggest its use. Under these conditions, it’s easy to imagine players feeling that it makes more sense simply to keep the vibrato going most of the time, varying its intensity as necessary, rather than turning it on and off like the flick of a light switch. String writing like this points to a seldom-absent, intrinsic expressive timbre, whether in melody or (as again in this example) accompaniment, and it’s not just a German specialty:



This extract, from Massenet’s ballet music in his opera *Thais*, also features plenty of excuses to use vibrato, from the dynamic hairpins, to the tenuto accents (a Massenet specialty) and verbal *sostenuto* directives. The use of vibrato in the French school is, in any case, quite easy to establish simply from reading reviews published in the *London Times* throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Italians, the French were unquestionably the

nation most frequently accused of the unforgivable sin of musical sensuality as represented by the employment of vibrato, especially by singers.

Now it may very well be that there was a local school of string playing in England around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century that condemned the frequent employment of vibrato, but Arthur Sullivan aside there isn't a single English composer of this period that we care about (the emotional sterility of much their work being one of the main reasons). So if the music created within that tradition hasn't survived, why should we care about the equally stale performance practice that may have accompanied it? Shouldn't performers today be encouraged to select, from among the numerous "authentic" practices, the one that best serves the music that they are actually playing?

The biggest incongruity in Brown's approach is that when it comes to the vibrato question he asks that we accept the notion that musical expression in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was rationed by the teaspoon, rather than indulged as lavishly as the scores, the musical idiom, and the very term "Romantic" all suggest must have been typical. His colleagues then carry the same argument forward into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet how can they explain examples such as the following in light of Brown's own analysis of what  $\diamond$  means?

**Kreisler: String Quartet in A minor, first movement (1919)**



Kreisler's string quartet makes an ideal "vibrato test case," particularly because Kreisler himself recorded it in 1935 (more on that later). The works cited here make especially irrelevant the question of whether or not vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was used "continuously" in the modern sense, never mind in accordance with the HIP caricature of contemporary technique that serves as a straw-man throughout the scholarly and not-so-scholarly literature. Nevertheless, Brown and his colleagues insist that performers heeded warnings in (often stylistically anachronistic) treatises to limit the use



of vibrato *irrespective of what the music in front of them plainly required, and even when its presence is supported by those self-same treatises.*

Thus, the existence of a vibrato accent such as <> does not imply a general non-vibrato timbre as the norm. By itself, it doesn't tell you anything about the "the norm" at all, save for the fact that some moments in orchestral or solo string music require more vibrato than usual in tandem with a slight dynamic swell. You can have vibrato without the hairpin, and as the following excerpt from the scherzo of Schumann's Trio Op. 80 shows, you can have one-note hairpins unquestionably without vibrato:



Not only can the piano not employ pitch vibrato, it also can't realize hairpin dynamics on single notes. Nevertheless these two inconvenient facts don't stop Schumann, or Brahms for that matter, from using <> over individual tones in their piano parts frequently.

To summarize, then, composers may use the hairpin vibrato accent to add vibrato to a passage that otherwise would not have any at all, but they might just as often use it:

1. To add even more vibrato to a previously existing dolce or espressivo (as do Joachim, Mendelssohn, Brahms [Violin Concerto, orchestral part], and Kreisler [String Quartet]);
2. To maintain vibrato in situations where players might otherwise neglect it, whether because of short notes (Brahms' Third Violin Sonata), the presence of passagework in moderate to rapid tempos (Elgar's Violin Concerto), or any combination of the two.
3. To enrich the texture of subsidiary or accompanying voices (Rheinberger, Zelenka).
4. To shape and color short phrases, or small groups of notes, particularly in quicker tempos where restricting either the dynamics or the vibrato to just one note at a time is

impractical from a technical point of view, not to mention needlessly fussy and imperceptible to the listener (Méhul, Schoenberg, Grieg).

All of these various possibilities are as valid in orchestral music as they are for solo string writing. So if, as Brown admits, the presence of this particular accent mark cannot preclude the possibility of additional vibrato elsewhere, then that's the end of this particular story.

Finally, it's also worth mentioning that there is a sort of "fallback" theory concerning the rise of vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one particularly mentioned by Donington, David Milsom, and also German scholar Werner Hauk (in his interesting and sometimes nutty book *Vibrato on the Violin*, Bosworth, 1975). This states that the use of vibrato was actually quite frequent in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup>, but went into eclipse during the Classical period as the use of improvised ornamentation declined and composers began to write out their scores in greater detail. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, vibrato regained lost ground within the context of the Romantic style, until finally becoming "emancipated" (to use Hauk's term) around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There may be some validity to this theory. After all, tastes certainly can change in cyclical fashion. The problem, however, with this proposition is that it poses the same thorny questions about the degree of difference from one era to the next, only from the opposite end of the time continuum, and without the benefit of modern recording technology that allows us (potentially at least) actually to quantify the facts concerning the standard vibrato of at least one of the periods in question. Nor is this idea truly new. After all, Leonard Bernstein was telling an audience of young people in 1965 on national television that Classical period music requires only minimal vibrato.

The fact that there is no definitive answer to the question of what the vast majority of players actually did with vibrato in centuries past represents an all but insurmountable problem. In truth, there are at least three contextual definitions of "vibrato" that are used with appalling casualness not just in the historical sources, but by modern performers and scholars as well. First, there is the natural vibrato of the human voice. Second, there are the various left hand and bowing techniques used to produce a natural-style vibrato on the violin. Finally, there are the various vocal and instrumental ornaments applied atop, or perhaps in lieu of, either of the previous types, generally associated with "espressivo" or passionate utterance. Any of these may be scorned or praised, depending on the source, and referred to simply as "vibrato," or by numerous similar terms.

The failure in the scholarly literature to make a serious attempt at distinguishing between these various kinds of vibrato--and admittedly it's not always possible--opens up a Pandora's box of possibilities, inviting speculation based on extremely limited anecdotal evidence, and encourages the promulgation of theories based less on their ability to withstand a rigorous methodological challenge than on the desire of both academics and performers to come up with something as different as possible from the prevailing performance styles in use today. Scholars have many options in dealing with the vibrato

question, and in my opinion, with very few exceptions, their handling of it to date does not constitute one of modern musicology's more impressive achievements.

## **Historical Recordings and Orchestral Vibrato**

This section necessarily contains a very long discussion because it has a tremendous amount of ground to cover. It falls naturally into three big parts:

1. Problems in using historical recordings as evidence; what scientific studies reveal as opposed to the recent claims made for them by supposed musicological experts; the various agendas of some of the authors of major books on the subject;
2. A survey of selected recordings as examples of what we can and cannot hear with the naked, unaided ear; suggestions for useful methodologies, and what the results tend to reveal;
3. The difficulty in weighing recorded evidence alongside other kinds of source material (written, oral), and the distortions and biases caused by giving aural documents undue emphasis and significance.

In Part One, I explained concisely why historical recordings for the most part cannot be used as evidence for the presence or absence of orchestral vibrato (and have a very marginal significance when it comes to the solo variety too). The bottom line is simple: orchestral vibrato has a unique function, and in most circumstances cannot be heard as a distinct variance in pitch, as it sometimes can with a solo. It acts as an enhancement of the section's basic timbre, and perception of it is dependent on so many contingent factors that those who claim otherwise really are for the most part kidding themselves. Indeed, it realizes Flesch's ideal of being unobtrusive, the "scent as it relates to the flower," by default. This point should be obvious, but it doesn't take into consideration the desperate need of the anti-vibrato crowd to prove their theories using evidence beyond that available in writing alone.

There is no inherent reason why the advent of recorded sound should be particularly useful in proving or disproving any theory about performing practice in prior centuries. Indeed, to the extent that it suggests an artificial periodicity--the vibrato clock starts running conveniently in tandem with the new technology--it may be a hindrance. The availability of decades of recordings featuring "continuous" solo violin vibrato seems to offer "proof" of the difference between modern technique and that described in the old treatises. That we also know from anecdotal evidence (Flesch and others) that continuous vibrato was basically in use by the 1880s, if not sooner, in the hands of soloists such as Vieuxtemps, Ysaÿe, Wieniawski, and later Kreisler matters not a bit.

Now consider this same point in the field of orchestral music. In Part One I avoided printing many score excerpts because of the sheer number of works being discussed. The inclusion of the music would have necessitated adding a couple of hundred extra pages, at least. Here we have a bit more room to maneuver:

[illegible]

The above extract comes from Frank van der Stucken's Sinfonischer Prolog zu Heinrich Heines Tragödie "William Ratcliff," Op. 6 (1883). As you can see the string parts, which occupy the bottom half of the score, feature first and second violins divided into four parts each, violas in three parts, then cellos and basses. All play, pianissimo, a sequence of chords in slow tempo, with the initial entrance of the upper strings echoed, *senza espressione*, by the remainder of the section. There can be no question that this directive means "withhold vibrato." If all of the examples previously cited up to now don't make that point pellucidly clear, the context here could hardly suggest otherwise.

Van der Stucken (1858-1929) is a fascinating character. The first principal conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony (from 1895), he was born in Texas of a Belgian father and German mother, trained in Leipzig, and grew up to be a close friend of Grieg. His Sinfonischer Prolog was premiered in the year of its composition by Liszt's orchestra at Weimar. Van der Stucken's instrumentation is extremely audacious for its time, with his use of "no expression" even predating that found in Strauss' early tone poems. Like the Bloch Symphony discussed in Part One, it is quite self-consciously the work of a young composer fully aware of contemporary performance practice and the kinds of effects he could expect a typical orchestra of the day to produce. And it is evident from the above example that the basic string timbre of a central European orchestra from the German school in which van der Stucken was trained included vibrato.

This hypothesis cannot be tested directly by appealing to old gramophone recordings because none existed in 1883. But van der Stucken's is just the sort of work that has the potential to be useful in drawing some firm conclusions about the use (or not) of vibrato at this time, because the composer has specifically notated a passage that contrasts the unmodified mean sonority of the strings with a timbre that can only be realized by eliminating intrinsic vibrato. Otherwise there would be no audible difference between the various string sections at all. The fact that some listeners claim not to hear vibrato in a few historical recordings made decades later (of very different repertoire) hardly invalidates what this and similar pieces of evidence suggest.

I hope you can readily see how these various attempts to prove a negative by saying "we don't believe it's there so we don't hear it," aside from being a self-fulfilling prophecy, inevitably falsify the timing of the advance of "continuous" vibrato--assuming of course that such a thing happened at all. We will return to the question of other types of evidence beyond sound recordings later on, but I wanted to begin this discussion with an example similar to those used in Part One of this essay because it speaks directly to the critical issue of periodicity. Keep in mind that the proponents of the non-vibrato theory of 19<sup>th</sup> century performance not only claim to know *what* happened, but also *when* it happened. They desperately need the alleged supporting evidence of historical recordings to back up patchy documentary sources which often either predate the period in question, or cannot be linked with any degree of certainty to specific performers or actual performance situations.

A mangled theory of periodicity has profound implications for current scholarship, forcing its proponents to regard early recordings as the fortuitously preserved, "last gasp"

of a dying but grand performance tradition rather than, for example, as isolated instances of individual artistry in the days preceding the widespread standardization of violin pedagogy, or as proof of lower average levels of technical accomplishment among orchestras and soloists (this latter a long-known, undisputed and uncontroversial fact). And for today's period-instrument specialist, a skewed view of periodicity creates an acutely uncomfortable relationship with the "evidence" that purportedly serves as a performance model. This is because it is easy to justify the minimal vibrato approach to Baroque and early Classical period music on audible stylistic grounds, but much more difficult as we enter the Romantic period and encounter the repertoire that the historical recordings available to us for the most part document.

Remember that in the 1960s and 70s, the period instrument movement staked its claim to legitimacy based on the fact that the Baroque and early music it was performing had been falsified by Romantic performance traditions, including the extensive use of continuous vibrato. For example, Nikolaus Harnoncourt stated in a radio interview on New York's WKCR<sup>11</sup> in December of 2005: "My memory goes far back into the 1930s, my actual memory. And I think, this way started really with Mendelssohn. And when they played Bach for instance in Vienna, in the time of Brahms and Dvorak, it was very, very Romantic and with a very great orchestra, and believe it or not with a lot of vibrato then already."

According to Harnoncourt, it was the younger generation of Hindemith and Krenek, the "New German School" of the 1920s with its motto of "Neue Sachlichkeit" ("New Objectivity") that began playing Bach and his contemporaries without vibrato. The evidence for this is incontestable. Peter Heyworth, for example, notes in his biography of Otto Klemperer that during this period the conductor "recognized that 'expressive' dynamics still preferred by most conductors were inappropriate and in their place substituted terraced dynamics. He dispensed with string vibrato, even in slow movements" (p. 299). This approach caused controversy in its day. But Klemperer, notably, did not do the same with the music of Brahms, Mahler, Strauss, and their contemporaries for the simple reason that, having lived with and been trained in the late Romantic tradition, he knew that to play later music like Bach's was stylistically just plain wrong.

Now, however, the claim by certain members of the current generation (but significantly not Harnoncourt) that the music of the Romantic period was played without vibrato begs the question all over again of what really happened in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century performances of Baroque and Classical music. The new paradigm directly contradicts the aesthetic assumptions of the historically informed performance movement's founding fathers--assumptions based not on the sound of old recordings, but on the experience of artists like Harnoncourt of a living musical tradition that they themselves witnessed and absorbed as part of their early training. In order to legitimize its revisionist view of Romantic music, today's scholarship rejects the early music revolution's original

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<sup>11</sup> For the entire interview, go to: <http://welltemperedmusic.blogspot.com/2005/12/harnoncourt-interview-transcript.html>.

premises concerning periodicity, and in a feat of breathtaking opportunism and intellectual *chutzpah* moves forward its own prior estimate of the rise of continuous vibrato by at least half a century; and in extreme cases such as Roger Norrington's by much more than that.

Perhaps this explains why, even where the opportunity does arise to compare the current orthodoxy directly with early recordings, few commentators rise to the challenge, and none have done so successfully. We can, after all, take soloists such as Simon Standage, Rachel Podger, Vera Beths, or Andrew Manze<sup>12</sup> and contrast them systematically to violinists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is just as possible in considering, for instance, the Vienna or Berlin Philharmonics in Mozart and Beethoven as opposed to Concentus Musicus Wien or the Academy of Ancient Music. Although we read *claims* that early soloists and orchestras used very little vibrato, and we have actual performances by modern period instrument soloists and ensembles using very little (or no) vibrato, the notion of making a straight A/B comparison *in the same repertoire* seldom if ever arises--and for good reason. These performances don't sound anything like one another.

Consider, for example, Nikisch's famous Berlin acoustic recording of Beethoven's Fifth, place it next to modern versions by Hogwood, Gardiner, or Norrington, and insist that the timbral ideals of all of these ensembles are basically identical. Then see what happens to your reputation as a serious scholar. As long as today's period instrument organizations conveniently suggest that their models lie, for the most part, well back in the era prior to the advent of recordings--embodying the stylistics prevalent close to the actual date of composition--it's a matter of "no harm no foul." We can enjoy (or disparage) their work as an imaginative recreation and revival of a conjectural manner of performance.

However, as the authenticists get closer to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in giving Romantic repertoire "the treatment," and the lineage of performance practice finds itself documented in the living memories of today's best conventional artists, the risk of doing something utterly foolish is much greater. The need to find hard evidence in support of deliberately different timbral predilections accordingly becomes a major issue--so here too we find a reliance on historical recordings for validation, one more implicit than explicit because the actual comparison (conveniently) is never actually made. It's very interesting to note in this connection that none of the major Baroque and Classical period-style violinists have taken on the great Romantic concerto repertoire. No doubt it will happen, but for the moment the danger of failure would seem to be too potent<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> This should not be taken as adverse criticism of those performers, some of whom I admire very much and have praised in record reviews for many years.

<sup>13</sup> This in turn brings up what remains to my mind the singular, most inauthentic characteristic of the period performance movement: its failure of nerve. You would think that the absence of historical recordings of, say, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in the purported style of Auer himself, the dedicatee and a Joachim pupil, would represent an opportunity, but just the opposite is the case. Auer's pupils, Heifetz, Milstein, Elman, and others, constitute a major stumbling block (and for good reason) to any modern artist who wants to claim that he or she is the true representative of the Auer school, and that those illustrious names really "got it wrong." In the Romantic period, of course, it wouldn't matter. Auer himself simply rewrote

Footnote continues on next page...

Since none of the purported avatars of the “less vibrato” school of violin playing made complete concerto recordings, and precious few of large works in any medium, there is no support (however illusory or controversial the audible evidence) for any modern interpretation along supposedly historical lines. The issue with Romantic chamber music is more complex, but the above generalization is broadly true there as well. At the end of the day, the only means of validating the approach to vibrato ascribed to, say, the Joachim school will be the arrival of a performer broadly acknowledged to be as great an interpreter as was Joachim. This will, rightly, make the entire vibrato question a secondary issue at best. Until that happens, all self-proclaimed followers of the minimal vibrato philosophy are nothing more than musical bench-warmers.

We can thus see how the use of historical recordings becomes a two-edged sword, a factor as limiting as it is potentially liberating. Obviously artists of the alleged “old school” were alive at the dawn of recording technology, and some (such as Joachim) barely survived to make a tiny handful of recordings. But what does this prove, even assuming that the recordings support some of the theoretical writings on the subject of vibrato? It proves nothing, because the real issue is whether what Ysaÿe, Wieniawski, or Kreisler did was truly unprecedented or merely a different twist on a practice that had existed all along among those not fortunate enough to have had their art either preserved on disc or reported in written testimonials. And that we cannot know with certainty, because in the era before recordings there are no aural documents to confirm or disprove any statement on this subject.

All we have are ex-post facto recollections, and a few eyewitness accounts or anecdotes based on hearsay. These can be maddeningly inconsistent. For example, in a review of a Kreisler recital in London in 1909, the *Times* critic acclaimed his Bach playing as “the legitimate successor of Joachim” (May 26). There’s not a word about vibrato in this article, which is actually a useful fact, because it tells us that there were more important interpretive qualities that were thought worthy of discussion at the time. Indeed, a survey of critical literature during this period reveals that the term “vibrato” is used very loosely, as musical jargon, interchangeably with “wobble” and synonymously with anything that results in poor intonation (a relationship that we now know based on scientific evidence to be largely false).

Flesch, in any event, was well aware that a revolution in technique in the hermetically sealed world of violin performance practice may not result in a decisively audible timbral difference. Here, for example, is his summary of Kreisler’s achievement (from *Problems of Tone Production in Violin Playing*, 1931):

“The use of Vibrato during *passages* mainly introduced by *Kreisler*, signifies one of the most important achievements of modern violinistic art. Different opinions as to its

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Tchaikovsky’s violin part to suit his own view of what it should have been. The rights of the performer equaled or exceeded those of the composer, however much the composers complained, but this stands in flagrant contradiction to the entire scholarly apparatus and *raison d’être* of the HIP movement today.



aesthetic justification may be expressed. However, certain it is, that it answers the taste of the times and is already valued as one of the indispensable constituent parts of contemporary playing. Considered from a purely tonal point of view, it does away, above all, with that dry etude-like character during *détaché* bowing, which is apt to let passage work appear as a foreign matter in the organism of the living art work. Its application, in accordance with the law pertaining to even apportionment for expressive strength in both arms, causes an automatic diminution of right arm pressure, and on this account is unusually valuable for violinists who habitually force the tone.”

In other words, Kreisler’s innovation was for the most part technical, interesting and important primarily from the viewpoint of the player as Flesch well knew when, in his *Memoirs*, he described it as “admittedly...more latent than manifest” (p. 129). No listener who is not a violinist cares much about passagework, save that it be in tune and suitably brilliant. You certainly cannot hear vibrato in early (or most modern) recordings as a notable component of a violinist’s technique in passagework. Yet Kreisler’s name constantly comes up as the “guru of continuous vibrato” without any mention of what he actually accomplished, whether or not you can even perceive it--in his own performances or anyone else’s--and what it is that the recordings reveal. In fact, we have evidence that Kreisler’s actual practice conforms neither to Flesch’s description, nor anyone else’s.

Consider Kreisler’s version of the opening Adagio from Bach’s Sonata No. 1 in G minor for solo violin, which is analyzed in detail by Scott N. Reger in his article “The String Instrument Vibrato” (*Studies in the Psychology of Music*, Vol. 1, University of Iowa, 1932). Reger discovered that, “The vibrato is consistently used on stopped notes until they become less than .25 of a second in duration. Practically all the notes of longer duration than this played without vibrato are open string notes. Open string notes have a range in duration from .2 to 1.4 seconds. The vibrato was never superimposed upon slurs, glides, portamentos or glissandos. In the selection studied, Kreisler employed the vibrato approximately 79 per cent of the total playing time.”

However, Reger goes on to note that, “Some compositions intended for a display of technical ability consisting in great part of fast runs, trills, glissandos, and other devices would present comparatively little opportunity for use of the vibrato. One cannot conclude that because Kreisler used the vibrato 79 per cent of his total playing time in the selection studied that he would use it approximately the same amount of time while playing a different type of selection.” In short, the amount of vibrato used will necessarily vary from work to work for technical reasons, even if the artist displays a tendency to employ it as often as possible.

The Bach is, of course, a slow and predominantly lyrical piece in an “emotional” minor key. Yet even here, as you can plainly see, Kreisler’s vibrato is not continuous in the strict sense. It’s probably fair to assume that this example was chosen so as to give the analyst maximum opportunities to find vibrato for study purposes. The question of frequency, the critical issue in most modern studies, is not the focus of Reger’s work. He is more interested in describing exactly what vibrato is generally than in tabulating how often it is used. But what really matters is that Kreisler’s interpretation in this particular

work fits neither Flesch's general characterization of his achievement, nor the usual description of what "continuous vibrato" is supposed to be.

Kreisler's own 1935 recording of his String Quartet in A minor<sup>14</sup>, with Thomas Petre, William Primrose, and Lauri Kennedy represents another excellent test case, particularly for those who claim to be able to describe the exact amount of vibrato on historical recordings. Kreisler's quartet is not just an abundant source of ornamental vibrato hairpin [ $\langle \rangle$ ] accents (sometimes piled atop one another, as we have already seen from the bit of score previously cited). It also contains three lengthy passages where he specifically asks for extra "vibrato" from some or all of his players. This, despite the theoretically "continuous" technique already in place at this time, and with this particular violinist. Challenge one of your authenticity-minded friends unfamiliar with the work to listen "blind" and correctly describe where each such passage begins and ends.

Now apply the above observations to the analysis of Robert Philip (as discussed both here and in Part One), David Milsom [author of *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance* (Ashgate, 2003)], and others in their own descriptions of vibrato in historical recordings. Even assuming they get their facts right from the point of view of objective analysis--which is unlikely given their methodology--their approach shows a clear bias that corrupts their results. In order to fit the evidentiary square peg into the theoretical round hole they find it necessary to choose the earliest recordings by the oldest artists. This is the only way that they can assert the probability of stylistic variation over time, and it means that the performances feature the poorest, most limited sound, and artists who are often well past their primes.

Writers like Milsom would have us believe that the newer generation of violin players at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century used more vibrato because of a measurable change in aesthetics, when in fact they were also healthier and in better technical shape<sup>15</sup>. Even if this were not true, it would be necessary to account for this possibility, and there's no way to do that because we have no recorded evidence of the older artists at the peaks of their respective careers in comparable repertoire. So when you consider the age issue in tandem with the writer's need to prove his thesis, and then, as the Kreisler examples show, the likelihood of a high degree of analytical inaccuracy when relying on the unaided ear, the scholarly results can't help but be doubtful in the extreme.

In order to illustrate this point with reference to some additional serious science, compare Milsom's list of historical singers, whose dates of birth fall in the 1840s and 50s, to those in the much earlier study by Max Schoen, a colleague of Carl Seashore, whose article "An Experimental Study of the Pitch Factor in Artistic Singing" was first published in

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<sup>14</sup> It's available from Biddulph (LAB 123) in Ward Marsten's excellent transfer.

<sup>15</sup> Of the dozen tracks that Milsom analyzes in the CD supplied with his book, four are by Joachim, who had been in technical decline since 1890 (according to Flesch) and who was only a few years away from his death at the time of recording. Here are the ages of the other violinists included: Sarasate (60), Auer (75), Hubay (71), Arnold Rosé (64/5), Ysaÿe (54), Hugo Heermann (65). This geriatric pantheon is not exactly a list of artists captured in their respective primes.

1922. Schoen compares five recordings of the Bach/Gounod *Ave Maria* by five singers: Nellie Melba, Alma Gluck, Emma Eames, Frances Alda, and Emmy Destinn<sup>16</sup>. Using custom-built equipment designed especially for the purpose of isolating and measuring vibrato, he reached the following conclusions based on its nearly ubiquitous presence in the voices of all five singers:

“1. The vibrato is a fundamental attribute of the artistically effective singing voice in that it is a medium for the effective conveyance of emotion in vocal expression.

2. The vibrato is a manifestation of the general neuro-muscular condition that characterizes the singing organism.”

Schoen’s findings agree with those of later studies conducted under Carl Seashore’s auspices, including one by Milton Metfessel, whose very extensive study “The Vibrato in Artistic Voices” (1932) determined that, “The objective evidence from artistic voices on phonograph records shows conclusively that there is a pulsation present in the voice of every vocal artist.” This raises an obvious question: If every singer has an intrinsic vibrato, why doesn’t Milsom notice? Giving him credit for basic intellectual honesty in this regard, Seashore suggests several reasons.

First, as noted with respect to both singers and string players in *Psychology of Music*, “The vibrato is always heard as of very much smaller extent than it is in the physical tone. For example, a pulsation of a semitone is ordinarily heard as less than 0.2 of a tone. It is this illusion which makes the vibrato tolerable. *Much of the most beautiful vibrato is below the threshold for vibrato hearing and is perceived merely as tone quality.* Individual differences in the capacity for hearing the vibrato are very large. In a normal population, one individual may be 50 or 100 times as keen as another in this hearing.... Regardless of the extent of pitch, intensity, or timbre pulsation, we always hear an even mean pitch corresponding to the true pitch, an even intensity and continuous timbre.”

In other words, an accurate measurement of vibrato by a single listener is simply impossible, unless that person has an extraordinary, indeed phenomenal auditory gift. This would be true even if Milsom and Schoen did not have very different agendas. Schoen, like Reger, merely wishes to measure objectively the frequency and extent of vibrato using the most promising material: living artists in their prime, whose recordings are then analyzed under controlled conditions with the most sophisticated technological aids available. Milsom, in contrast, is trying to prove the truth of the hypothesis that significant stylistic changes have occurred over time based on the evidence of historical recordings auditioned with an ear toward finding timbral differences between individual tones, which are then hopefully and subjectively labeled “vibrato” and “non-vibrato.”

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<sup>16</sup> Two of these, Melba and Eames, were pupils of Garcia’s star protégé Mathilde Marchesi, and thus represent a direct line back to the kind of sound that he theoretically advocated in his method (if you believe in the lineage business). And both exhibited continuous vibrato.

The situation looks even worse when it comes to evaluating violinists than it is with singers. Not only does the violin not possess an intrinsic vibrato, unlike the voice, but Seashore's research (which has consistently been confirmed in its basic findings) shows that string vibrato averages a mere quarter tone, as compared to a full half tone for vocalists. In other words, violin vibrato is more difficult to hear with the necessary specificity. This makes the absence of some kind of control, or objective measure of accuracy, all the more telling in the work of Milsom, Philip, or anyone else operating in the field of analysis of historical recordings. The study of vibrato requires great subtlety in measurement, particularly in considering those artists who prided themselves on its unobtrusive use. Is it any wonder that much of it probably goes unheard, and unreported?

There is another, still more interesting explanation that helps to answer this critical question. As Metfessel point out at the conclusion of his study of vibrato in artistic singing:

*The fact that musical histories credit Rubini with introducing the vibrato into artistic singing needs explanation. How could Rubini introduce a phenomenon which is unintentional in many voices? One interpretation would be that a voice with involuntary vibrato before Rubini's time was not listened to just as those without any vibrato at all are not listened to at the present time. Rubini, then, having a vibrato in his own voice, introduced a vocal fad that has been a boon to all those with natural vibratos. This interpretation does not make very good sense for us because the vibratos of artists seem to have such a law and order in their consistency. Something fundamentally esthetic seems to be at work, or else the limits of vibrato rate and extent among artists would not be so critical as to include five out of six ordinary vibratos. Just to have a vibrato in a voice is not enough; it must be a certain kind of vibrato. We believe that the artistic vibrato has always belonged to artistic singing.*

*As Mr. Henderson says, (New York Times, January 6, 1919), Rubini used vibrato in emotionally emphatic tones. What he introduced was not the natural vibrato we are calling artistic, but rather an exaggerated one which actually makes the voice tremulous. He directed attention to what was ordinarily a marginally conscious phenomenon by putting on enough pulsating power, generally with intentional oscillating of the breathing musculature, to make it easily perceptible. Artists still do this today; but they use the prominent vibrato with discretion. One of these is an example by Caruso in Fig. 15. The prominent vibrato is an embellishment and its use may be subject to fads; the less prominent vibrato is so well balanced that it fuses sufficiently to keep itself in the background.*

I hope this explanation looks familiar. It is, of course, Donington's theory of "colorful" and "ornamental" vibrato in violin playing, albeit arrived at through entirely different means as the result of a rigorous process of scientific analysis. It is, furthermore, also entirely consistent with my own conclusions based on examination of the scores cited in Part One of this essay. This means that three very different approaches--(1) reference to historical violin treatises; (2) study of composers' written indications in their scores; and (3) scientific analysis of the recorded voices of renowned 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century singers--

all arrived independently at the same conclusion. This certainly cannot be said for the opposite view regarding vibrato.

Just as significantly, Metfessel raises (and attempts to answer) the critical question of just what pedagogues and treatise writers were talking about when they protested against, or praised, the use of vibrato in vocal or instrumental music. Was it an exaggerated melodic embellishment, or an intrinsic, background timbre? Did theoreticians who defined vibrato as an “ornament” simply accept the intrinsic kind as natural timbre, and so not mention it or class it as “vibrato” at all? We don’t know. However, given that the existence of a natural level of vibrato in the human singing voice is an irrefutable fact, we can be sure that when listeners such as Milsom purport to count vibrato in historical recordings, they are in fact reporting the presence only of the most prominent type, assuming they can hear it correctly at all.

Later research specifically supports this last hypothesis. James Stark, for example, notes that “The normal rate of vibrato has generally slowed down since the early twentieth century, perhaps because of a ‘shift in our aesthetic value system (Rothman and Timberlake 1985, 114). For instance, Enrico Caruso’s vibrato rate was near 7.0 [cycles per second], whereas Luciano Pavarotti’s is near 5.5.... Early sound recordings confirm the faster rate of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century singers” (p. 141). Given that what is true of voices is also generally valid with respect to instruments, these findings suggest some very interesting facts about the period practice movement that may be singularly applicable to this discussion.

As Seashore and his colleagues demonstrated, the quicker the vibrato rate, the less audible it is as a clearly defined pitch oscillation<sup>17</sup>. The tone “blurs,” just as the individual still photos of moving pictures blend to give the illusion of smoothly continuous motion. From the point of view of the violinist, a quick vibrato often means a narrow vibrato, because there is less time to move the fingers a wide distance on each cycle. The result is vibrato that is more difficult to hear as such, particularly in technically fallible early recordings. Some listeners likely perceive the result as having little or no vibrato, particularly as Seashore also demonstrated that the ear hears the mean pitch in each cycle as the fundamental tone. The presence of vibrato, unless very pronounced, has little effect on the perception of intonational purity. So vibrato may well be present without its being detected by the unaided ear.

Unfortunately for Milsom, there is yet another, more simply understood possibility: he is biased as a result of a misunderstood notion of what the Joachim school to which he theoretically claims allegiance actually taught. The evidence for this is compelling. For example, in his discussion of vibrato, he claims, “...most of the performances reviewed here located vibrato in ‘theoretically justifiable’ places. Earlier-born performers, in the main (and those more obviously embodying the stylistic ‘*ancien-régime*’), use the device

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<sup>17</sup> And as you will see, violinists know this and play accordingly. They are nearly unanimous in equating slow vibrato with bad vibrato.

almost exclusively in these places. Thus, one might classify Joachim, Auer, Rosé, Sembrich and Santley.” (p. 139)

Compare this to the statements of violinist Edmund Severn, who studied at the Berlin Hochschule under Emanuel Wirth, Joachim’s first assistant and violist in the Joachim Quartet. While conceding that the vibrato question has never been without controversy, and that “my teachers decried it,” Severn reaches the following remarkable conclusion:

“Why, then, has [vibrato] come into general use during the last twenty-five years<sup>18</sup>? Simply because it is based on the correctly produced human voice. The old players, especially those of the German school, said, and some still say, that *vibrato* should only be used at the climax of a melody. If we listen to a Sembrich or a Bonci, however, we hear a vibration in every tone. Let us not forget that the violin is a singing instrument and that even Joachim said: ‘We must imitate the human voice.’ This, I think, disposes of the case finally and we must admit that every little boy or girl with a natural *vibrato* is more correct in that part of his tone-production than many of the great masters of the past.”  
--cited in Martens, *Violin Mastery*, 1919 (p. 133-4).

Despite Severn’s hope, the case obviously has not been “disposed of finally,” so perhaps the comments of another Joachim pupil, Maximilian Pilzer, can help:

“Of course, any trained player will draw his bow across the strings in a smooth, even way, but that is not enough. There must be an inner, emotional instinct, an electric spark within the player himself that sets the *vibrato* current in motion. It is an inner, psychic vibration which should be reflected by the intense, rapid vibration in the fingers of the left hand on the strings in order to give fluent expression to emotion. The *vibrato* can not be used, naturally, on the open strings, but otherwise it represents the true means for securing warmth of expression. Of course, some decry the *vibrato*--but the reason is often because the *vibrato* is too slow. One need only listen to Ysaÿe, Elman, Kreisler: artists such as these employ the quick, intense *vibrato* with ideal effect. An exaggerated *vibrato* is as bad as what I call ‘the sentimental slide,’ a common fault, which many violinists cultivate under the impression that they are playing expressively.”  
--cited in Martens (p. 109).

Pilzer’s authority might be given some weight, as he performed Joachim’s Hungarian Concerto for the great man himself, presumably in keeping with the above aesthetic criteria, and was purportedly told by the composer “There is nothing for me to correct!” (Martens, p. 110). So once again we see very tellingly the difference between what is *said*, and what the artist *does*; between what the student learns in conservatory and what

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<sup>18</sup> Severn’s comment raises a very intriguing question that the contemporary literature on the vibrato question scarcely addresses: the reliability of human memory. How does Severn actually know that vibrato is bring used more than formerly? The fact is, he doesn’t. There are no recordings to support his view of the past; there is only anecdotal evidence--perhaps some statements by long-lived pedagogues or older performers, and little else. This does not mean that he is wrong, but gross generalizations of this sort need to be viewed very critically.

he must do to make his path in the world. Indeed, despite all the talk about the German school's avoidance of vibrato, these quotations suggest that few of Joachim's students who achieved even relative fame copied him in this respect, *despite what they purportedly were taught*. Quite the opposite. We have already seen that the most renowned of them all, Willy Burmester, even used vibrato on harmonics (he later claimed to have spent years "unlearning" the debilitating habits inculcated by Joachim's school, all of which is entirely consistent with Flesch's observations as well)<sup>19</sup>.

So we don't need the evidence of some custom-built scientific apparatus to theorize that if Severn hears vibrato "in every tone" of singers such as Sembrich, and David Milsom does not, then either the latter's hearing requires adjustment, or the recordings simply do not accurately reproduce what listeners enjoying the advantage of encountering her live were clearly in a position to observe. And what is true in the case of Sembrich may be just as applicable to the other artists in Milsom's list.

But then, Milsom gives his prejudice away in the very line of his text, where he hypothesizes that, "Players and singers of a later style, such as Calvé or Davies, or members of the 'Franco-Belgian' school of violinists, use the device more indiscriminately, although reserving the most pronounced effects for such specific moments in the text." The assumption that a more frequent use of vibrato must necessarily be "indiscriminate" not only flies in the face of what the artists themselves claim to be doing, it reveals one of the major fallacies undermining the authenticist position: the notion that "continuous" vibrato must be a witlessly uniform, unvarying or randomly applied timbral patina.

The truth is just the opposite. When taken to the extremes commonly heard today, it's clear that the non-vibrato timbre just as readily results in expressionless monotony, and it is precisely for this reason that the absence of vibrato has been characterized historically as a special effect. Louisa Tetrazzini pointed this out unequivocally when she wrote: "Too wide a smile often accompanies what is called 'the white voice.' This is a voice production where a head resonance alone is employed, without sufficient of the *apoggio* or enough of the mouth resonance to give the tone a vital quality. This 'white voice' should be thoroughly understood and is one of the many shades of tone a singer can use at times, just as the impressionist uses various unusual colors to produce certain atmospheric effects." (*Caruso and Tetrazzini on the Art of Singing*, p. 30). Here is the precise equivalent to the vibratoless *misterioso* called for in the orchestral scores examined in Part One.

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<sup>19</sup> This raises a fascinating question that the HIP community does not attempt to answer: Why did all of these performers ignore what they supposedly were taught? There are several possible answers, none of them kind to the theories of non-vibrato scholars. The first is that violinists throughout history ignored this advice, and what happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century doesn't represent anything particularly new as an artistic phenomenon. The second is that Joachim himself was anomalous, and so the school that he founded in his own image was not representative of contemporary attitudes towards vibrato. Finally, it seems that Joachim's own attitude was hardly as dogmatic on the vibrato question as his modern-day followers would have us believe. There is strong evidence in support of all of these possibilities.

Further elaborating on this point, Flesch observes, “Theoretically the pure tone is also possible without Vibrato; however, for the listener, it will sound poor and expressionless, excepting in case of some emotional complex, deprived intentionally of purely sensual ingredients.” (from *Problems of Tone Production, etc*). Here is yet another justification for the intrinsic use of vibrato, one that Milsom and his colleagues can hardly even attempt to address: the impact of audience expectations on performance technique. It’s easy to forget that all musicians are, first and foremost, *performers*, playing not for themselves, but for the pleasure of others. Forget about how much the pedagogues may rant and rave. If listeners like vibrato, and expect vibrato, and demand vibrato, then vibrato is what they are likely to get. Period<sup>20</sup>.

Very well, I hear the authenticists reply, Flesch is only speaking about our modern (or early 20<sup>th</sup> century) preferences in this respect. Nonsense. If current scholarship wishes to assert that listeners in centuries past had a fundamentally different concept of what constituted expressive timbre than we do now, despite there being absolutely no evidence one way or the other, they have the burden of proof to show it, and to describe exactly how string instruments communicate wide variations in emotional temperature without vibrato, especially in the Romantic repertoire which serves as the focus of this discussion. It’s not enough to assert that vibrato wasn’t used and that no one noticed that anything was missing, particularly in light of the strong evidence to the contrary.

As for the orchestra, although the “elderly recording artist with failing technique” issue hardly applies to the timbre of an entire ensemble, the claim that string sections avoided using vibrato originates not in demonstrable facts supported by the evidence of historical recordings, but rather in what the ensemble is alleged to be doing based on the barely audible behavior of a few contemporaneous, sadly decrepit soloists, who in turn are viewed as little more than living embodiments of even older pedagogical texts. We have already seen in Part One of this essay that this viewpoint has no basis in fact, and indeed probably gets the chronological advent of “continuous” solo versus orchestral vibrato backwards. Seashore’s findings are extremely helpful in this connection:

“In solo parts, both vocal and instrumental, the artist has larger latitude for giving prominence to the vibrato than he has in ensemble.

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<sup>20</sup> Just so we’re clear on where I stand personally on this issue, I am in full agreement with Tetrizzini, Flesch, and indeed most other sensible authorities in believing, first, that vocal vibrato in a well trained voice should basically regulate itself and find its natural level depending on the emotional temperature of the music being sung; it should not need to be added prominently except as a special effect, and should not be permitted to overwhelm the tone. The same applies to violin playing: vibrato should sound natural, “vocal,” and never draw attention to itself except in unusual expressive circumstances. But this, to my mind, is what most fine artists have always tried to do, albeit with varying degrees of success and making due allowance for personal taste and variations in technique. The confusion in violin-playing circles partly arises from the complete lack of consistency on this issue among voice pedagogues. Thus, when Lilli Lehman in her book *How to Sing* (1902) wrote that “even the vibrato, to which full voices are prone, should be nipped in the bud” (p. 72), she was obviously not speaking of that natural vibrato that gives the timbre life and color—at least judging from her own recordings, which are perfectly “normal” in this respect and as audibly full of vibrato as anyone’s.



The more nearly alike the timbres of the instruments within an orchestral choir, the greater may be the demand for the vibrato in that choir.” [*Psychology of Music*]

Here, in these two concise statements, is the scientific rationale for the existence of intrinsic vibrato within the orchestral string section at a comparatively early date. At this point it becomes obvious that the proponents of the various contrarian theories are trapped in the twisted logic of their own pre-existing, vibrato-denying intellectual construct, so much so that the reality of what historical recordings reveal (as we shall very shortly see) has little or nothing to do with the claims actually made for them.

Moreover, because orchestral vibrato can’t be heard in isolation or with any marked degree of specificity, and even the solo variety presents serious problems, the findings made in considering historical recordings range all over the place. Donington, for example, hears continuous vibrato in Joachim’s solo recordings; Brown and Hickman (and Philip and Milsom) do not. Brown claims that Nikisch’s Berlin Philharmonic acoustic performances from 1913 have no vibrato; other writers admit that it’s impossible to tell until the advent of the electrical process due to the extremely uncomfortable compromises attendant on acoustical recording technology. Philip, as noted previously, dubiously claims that vibrato in the Vienna and Berlin orchestras varied according to the habits of their respective concertmasters. Norrington inanely asserts that German orchestras in the 1920s and 30s used none at all<sup>21</sup>.

I have already pointed out, with Spohr’s assistance, the silliness of taking a geographical approach, of alleging that vibrato was common in orchestras in France or Italy, but not in Germany or England. Brown further asserts that the gradual hiring of soloist-quality players in major orchestras contributed to a greater homogeneity of string sonority (never mind that this tends to contradict the basic underlying assumption of the “top down” theory of continuous vibrato diffusion: that orchestra members waited to see a famous soloist do it first). Brown assumes, of course, that those new members played with minimal vibrato, and does not bother to mention any orchestras specifically, quantify the rate of turnover in their string sections, or otherwise give some indication of the time-period in question. In all of this, there is no methodologically sound standard of proof, and no test of reasonableness that can be applied to validate any of these claims. They are fundamentally speculative and impressionistic.

Indeed, in his book *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, Robert Philip concedes that, “In an orchestra, it is impossible to know whether an individual string-player is using vibrato on a particular note, or playing a portamento over a particular interval, or phrasing in a particular way. What one hears is the combined effect of what everyone in the section is doing.” (p. 104) We can only applaud the refreshing honesty of this admission. Nevertheless, Philip’s subsequent refusal to confront the implications of his own words, and offer a rational methodology that validates his proclaimed ability to hear

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<sup>21</sup> “My impression is that 90 per cent of historically informed players, and of course 100 per cent of modern executants, have no notion of what can be so simply revealed in a good gramophone collection: that no German orchestra played with vibrato until the 1930s.” [*Early Music*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (February 2004)]

the gross quantity of orchestral vibrato employed (or not) in historical orchestral recordings, can only excite dismay.

These, then, are the reasons that I have seen little purpose before now in taking on the issue of historical recordings. The people who claim not to hear vibrato in pre-war orchestras are making an assumption based on the input of their senses, the interpretation of which is a matter of faith. How can we be sure that they even know what “continuous orchestral vibrato” sounds like? Has anyone ever accurately described or defined its timbre? Is it always the same? Can anyone isolate and identify it, and come to a general conclusion applicable to the vast majority of unrecorded *live* musical activity in a given period? What is the standard, or norm, by which early recorded performances should be judged, and how is it measured? None of these questions have been answered in the extent literature; indeed, they haven’t even been seriously asked.

In my view, proponents of the non-vibrato school who use recordings as the basis of their beliefs are like members of the Flat Earth Society<sup>22</sup>: based on the visual perception of someone standing on the ground the earth does indeed appear flat. But it’s not. In the case at hand, if a body of scholarship (and I use the term loosely) had not arisen claiming that vibrato was not used by orchestras in the pre-War period, I strongly suspect that no one would be talking about these recordings today as proof of this assertion one way or the other. Instead, we would attribute instances of thin, desiccated string tone to technological shortcomings in the original recordings or their subsequent transfers, or to the often inferior quality of the string playing in many of the orchestras themselves (including some very famous ones).

Some of the other basic reasons that historical recordings need to be used with great caution before being taken as evidence of a particular performance practice actually are addressed very honestly and intelligently by Philip and Milsom (and others) in their various books and articles. These include the question of whether or not the body of available evidence constitutes a statistically reliable sample, whether the performers actually played in the same way under artificial studio conditions as they would have “live,” and whether the limitations of the prevailing technology have a quantifiable impact on our ability to perceive an artist’s interpretation.

Philip, especially, in *Performing Music in the Age of Recording*, criticizes Norrington’s cherry-picking approach to the use of historical recordings in order to support his personal view of “authentic” performance:

“[Norrington] draws on historical recordings to support his taste in this matter. Why, in that case, is Norrington not interested in the equally traditional portamento of those orchestras? Because he does not like it. There is an uncomfortable feeling, despite the selective appeal to history, that the orchestra has become like a young boy’s train set,

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<sup>22</sup> I use this analogy deliberately; Norrington refers to those who question the Historical Performance Movement (and by extension himself) as “flat-earthers” in his preface to Brown’s book.

which he is free to take to pieces and rearrange whenever he gets bored with the current layout.” (p. 222)

What disturbs Philip, and should bother music lovers generally, is the effort to claim historical legitimacy by creating a mix of elements, a total package, as modern and historically unfounded as what one hears at any normal subscription symphony concert. All classical musicians embody, in some aspect or another, elements of a long and illustrious performance tradition. This is a given. It comes with the territory, and few feel a need to advertise this fact. And Norrington, to be fair, does not insist that he is attempting a literal recreation of period style. But he is at the same time eager to claim scholarly expertise on the subject of orchestral vibrato and use it to validate his work, despite abundant evidence that he is simply making it up as he goes along.

The element of opportunism in all of this captures the attention of David Milsom too, in his book *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth-Century Violin Performance*:

“Norrington’s performances apparently base this process of ‘informed guesswork’ upon an assumption that late nineteenth-century playing was necessarily very different from present day ‘mainstream’ renditions<sup>23</sup>. The use of period instruments and the evidence of research into appropriate playing techniques result in a very ‘different’ style of delivery. However, one cannot deny that the primary function of any commercially-recorded performance is to sell records, and it seems likely that his performances are compromised by the need to appeal to modern taste sensibilities” (p. 2).

This criticism is only true up to a point. Norrington’s position on the vibrato question only emerged in its current, extreme form after he took over a normal orchestra at today’s extravagant salary level. For him, if perhaps not for others, it would seem that money is a secondary issue; but these remarks still have potential relevance well beyond the interpretive predilections of one trendy if mediocre modern conductor. For example Milsom himself, an associate of Clive Brown, is not entirely free of the charge of opportunism (never mind hypocrisy). On his personal website [www.davidmilsom.net](http://www.davidmilsom.net), he defines himself as a “disciple of Joseph Joachim,” and also notes that he is founder (with his wife) of the “Milsom School of Music.” His own historically informed performances appear on the CD included with his book, taking advantage of being included among some illustrious names.

Given that Joachim left only 5 paltry acoustic recordings captured in absolutely horrendous sound--2 Brahms Hungarian Dance transcriptions, 2 Bach bits, and 1 salon piece of his own--three fifths of which consist of utterly inconsequential repertoire, all made in 1903 when his hands were crippled by gout and his technique was audibly failing (take Flesch’s word for it, if you won’t accept the evidence of your own ears), one might wonder just how Milsom assumes the great man’s mantel. After all, it takes a certain amount of *Chutzpah* to even make, let alone substantiate, such a claim,

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<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, this critique is equally applicable to the work of some of the serious scholars already mentioned.

particularly coming from an artist born not in 1874, but 1974--nearly four generations removed from the date of Joachim's death. Mind you, we can only applaud Dr. Milsom's entrepreneurial zeal; it's the artistic foundations that remain questionable.

The field of Applied Musicology (as with Music Criticism) is full of failed performers and under-salaried university hacks seeking to supplement their incomes through teaching, writing, and occasionally playing. Under the circumstances, academic credentials and a book or two make a fine substitute for artistic pedigree in conferring legitimacy on the teacher's "method," while the historical performance movement itself grants a license to a whole new crop of self-styled experts offering musical training in styles that they very conveniently never heard. But no one can gainsay their authority because we're all in the same boat: nobody knows if the aesthetic to which they pay lip-service, and consequently the noises that they exploit in order to pay their bills, are even remotely "authentic." I do not, by the way, insist that Dr. Milsom belongs in this category. It does seem, however, that in another reversion to 19<sup>th</sup> century practice, the vendors of violinistic snake oil and other patent medicines have returned with a vengeance to peddle their miracle cures and potions.

Notwithstanding such a curious and fascinating state of affairs, within the context of this discussion any tawdry financial and egotistical motives--whether Roger Norrington's, David Milsom's, or anyone else's--are basically side-issues. The real question is whether or not historical recordings support the notion that early 20<sup>th</sup> century orchestral string sections used little or no vibrato. It seems ingenuous of both Philip and Milsom to question Norrington's personal motivations without in the first place addressing the critical issue of whether the specific evidence unambiguously supports his position--one which happens also to be their own. It does not.

Consider, for example, the question of whether the body of available material is truly representative. This matters because we know that performers understood the need to adjust their level of vibrato to the repertoire being played. Thus, if Leonard Bernstein is correct and orchestras naturally used less in music of the classical period, and if this music constitutes the bulk of recordings sampled, then they cannot give a useful overview of how vibrato was handled generally in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the fallacious underlying assumption found in most of the literature on this subject is that vibrato varies more according to school of technique or historical era than according to what best suits the work. And so vibrato in Mozart is handled exactly as it would be in Wagner. Does anyone seriously believe that this is true to the facts, and that the evidence of early recordings supports such a bizarre notion of how musicians are trained and actually perform?

Similarly, the question of the effect of the circumstances of recording on an early 20<sup>th</sup> century artist's interpretation becomes critical when specifically dealing with the issue of vibrato. After all, if it truly is an "ornament," that is, an embellishment to be improvised to a greater or lesser degree according to the inclination of the artist, and the use of which may vary on different occasions, then the question of what to do in making a permanent record of a particular work matters very much. This can only be addressed on a case by

case basis as a function of the individual performer's attitude toward the recording process generally. Without some definitive statement in this regard, and even assuming that we can actually hear what the artist does, we have no way of knowing even if the recorded example is typical of that single interpreter, never mind the wider universe of string players.

Here's a particularly delightful case-study dating from just before the First World War that illustrates some of the problems of early recording technology as they affected interpretation:

### EDISON AND OCTAVES

*"The best thing I've ever heard said of octaves was Edison's remark to me that 'They are merely a nuisance and should not be played!' I was making some records for him during the experimental stage of the disk record, when he was trying to get an absolutely smooth legato tone, one that conformed to Loeffler's definition of it as 'no breaks' in the tone. He had had Schubert's Ave Maria recorded by Flesch, MacMillan and others, and wanted me to play it for him. The records were all played for me, and whenever he came to the octave passages Edison would say: 'Listen to them! How badly they sound!' Yet the octaves were absolutely in tune! 'Why do they sound so badly?' I inquired.*

*"Then Edison explained to me that according to the scientific theory of vibration, the vibrations of the higher tone of the octaves should be exactly twice those of the lower note. 'But here,' he continued, 'the vibrations of the notes all vary.' 'Yet how can the player control his fingers in the vibrato beyond playing his octaves in perfect tune?' I asked. 'Well, if he cannot do so,' said Edison, 'octaves are merely a nuisance, and should not be played at all.' I experimented and found that by simply pressing down the fingers and playing without any vibrato, I could come pretty near securing the exact relation between the vibrations of the upper and lower notes but--they sounded dreadful! Of course, octaves sound well in ensemble, especially in the orchestra, because each player plays but a single note.*

This entertaining bit of history was related by Samuel Gardner (1891-1984), noted teacher at the Juilliard School and violinist with, among other groups, the Kniesel Quartet, the New York Philharmonic, and the Chicago Symphony. His description of Edison's obsession with the tuning of octaves is backed up by Flesch in his Memoirs. Flesch recounts how he actually made a recording of Schubert's *Ave Maria* without the octaves for Edison's private enjoyment. Gardner's reminiscences were published in Frederick Martens' book *Violin Mastery: Talks with Master Violinists and Teachers* (Stokes and Co, New York, 1919). Many other sources report Edison's famous statement that his laboratories tested some 3800 vocal music recordings and found only 22 singers who were able to minimize their vibrato to his satisfaction.

That the problem of absolute accuracy of pitch (for Edison at least) was solved by eliminating vibrato is directly to the point as an illustration of the odd things artists might be asked to do in the unnatural circumstances of acoustic recording. Edison was

convinced that his equipment amplified vibrato, and that pure tones reproduced more cleanly and clearly. It is difficult for us today to recapture, not so much the newness of the experience, but rather the experimental nature of it all. When Stokowski made his first electrical recording of Dvorák's "New World" Symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1925, he still used reduced forces and substantially re-orchestrated the piece as for an acoustic recording, because neither the players nor the engineers had any idea what sounds the new technology could handle adequately. Working under these conditions imposed limitations on the artists of a very different kind than does modern studio work.

There is also some very interesting scientific evidence that recording quality can significantly affect perception of vibrato. In a 2002 study carried out at The University of New South Wales, Australia<sup>24</sup>, two recordings of Bach's solo violin music were auditioned by a group of 32 listeners, 20 second year Bachelor of Music students, and 12 period performance specialists. The first recording was Menuhin's, dating from ca.1934, the second was Sergio Luca's "authentic" 1977 version. The purpose of the study, ostensibly, was to determine if Baroque performance practice would be found equally (or more) expressive in Baroque music. Not surprisingly, the answer was "yes," but that's not the most interesting finding for our purposes.

In order to equalize sonic considerations, a second, filtered version of Luca's performance was also auditioned by the panel, with its sound characteristics altered to match those of the 1934 Menuhin recording. The process measurably impaired the listeners' ability to detect vibrato, to a degree that Luca's rendition, initially perceived as using a moderate amount of vibrato, was now perceived as "lacking" vibrato. Other performance parameters were also affected, but none so dramatically. The implications of this finding for modern scholars seeking to catalog the frequency and range of vibrato in historical recordings are obvious, and quite significant. Most sensible people would treat as a truism the notion that poor sound results in a distorted or limited experience of the actual performance, but this study makes the point clear specifically with respect to vibrato.

Having already seen that opinions can vary widely concerning the amount of vibrato used by a particular soloist, the very nature of orchestral recordings, which require that the technology encompass a wide range of dynamics and tone colors while conveying realistic ensemble balances, can pose near insurmountable problems for the listener or scholar seeking to use them as historical evidence. As I note in Part One, some aspects of a specific interpretation, such as tempo, the use of portamento (along with other details of phrasing and melodic ornamentation), and the treatment of rhythm can indeed be heard,

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<sup>24</sup> "Is There Only One Way of Being Expressive in Musical Performance? – Lessons From Listeners' Reactions to Performances of J.S. Bach's Music", Dorottya Fabian and Emery Schubert, The University of New South Wales, published in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition, Sydney, 2002*. C. Stevens, D. Burnham, G. McPherson, E. Schubert, J. Renwick (Eds.).

more or less, depending on the source material. Others, such as vibrato, simply cannot, at least a majority of the time.

This is where the usefulness of video as an aid to merely aural impressions comes in. Vibrato, in particular, can be (and often is) applied so gently that it is all but undetectable, even on the most analytical modern recordings. Brown cites Flesch as stating: “We must not forget that even in 1880 the great violinists did not yet make use of proper vibrato but employed a kind of *Bebung*, i.e. a finger vibrato in which the pitch was subjected only to quite imperceptible oscillations.” Of course, this raises the issue of what the not-so-great violinists were doing, and it also implies that this sort of vibrato was different from the ornamental kinds described by Tartini, Mozart, and Spohr (an ornament by definition cannot be “imperceptible”)<sup>25</sup>. Remarkably, and despite this bit of evidence, advocates of the use of historical recordings seem to have no problem claiming an ability to detect (or not) the slightest wisp of vibrato, irrespective of sonic considerations.

Once again the question arises: What is the threshold level, and how do we know when it has been reached? Realistically I have no doubt whatsoever that between Carl Seashore’s findings and the visual evidence of what players do today, a great deal of narrow or subtle vibrato must go unnoticed and unacknowledged on historical recordings of both orchestras and soloists. I vividly recall how, when Pearl records issued its set of Schnabel Beethoven piano sonatas, several listeners pointed out that the new transfers, despite the higher level of surface noise, revealed entire notes that were inaudible in the standard EMI transfers. If entire notes can go missing, then how much more difficult must it be to detect subtle timbral embellishments of them?

This argument applies with particular force to our ability to hear non-vibrato tone-colors too. For example, aside from the Pierné score previously mentioned, in Part One I discuss the “Westminster Chimes” passage immediately preceding the Epilogue of Vaughan Williams’ *A London Symphony* as a particularly audible example of non-vibrato texture, at least with modern engineering. There are two historical recordings of this work: Goossens/Cincinnati (1941) and Wood/Queen’s Hall (1936). In the former, surface noise precludes hearing clearly the soft chord in the strings at all (at least on the Biddulph transfer). In the latter, there is a distinct flutter that makes it impossible to tell beyond doubt if the strings are playing non-vibrato or not.

Indeed, the nature of the technical shortcomings in many historical recordings makes any claim that the strings are playing non-vibrato all the more remarkable, since one of the most frequently encountered defects is a rapid fluctuation in pitch--in other words, artificial vibrato. This cannot be corrected in making transfers from 78s without affecting string timbre. It’s useful in this context to recall Thomas Mann’s description of the playing of a phonograph record in *Magic Mountain*, also quoted by Szigeti in his autobiography. The motion of the disc was “not only circular, but also a peculiar sliding

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<sup>25</sup> Not surprisingly none of today’s self-styled expert vibrato detectives are able to identify, in historical recordings of “old school violinists,” any of the specific types of ornamental vibrato that the early treatise writers (such as those listed above) describe or recommend.

undulation, which communicated itself to the arm that bore the needle, and gave this too an elastic oscillation, almost like breathing, which must have contributed greatly to the vibrato and portamento of the stringed instruments and the voices.”

Another complicating factor associated with historical recordings is that the vast majority of non- or less-vibrato indications occur at very low dynamic levels. This is quite understandable. Loudness is in itself a form of excited utterance, the musical equivalent of shouting, and as seen in Part One many of the earlier uses of vibrato (in Rossini) occur in connection with noisy, ringing outbursts. By the same token, many composers take pains to warn players to maintain their expressivity even in piano passages, when the naturally tendency would be to relax and lessen the intensity. As the above example shows, the presence of hum, hiss, disc-surface or ambient noises, never mind the presence and prominence of other instruments, all combine to make detecting useful information about vibrato from many historical recordings particularly difficult<sup>26</sup>.

Most significantly, no one to the best of my knowledge has attempted to quantify perhaps the most important factor in determining the degree of vibrato actually used in a specific orchestral performance. It is not the nationality of the players, their training, or even so much the music in front of them. Indeed, it is a matter utterly beyond their control, and one quite independent of the technical details of string performance practice. It is *tempo*. As should now be evident, aside from not being truly continuous, the quantity of “continuous orchestral vibrato” will necessarily vary (sometimes hugely) depending on the speeds adopted by the conductor. This is what determines how much time a player has to color a note if he feels so inclined. The basic tempo determines not just the amount of vibrato, but also its quality--whether it is wide or narrow, fast or slow, readily audible or barely detectable.

This point may seem obvious, but the literature on historical recordings stubbornly fails to take notice of it. The amount of possible vibrato for any group of orchestral players in any given work, beginning at the slower side of average tempo in each movement or section, ought to be quantifiable, as should be the variance downward as speed increases from a postulated benchmark of 100%. It goes without saying that the amount of work required to establish these parameters would be significant, and perhaps impractical, but theoretically at least it does offer a comparatively rational means of measurement, and the concept is very useful. Whether it would be audible is another matter. In any event, this is the kind of analysis that serious investigation would entail.

This idea also suggests--at least to the extent that tempos may have been generally swifter in decades past (as everyone seems to agree)--one reason why the amount of vibrato in historical recordings could be perceived as less than today's norm. There would in fact *be* less, except that this has nothing whatsoever to do with the habits or attitudes of the players, and remains solely a function of their physical ability to use vibrato to expressive effect at the given tempo. Thus, it would be perfectly reasonable to say that Bruno

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<sup>26</sup> This was a big problem for Seashore and his colleagues: finding recordings that featured the solo voice or instrument distinctly enough so that the level of vibrato was actually measurable.



Walter's 1938 Mahler 9<sup>th</sup> with the Vienna Philharmonic does indeed have less vibrato than many other performances, not because the orchestra refrained from using it as matter of stylistic preference, but merely by virtue of its being the quickest version ever recorded.

To take another example, it may very well be that the funeral march in Pfitzner's Berlin Philharmonic rendition of Beethoven's "Eroica" (1929), which lasts a bit more than fourteen and a half minutes, has less vibrato than Kubelik's notably slow modern version with the same orchestra on DG, which takes about three minutes longer. As an issue of fact, this must be the case, at least on short notes, though decades of technological improvement make the precise nature of any difference impossible to quantify on direct comparison. However, despite really lousy engineering, the Pfitzner still has audibly greater richness of string timbre than Norrington's Stuttgart version, which at just a bit more than twelve minutes exceeds even Beethoven's very quick metronome marking.

Pfitzner and Kubelik for all their disparity in tempo, fall within a range of interpretation that makes them sound far more like each other than either does like Norrington (a version I happen to enjoy, by the way). This has less to do with "performance practice," with what the players are trained to do and wish to do, than with what they are physically *able* to do at a given tempo. To this extent the issue of vibrato, especially in music of the Baroque and Classical periods, is self-regulating and need not attract any special attention. It would be very interesting, for example, to compare two performances of the "Eroica" funeral march at Norrington's tempo, one with no vibrato at all, the other in which the players are simply told "do as you please" (probably the far more authentic option), and see how audible the difference would be. My guess is: not very.

In any case, there are no historical recordings of the "Eroica" funeral march at anything approaching Norrington's tempo. Consider Fried in 1924 (14'50"), Coates in 1926 (14'35"), Weingartner in 1936 (15'11"), or Toscanini in 1939 (16'21"), which give a good idea of the basic range of duration. And in comparative listening none of these early versions impress as notably bereft of vibrato. Norrington's approach thus turns out to be a modern, wholly iconoclastic recreation based on unprecedentedly fast speeds, married to a timbral ideal that defines vibrato-less sonority as the sound of early 20<sup>th</sup> century orchestras captured via the poor recording technology of that era. In short, he's trying to sound as much as possible like a bad 78 rpm record. This doesn't mean the performance is inferior, but let's be honest: neither "history" nor "authenticity" has much to offer in validating the approach.

This relationship between vibrato and tempo, however, might be used to test the audibility of orchestral vibrato in historical recordings given the right music, and the right circumstances. Compare, for example, Siegfried Wagner (1926) and Karl Muck (1928) in the Prelude to Tristan und Isolde, both with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra. Wagner is about 25% quicker than Muck, and sure enough, those opening phrases for the strings have discernibly greater richness under Muck, perhaps to some extent the result of the fact that he gives them more time to display additional vibrato. But by the same token, the differences aren't so great that I would be willing to suggest that under Wagner *films*

vibrato is notably absent. His strings sound perfectly normal by today's standards, inasmuch as one can tell.

Now let's consider the problem from a slightly different angle. Compare Furtwängler's two recordings of this same music, both with the Berlin Philharmonic for DG, one dating from 1930, the other from 1954 (there is also another Berlin recording from 1938 on EMI that we can toss into the pot). Happily the sound is clear enough in the earlier version(s) to make it impossible to claim that the string timbre is substantially different from the 1950s remake in direct, comparative listening in real time--even though the later interpretation dates from well into the purported "continuous vibrato" era, and the 1938 version is distantly recorded and transferred at a comparatively low level. The tempos are also very similar, a critical factor in light of the above analysis. This means that the level of vibrato, irrespective of whether or not one can hear it as such, likely remains relatively constant in all three renditions.

In the nearly two and a half decades between the two recordings, the Berlin Philharmonic had gone through the upheaval of World War II, losing most of its Jewish players in the process, never mind the natural process of attrition within the ranks of its string section. But you would be hard pressed to allege by any objective measure that there has been an audibly significant change in the standard and method of tone production. More to the point, current theory tells us that in this period the use of vibrato should have gone from zero to "continuous," all with the helpless acquiescence of (in this case) the same conductor playing the same music as previously<sup>27</sup>. Does that make any sense to you?

The main reason for this "zero tolerance" hypothesis, at least purportedly, is because the (much) earlier treatises warn orchestral players not to do what a soloist would do in terms of ornamentation. Never mind that this ignores both the evidence of the scores, which shows orchestral vibrato being specifically called for at least from the time of Rossini, as well as the comments by the treatise-writers themselves suggesting that no one in the real world paid attention to this advice. And the general prevalence of orchestral string portamento on these self-same historical recordings shows that they were right. Consider that Baillot, in addition to his views on sliding already quoted, further cautioned: "Since the *port de voix* is a means of tender expression, it would lose its effectiveness if used too often." How is it that what was true of glissando and portamento (Spohr was even criticized for his excessive use of it) was not equally true of vibrato?

The real utility of the zero vibrato proposition is that it neatly ducks the thesis-annihilating question: If orchestras only used "less," then how much less, and how can we establish what is "normal" given the fact that the amount of vibrato may vary from

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<sup>27</sup> Norrington's reply in a recent Boston Globe article (January 12, 2007) to the question of why Mahler conductors who worked in the pre-vibrato days raised not a single objection to the new, post-War style is, "They had to get used to it." In other words, the likes of Walter, Klemperer, Furtwängler, Toscanini, Monteux, Szell, Reiner, Boult, Kleiber, Ormandy, Scherchen, and Stokowski had no say in the matter, but Roger Norrington, uniquely, does. This condescending answer more than anything else reveals the level at which Norrington's much-vaunted "scholarship" operates, and I find it pathetic that serious scholars haven't called him out on the carpet for it.

ensemble to ensemble, from work to work--or even within a single orchestra on the basis of tempo alone in the same music? The idea that the level of vibrato varies is neither new, nor unreasonable. Indeed, we have seen that it is inevitable, a physical fact. It just won't earn you a PhD. That it varies as drastically as modern scholarship posits makes no sense, but it helps to get you published (and performed). The need to push the argument to such extremes really does suggest a desire to create significance for this issue that it neither has nor deserves.

And so for all of the above reasons these Wagner examples, in my view, quite comfortably refute the fiction that German orchestras in the 20s and 30s played with little or no vibrato, and that the alleged advent of "continuous vibrato" marked a significant break with the past. The audible evidence says otherwise. Taking one piece at a time in isolation, or lumping together music in different styles from different periods with different standards of vibrato, played by different orchestras under different conductors in different acoustic environments, recorded with different equipment at different times, transferred according to differing standards and played back on different audio systems (and of course auditioned with different ears), adds a miscellany of factors to the equation that can't possibly be reliably untangled to isolate vibrato apart from all other considerations.

Even this little experiment, in which as many of these complicating factors as possible have been eliminated to facilitate comparison, entails an element of subjective opinion that diehard anti-vibrato cultists, never mind opportunistic performers, would be unwilling to accept--and so it is not to them that these remarks are directed. It would be nice, however, if the supposed experts on this subject, instead of making sweeping generalizations or merely parroting one another approvingly, would attempt to test their hypotheses along these or similar lines. Maybe a few honest souls would then feel compelled to come clean on the subject and report accordingly.

There is also another method that may be tried to test the usefulness of historical recordings as a tool to measure orchestral vibrato. I have already suggested it in Part One in considering Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*, which specifically asks for an exaggerated, "ornamental" vibrato followed by a gradual decline down to none at all. If the current orthodoxy is correct, and no vibrato was the norm during this period, then in recordings such as Mengelberg's 1928 New York Philharmonic rendition, we should be able to detect a sudden change in timbre at the start of the passage in question, followed by a gradual return to "normal." The fact that we can't (try it!), either here or in Strauss's own two recordings--including the one he made in 1944 with the theoretically vibratoless Vienna Philharmonic--speaks volumes.

Although not huge in number, the body of historical recordings containing works in which the composer specifically requests either extra or no orchestral vibrato is reasonably varied and comprehensive. Certainly it's broad enough for you to be able to confirm whether you can or cannot hear the sudden eruptions or cessations of vibrato that must be occurring if the most current school of thought has any basis in reality. Here's a hint: you can't, at least the vast majority of the time, but you certainly don't have to take

my word for it. In order to gratify your own curiosity, I have assembled a select list of examples consisting primarily of music described in Part One of this essay. Interested listeners should have little problem sourcing most of these performances, as many appear on multiple labels.

Debussy: *La Mer* (Copola, 1932)

Franck: *String Quartet* (Pro Arte Quartet, 1933)

Mahler: *Symphony No. 5: Adagietto*: (Mengelberg, 1926; Walter, 1938)

Boito: *Mefistofele* (Molajoli, 1929)

Ponchielli: *La Gioconda: "Suicidio"* (Molajoli, 1931)

Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde* (Elmendorff, 1928; Reiner, 1936)

Chabrier: *Gwendoline Overture* (Pierné, 1930)

Glinka: *Ruslan and Lyudmila Overture* (Wood, 1937)

Borodin: *Polovtsian Dances* (Stokowski, 1937)

Elgar: *Symphony No. 2* (Elgar, 1927); *Cockagine Overture* (Elgar, 1926 and 1933)

Strauss: *Der Rosenkavalier* (Heger, 1933); *Don Juan* (Strauss, 1929; Coates, 1926; Walter, 1926); *Death and Transfiguration* (Coates, 1926; Strauss, 1926, 1944; Stokowski, 1934; De Sabata, 1939; Mengelberg, 1924 & 1942; Furtwängler, 1950; Toscanini, 1942 & 1952; Walter, 1952)

In analyzing these examples, bear in mind that although they have been chosen because they contain moments in which the composer actually uses the word “vibrato” (or not) they are also replete with other expression markings. Many of these, including *espressivo*, *dolce*, *cantabile*, *agitato*, *appassionato*, and their various equivalents in other languages, also call forth additional vibrato from string players under normal circumstances<sup>28</sup>. Indeed, we have already seen exactly this point demonstrated in the above example from Bériot’s treatise (and Spohr in Part One). So it makes no sense for anyone to suggest that orchestral players would refrain from using vibrato unless the music in front of them specifically tells them to by using that one term exclusively. Nevertheless, we must set this obvious point aside, at least for the moment, for the sake of maintaining unequivocal clarity on this issue in our test sample.

While the reality that extra or ornamental vibrato cannot be heard in context on these recordings may seem frustrating, in fact it is extremely revealing. And it’s not surprising that the historical recording authorities, such as Philip or Milsom don’t notice, whether here or elsewhere. They aren’t focusing on string vibrato specifically most of the time, and are perfectly justified in surveying broader selections of material in order to catalog the many performance characteristics that are indeed quite audible. If, along the way, they mention that they aren’t hearing what you can’t hear anyway, and this conveniently dovetails into the most current academic theories, who can blame them for saying so? The problems start when these erroneous observations are lazily parroted by serious scholars like Prof. Brown, who really ought to know better.

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<sup>28</sup> See Norman Del Mar, *Anatomy of the Orchestra* (p. 135): “Broadly speaking, it is the use and degree of vibrato to which composers are indirectly referring when using such terms as *dolce* (German *zart*, French--though more rarely--*doux*) or *espressivo* (German *ausdrucksvoll*, French *expressif*).”

This analysis, then, reveals several telling pieces of information. First, the recordings themselves are often simply too technologically challenged to be useful. After all, if you can hardly make out the fortissimo bass drum, snare drum, and tambourine all hammering away simultaneously in the rondo (third movement) of Elgar's Second, then how on earth will you hear the vibrato in the strings when they take over the climax of the slow movement? Perhaps this explains why Prof. Brown mentions the Elgar and Franck scores, cites historical recordings as evidence for his views generally, but then does not bother to add "two plus two" and investigate the audible facts with regard to the readily available early recordings of these specific works.

Second, if you listen to modern versions of this same music, whether in direct comparison with these examples or not, you may well find even there that the moments of notated vibrato are just as undetectable. For example, you can follow the Vienna Philharmonic through Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*, starting in 1933 and continuing on through performances by Szell, Erich Kleiber, Bernstein, Solti, and Karajan--essentially one recording in each of the ensuing decades through 1990.

The music at and around figure 327 towards the end of Act 1, where Strauss marks the string parts "*alle Streicher stets sehr seelenvoll und vibrato*" ("all strings always very soulful and vibrato") offers a fine example of an exposed, persistent vibrato that lasts for minutes on end. Interestingly, the performance in which you can hear the richer string timbre characteristic of additional vibrato most tellingly is not Elmendorff's of 1933, where the difference should be the greatest because of the postulated variance between zero and one hundred percent vibrato, but Bernstein's in 1971. The reason hardly stems from any timbral predilections of the musicians inherent in their playing, but has everything to do with the fact that Bernstein is simply slower, and so gives the string section more time to color the actual notes.

Another factor at work here is room acoustics. While you may not notice the vibrato in Elmendorff's strings from one bar to the next, they do sound notably richer as captured in the Mittlerer Konzerthausaal than in the Musikverein for Walter's 1938 Mahler Ninth and the Fifth Symphony's Adagietto. Obviously this doesn't mean that the same players used more vibrato in 1933 than they did five years later. One easy way to illustrate this is to examine a more recent case featuring modern engineering. Compare Bernstein's video of the Adagietto to his Deutsche Grammophon CD recording. The timings are similar, and the orchestra, once again, is the Vienna Philharmonic. Thanks to video, you can see that vibrato is being used as expected, and yet the string timbres once again have a grainy, almost raspy quality to them.

As it turns out, the performance taped for television also took place in the Musikverein, a legendary hall acoustically, but one that frequently turns exceptionally dry on recordings, particularly live ones. Bernstein's DG Sibelius First Symphony is another notorious example, and such is also the case with Walter's two outings cited here. Bernstein's CD rendition of Mahler's Fifth, on the other hand, was captured on tour, in the Alte Oper, Frankfurt--a space with a big, reverberant room ambiance. Sure enough, the strings

sound quite different: distinctly warmer and more rounded. What may strike you at first as an audible variance in vibrato turns out to be something else entirely.

Returning to Walter for a moment, you can also compare his 1938 Vienna performance of the Adagietto to his 1947 New York recording, which is even swifter by half a minute (similar in tempo, if not identical in timbre, to the positively succulent sounding Mengelberg version of 1926). Here, the wider dynamic range and more natural sectional balances reveal another important difference between the two Walter recordings. The earlier one is basically a loud, close recording of a string section playing very quietly. At low dynamic levels, as Bernstein's video reveals, vibrato is often used quite sparingly and subtly, today as in decades past, for the obvious reason that too much would make it extremely pronounced in *piano*, turning what ought to be "intrinsic" into something "ornamental."

Of course in this movement the distinction between ornamental and intrinsic vibrato is very much to the point. As I note in Part One, Mahler in one passage asks for a special *vibrato/mit innigster Empfindung*. None of these subtleties are audible in Walter's 1938 Adagietto, which hardly means that they aren't present--at least his slightly more natural-sounding version of less than a decade later suggests as much. Before rushing to judgment on the vibrato question, then, it's necessary to do more than merely make assumptions based on the fitfully audible aspects of timbre as filtered through the technical inadequacies of period engineering. Otherwise, you are left with Roger Norrington's quaint if hardly credible contention that the Vienna Philharmonic went from zero vibrato in 1938 to the full panoply in 1940<sup>29</sup>.

Here is one further example. Compare the sound of the Vienna Philharmonic strings in the Adagio of Beethoven's Ninth from these recordings: Weingartner (1935, Naxos), Erich Kleiber (1952, Decca), and Walter (1955, Orfeo). The Weingartner was recorded in the Mittlerer Konzerthausaal; the Kleiber in the Musikverein; the Walter from the stage of the Staatsoper. Despite the early date and theoretical non-vibrato character of the playing, as well as the quickest overall tempo, Weingartner audibly enjoys the warmest string timbre. Kleiber comes in second, perhaps in part thanks to a notably slower basic speed that allows the players more time to inflect the notes. Walter's strings sound remarkably dry and wiry, no doubt due in some part to the presence of an audience as well as the less-than-ideal acoustic situation of having the orchestra on the opera house stage.

If you had to answer the question "Who has the least vibrato?" I have no doubt you would most probably choose the Walter, even though it's the most recent of the three recordings and should theoretically feature modern, continuous variety. There is no way to tell, on sonic evidence alone, which performance uses the most in absolute terms, and certainly no way to chart the progression from the theoretically vibrato-less 30s to the richly vibrato-prone 50s. All you can hear is what the massed strings sound like generally

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<sup>29</sup> As per the already-cited Boston Globe article of January 12, 2007, Norrington claims: "It [vibrato] didn't come into the Vienna Philharmonic until 1940." The only thing missing is the exact day, hour, and minute.

in three different acoustics, given variables in recording technology and placement of the microphones.

There is a striking parallel between these examples from Vienna and the string sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra, famously lush on many studio recordings, but sometimes remarkably dry on those made live in the Academy of Music. Or consider the NBC Symphony under Toscanini (and anyone else) in Studio 8-H versus Carnegie Hall. Collectors of historical recordings have long been aware of these and other factors which influence our perception of orchestral timbre, and few would venture to claim that they can hear the precise amount of vibrato being used by the orchestra in each case, independently of room ambience. If modern recordings present serious challenges in this regard, then historical engineering often makes hearing such subtleties all but impossible.

Strauss' own 1929 recording of *Don Juan* with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra, however, does offer compelling evidence of the ubiquitous presence of vibrato at an early date<sup>30</sup>. As previously mentioned, this stands among the first works to request “*senza espressivo*,” meaning of course no vibrato or any other sort of inflection. The passage in question, just before Letter G (after the first love scene), is extremely exposed, with the cellos all by themselves between two string-dominated outbursts for the full orchestra. Their dry tone and iffy intonation on the sustained notes all point to non-vibrato sonority, and to an accordingly vibrato-rich texture just about everywhere else. The 1926 Coates recording of the same work is too poorly engineered to be of any use at all in this respect, but Bruno Walter's from the same year (with the Royal Philharmonic) is amazingly transparent, and quite similar to the composer's own.

The use of extra vibrato in the love music, you would think, would be obvious, but common sense is not on the agenda of some of today's period performance scholars and performers. So for avoidance of doubt, here is Hermann Scherchen in his *Handbook of Conducting* (1929) commenting on this very passage, written before the supposed “continuous vibrato” revolution penetrated German orchestras: “The climax of the great singing melody in Strauss's *Don Juan* calls not only for an ever increasing fullness of tone, but for an increasing *vibrato*, so that at each apex all the sensuously stirring qualities that tone possesses are employed to their utmost.” And this, let us not forget, for a work composed in the 1880s.

Strauss' tone poem *Death and Transfiguration* offers an even better test subject, not just of our ability to hear vibrato vs. non-vibrato, but also whether or not the conductor and players follow the composer's directions. Before letter M (about 8-9 minutes in, after the soft flute solo following the first big climax), there is a series of phrases for solo violin, played normally, answered by solo cello, solo viola, and solo violin again, in that order, these latter three marked “without expression.” The similar dynamics and rhythmic shape

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<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, Philip in *Early Recordings and Music Style* lists this recording in his discussion of flute vibrato, but fails to note its applicability to the strings. The absence of scholarly “cover” means that Philip spends a vast amount of time on woodwind vibrato, charting a mass of performance detail to no definitive purpose, while ignoring the question of orchestral string vibrato almost entirely.

of each phrase, plus the fact that they are all solos and that first violin phrase isn't marked expressively at all, permits a clear comparison between a neutral string timbre and one with no vibrato.

However, in order to appreciate what the historical recordings show, it's necessary to have an easily audible "control" in mind. In fact, there are at least eight modern recordings that fit the bill: Kempe with the Staatskapelle Dresden (EMI), Szell with the Cleveland Orchestra (Sony), Blomstedt with the San Francisco Symphony (Decca) and the Staatskapelle Dresden (Denon), Sinopoli with the New York Philharmonic (DG), Runnicles with the Atlanta Symphony (Telarc), and Karajan, both with the Vienna Philharmonic (Decca) and the Berlin Philharmonic (DG, his second, digital recording for that label). Any of these will give you an excellent sense of what the passage should sound like when Strauss' markings are carefully followed. It's probably no mistake that a good number of these recordings come from conductors and/or orchestras long associated with this composer.

Sinopoli is a bit of a special case: at more than 28 minutes his remains quite possibly the slowest versions ever recorded. The choice of tempo makes the difference between vibrato and non-vibrato particularly easy to hear. In many other versions, the players simply fail to highlight the distinction between normal and non-espressivo timbres sufficiently. The opportunity for a solo turn simply overwhelms their willingness to do what Strauss asks. Either they play too loudly, refuse to reduce or eliminate their vibrato sufficiently, or both. And it's important to make a distinction here between "performance practice," what the players are trained and theoretically prepared to do, and what actually happens on the day. This alone offers an important lesson, one applicable to the vibrato question beyond this specific discussion of historical recordings.

Furthermore, in all of these performances the quality of the engineering is just as important as the interpretation. And that fact that this passage may not be cleanly audible doesn't mean that the sound is "bad." It's simply a function of balance and microphone placement. For example, Klemperer with the Philharmonia (EMI) and Böhm (DG), also with the Staatskapelle Dresden, sound as if they are probably following Strauss' markings, but the former's typically forward woodwind balances, and the latter's slightly softer handling of the solos against the flowing accompaniment, make it impossible to tell for sure. The same holds true for Karajan's first DG recording with the Berlin Philharmonic, and Haitink's with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Philips). So modern sonics offer no solid guarantees, even in a particularly exposed passage such as this.

Now let's see how the historical recordings stack up. It goes without saying that all of the above factors: the conductor's tempo, the inclinations of the players, and the engineering, come into play and are magnified by the limitations of the available technology. Both Walter (New York Philharmonic, 1952) and Toscanini (NBC Symphony, 1952) appear to honor Strauss' intentions, but the sonics are less than ideally clear, and it seems that at the end of the phrase eight bars before letter M (*leicht bewegt*) the three solo players reintroduce vibrato by way of transition--which is perfectly legitimate. Toscanini's 1942 Philadelphia recording, kinder to the soloists if not superior in other respects, is more



literal interpretively as well. Furtwängler (Vienna Philharmonic, 1950) does exactly what Strauss' score requires, and he makes sure to give his string players sufficient time to make the timbral contrast vivid.

Mengelberg (Concertgebouw, 1942), De Sabata (Berlin Philharmonic, 1939), and Stokowski (Philadelphia Orchestra, 1934), are so congested that it's impossible to tell exactly what happens after the audible vibrato in the solo violin's first phrase. Despite Strauss' persistent marking of piano, there is a tendency to play the passage as a crescendo up to the entry of the winds and harp, and the increase in volume naturally brings with it an increase in vibrato. Stokowski seems particularly enthusiastic in this regard, both here and in 1945 with the New York City Symphony (big surprise!). Albert Coates (London Symphony, 1926) has a slob of a principal violin who hangs onto his heavy vibrato for dear life. The cello and viola, in contrast, are practically inaudible. Strauss plays the passage as written in terms of dynamics (Staatskapelle Berlin, 1926), but that's all you can really hear, at least on the DG transfer. Happily, his 1944 Vienna Philharmonic remake suggests that he is in fact following his own directions.

Fascinatingly, Mengelberg's fragmentary 1924 New York Philharmonic performance captures the solo strings with striking clarity. Despite the high level of background noise and some whopping high-frequency distortion at the end of the phrase, you can indeed hear a timbral distinction between the opening violin line and the three "without expression" replies from the cello, viola, and violin once again. Even so, if others listening to the same excerpt failed to share my conclusion, I would certainly understand. We are talking about isolating subtle variations in tone color as captured and transmitted by comparatively crude technology. Only the fact that Strauss has given us a built-in basis for comparison makes this exercise possible at all.

I want to stress that in all of these questionable cases, without exception, the element that cannot be heard is the *absence* of vibrato; its *presence* is ubiquitous. If you take the time to listen to the passage played correctly, as Kempe or Furtwängler do, there should be no question in your mind that Strauss' "senza espressione" is a special effect that otherwise presupposes the presence of vibrato as a basic tone-color, particularly given that first violin solo with no expressive markings at all. Only playing the succeeding solos with a straight tone makes the timbral contrast with the preceding phrase audible. There really is no other option, and even if the earliest historical recordings aren't always useful in isolating this particular point, they do give clear evidence of vibrato being securely in place.

If isolating and identifying a non-vibrato timbre is this difficult when both the context and the use of solo strings theoretically makes it easier than perhaps anywhere else, you can readily imagine how much more challenging the job becomes in considering an entire orchestral string section. This is why the claims of the authenticity movement sometimes appear more like wishful thinking than audible fact. Death and Transfiguration reveals, above all, that composers naturally expect to be able to regulate the expressive intensity of their music, and this means a constantly variable level of string vibrato, from little-to-

none, to a great deal. If this sounds obvious, well and good: but it is precisely the simple common sense of the matter that modern scholarship attempts to deny.

Happily, even at this comparatively early date, it's possible to add the evidence of our eyes to that of our ears. The 1932 video of Max von Schillings conducting Rossini's William Tell Overture with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra [Staatskapelle Berlin] shows the orchestral cellists using continuous vibrato throughout the work's lengthy opening movement, exactly as they would today. Vibrato also characterizes: Erich Kleiber's 1932 Blue Danube Waltz with the same orchestra, Strauss conducting the Vienna Philharmonic in his Till Eulenspiegel from 1944, Weingartner leading the Paris Symphony in Weber's Overture to Der Freischütz, and Fritz Busch with the Staatskapelle Dresden in Wagner's Tannhäuser Overture (both of the latter from 1932). Mengelberg's Concertgebouw Orchestra<sup>31</sup> strings also use vibrato with abandon in a splendidly clear and vivid 1931 film of the Adagietto of Bizet's L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1.

It would be nice to be able to go back even earlier, but the fact is that "talking pictures" had only just been perfected in the late 1920s, so we are lucky to have even this small but significant sample. Thanks to these films, it's particularly easy to see that the level of vibrato differs from player to player, just as it still does in orchestras today, without there being any sort of visible pattern based on the age (or sex) of the musicians. Just compare what we can see here to Bernstein's previously mentioned video of the Adagietto of Mahler's Fifth. There you will find a splendid moment in close-up, just before the movement's *innigster Empfindung* episode, where one cellist is sustaining a long note with vibrato, while his neighbor omits it completely. This is how orchestral string sections operate and most likely always have, just as Forsyth claims in Part One.

I must mention in this connection one amusing aside. There are four DVD productions of Mahler's Fifth currently available: Bernstein, Abbado, Rattle, and Barenboim. It would be nice to be able to report on what happens in these various string sections when Mahler specifically asks for vibrato, but unfortunately "mit innigster Empfindung" seems to be a universal cue for the cameramen to focus on the sweaty, presumably sublimely enraptured and "innig" faces of the conductors. Trust me, it's not a pretty site. The same phenomenon holds true of Karajan's Death and Transfiguration (Sony). The first solo violin phrase, the one with vibrato, is beautifully caught, but in the ensuing solos "senza espressione" unfortunately means "senza video footage," despite the fact that the change in timbre is quite clearly audible. No doubt the moments in question wound up on the cutting room floor, discarded in favor the more shots of the great man himself standing in front of the orchestra conducting as he always did, with his eyes closed. So film has its limitations too.

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<sup>31</sup> This explains why I did not choose Mengelberg's 1941 Concertgebouw Ein Heldenleben for the discussion in the main essay: we already know that continuous vibrato was in use in Amsterdam at a much earlier date. That said, thanks to ridiculously close microphone placement the effect Strauss requests is more clearly detectable in the later recording. You probably wouldn't notice it unless you knew what was going on, but it's definitely there, and (*pace* Prof. Brown) provides further evidence that the directive to use additional vibrato in a "continuous" context need not compromise either its expressive effect or audibility.

The remarkable thing about these videos, both old and new, is the consistency of technique that they reveal, even as they prove that “continuous vibrato” has always been a myth as it pertains to orchestral practice. Furthermore, in the historical films, you can forget the notion that older members of the ensemble used less vibrato than younger ones, save perhaps for a few in their declining years who may suffer from what Flesch calls “the violinist’s arteriosclerosis:” the loss of ability to execute vibrato entirely. Given the fact that most of the members of these string sections are not exactly teenagers, and taking the latest performance (the Vienna Philharmonic under Strauss in 1944) as a starting point, would it not be fair, absent hard evidence to the contrary, to suggest that the same players who used vibrato then were also employing it freely in 1934, or 1924, or 1914 or even 1904?

Careers spanning four or five decades aren’t uncommon in major orchestras; the Vienna Philharmonic’s concertmaster Arnold Rosé offers one significant example. He played in that orchestra for over 50 years (1881-1938), and his very few extant solo recordings have been erroneously cited as proof positive of the *orchestra’s* non-use of vibrato. But here is the significant point: if Rosé’s style never changed over the course of his career, then why should any violinists’? The evidence on film shows numerous older gentlemen in the orchestra in 1944 using continuous vibrato, which means, by the same argument, that they likely always did. Furthermore, Willi Boskovsky, enthusiastic proponent of modern continuous vibrato, and later the orchestra’s concertmaster, joined the Philharmonic in 1933, when Rosé was still very much in charge. Presumably he brought his vibrato with him and didn’t feel compelled to abstain from using it until the Nazis forced Rosé’s emigration.

Backing up one or two generations, Carl Flesch spent a couple of seasons in the early 1890s in Paris’s Lamoureux Orchestra, and was actually hired by Mahler around 1900 to take the first desk position at the Vienna Court Opera (a.k.a. the Vienna Philharmonic). He also played with the second violins of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, as a tribute to its conductor Willem Mengelberg, at that ensemble’s 1920 Mahler Festival. Ysaÿe began his career during the 1870s in the violin section of the Bilse Orchestra in Berlin, predecessor of the modern Berlin Philharmonic. Kreisler auditioned for, and was rejected from, admission to the Vienna Philharmonic not because of excessive vibrato, but because the admissions committee found fault with his sense of rhythm. Does anyone for a moment seriously believe that these artists refrained from using vibrato simply because they happened to be playing in an orchestra?

Flesch, for one, mentions nothing of the kind, and the impression one gets from reading his *Memoirs* is that participation in orchestral string sections involved no compromises whatever in terms of tone or technique. Arnold Rosé enthusiastically backed him as his prospective stand-partner in Vienna, despite the fact that the older concertmaster was reputedly a violinist of the “old school” and Flesch stood squarely in the modern camp initiated by Ysaÿe and Kreisler. I strongly suspect that had Flesch taken the job, most of today’s scholars would think twice before making facile claims concerning the reputed non-vibrato string timbre of the pre-War Vienna Philharmonic. As it is, the mere fact that

Rosé wanted him, to the degree that he even helped Flesch “cheat” a little on his audition in front of Mahler, speaks volumes.

Another Rosé story bears mentioning, this time coming from violinist Otto Strasser (1901-96), who joined the Vienna Philharmonic in 1922 and served as president of the orchestra from 1958-67:

“When I went for my audition, the panel consisted of the Opera Director Schalk (it was difficult to engage Strauss for this kind of activity), the conductors Reichenberger and Alwin, and the orchestral leaders headed by Arnold Rosé. ...He (Rosé) was an imposing artist and was so firmly rooted in tradition that he was not very keen at all on the vibrato which had long ago become common practice, employing it only sparingly. Therefore, when, after some difficult passages, he put in front of me the violin cantilena from the entry of Lohengrin and Elsa into the cathedral, and I began playing away to my heart’s content with vibrato, Schalk, who shared Rosé’s views, interrupted me with the words: ‘stop bleating like that’.” (cited in *Perspectives on Gustav Mahler*, Jeremy Barham, ed, Ashgate, 2005).

The anti-vibrato crowd would no doubt cite this as evidence of the lack of vibrato in the Vienna Philharmonic, but of course it proves nothing of the kind, for several reasons:

1. First, it was clearly not a condition of Strasser’s engagement that he refrain from using vibrato in the orchestra. He was hired anyway, and does not suggest that he ever felt inclined to play like Rosé. Indeed, he openly viewed the concertmaster’s aesthetic as old-fashioned, and given this very well-known predilection, it’s even more interesting that Strasser felt under no compunction to withhold his vibrato simply to pass the audition. In short, whatever Rosé’s or Schalk’s personal feelings in the matter, they knew what they were getting.
2. We cannot discount the possibility that at this stage in his career, and at that moment, Strasser’s enthusiastic vibrato really did sound like “bleating.” He wouldn’t have been the first. Note also the difference between Rosé’s handling of Flesch, an established artist invited to become co-leader of the orchestra, and Schalk’s attitude towards a 21 year-old comparative novice.
3. As with all of these cases, it’s not clear whether the cause for complaint was the frequency of use of vibrato, or its amplitude (or both). This matters, because “sparing” can mean either “not often,” and/or an actual “narrow” or “thin” sound. The historical sources, such as Flesch’s *Memoirs*, are understandably much clearer on the kind of vibrato used than on its rate of occurrence, because the latter can only be discussed in the context of individual works. Both the description and reaction in this case suggest that the issue was the exaggerated timbral quality of what Strasser was doing, not the fact that he was doing it at all.
4. The extract from Lohengrin (the end of the Second Act) that Strasser was asked to play proves an extremely important point: specifically, that German/Austrian violinists used

vibrato *in orchestral music* well before 1930, and had been doing so for decades prior to Strasser's audition in 1922. His comments are absolutely dispositive in this regard.

5. So the only real issue is not whether the Vienna Philharmonic used vibrato, but rather how much it used. I have no problem with the perfectly reasonable notion that its string section may have used a more controlled or specific type of vibrato than some other orchestras of the period. That's not unusual. Indeed, you don't need to invent stories about historical recordings to learn this about the Vienna Philharmonic: simply compare Bernstein's video of the Adagietto of Mahler's Fifth to Barenboim's (with the Chicago Symphony). The difference is just as evident today as it was a century ago. The Leningrad Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Czech Philharmonic also have notably lean string timbres, and not just "historically."

Roger Norrington dubiously suggests that Viennese popular music, the sugary, sweet waltz-style of the Strauss family, made "serious" musicians highly sensitive to the use of vibrato, but this only begs the question of what they did in works by late 19<sup>th</sup> century composers such as Mahler and Strauss which call on this very idiom to excellent expressive effect--just imagine the Dance-Song from *Also Sprach Zarathustra* *senza vibrato*! The problem cannot be resolved by sweeping generalizations, but only with reference to the scores themselves, and there is certainly no need to create the myth of the "continuous vibrato revolution" as a convenient straw-man to flog. As I have said many times, *less* does not mean *none*, and the question I challenge scholars to answer is: How much less compared to today's norm?

6. There is more to this story than just the above quotation. Later on, Strasser observes: "Rosé's violin-playing was of a variety that could scarcely be called 'Viennese,' if one understands by this sort of style the kind of technique inimitably produced by the typically Viennese Fritz Kreisler." (see p. 162 of Strasser's book, orig. German edition, *...und dafür wird man noch bezahlt* [fig. "...and I get paid for this!"]). In other words, Rosé's sound was unusual, and not a model for anyone else--certainly not the entire string section of the Vienna Philharmonic. Kreisler, though uniquely masterly in the way he realized the Viennese style, nevertheless was seen as the embodiment of a national (or regional) aesthetic. It's really a very 20<sup>th</sup> century thing to insist that uniformity of technique be imposed either by the conductor or concertmaster (or textbook), when the essence of the Romantic zeitgeist was individuality and a celebration of the artistic ego, even within the context of a cooperative unit such as an orchestral string section.

7. The Music Director at the opera during this period was, as Strasser notes, Richard Strauss, whose theatrical scores from the early 1900s onward are replete with requests to use vibrato for substantial periods of time. Given Strauss' published views on the need for orchestral violinists to be free to phrase and play as they choose (cited in Part One), the idea that the Vienna Philharmonic nonetheless played without vibrato under his leadership seems bizarre.

It seems even more bizarre in considering Mahler's interpretive preferences. Herbert Borodkin, violist with the New York Philharmonic from 1904-9, recalls that Mahler

“used a lot more vibrato than most conductors do today. He insisted on it. He asked for it. When you played a melodic tune, you would have to use a lot of vibrato and sing, as he called it.” The “today” that Borodkin is referring to, by the way, is 1964 (!). Violinist Herman Martonne (in New York from 1905-09) notes the same basic facts concerning Mahler’s requirement that the strings adopt a distinctive, “singing” tone, and further comments on this style as being idiomatically Viennese. Martonne should know--he was a student at the Vienna Conservatory at the turn of the century and witnessed performances by Mahler both at the Court Opera and with the Vienna Philharmonic.

Both Borodkin’s and Martonne’s statements, in tandem with reminiscences by other members of the New York Philharmonic who actually worked under Mahler during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, originally were recorded for radio broadcast. Later released on disc by Sony Classical, along with Bernstein’s first version of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony (Sony Classical), they can be heard in their entirety as part of the Philharmonic’s private label issue *The Mahler Broadcasts*. Their importance as evidence speaks for itself, and represents a stinging indictment of period performance “experts” who claim that orchestras at the turn of the century used no vibrato. You have to hear these elderly gentlemen speak to truly understand just how impractical and unmusical the pseudo-scholarship on this issue today really is.

We have further eyewitness testimony from one of the most respected performers and pedagogues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, violinist Felix Galimir. Brahms authority Styra Avins reports this entertaining and enlightening exchange in a letter to the *Juilliard Journal* of February, 2003:

“Several years ago, I asked Felix Galimir about vibrato and Brahms's music. After all, Felix grew up and was educated in Vienna, where many people were still alive and performing who had known Brahms and had heard his music performed during the composer's lifetime. What did Felix think about the idea of playing Brahms without vibrato? ‘Are they meshuggah (crazy)?!’ broke out of him in an outraged tone. ‘But of course,’ he added quickly, ‘they didn't play with as much vibrato as we do now.’ Felix was a member of the Vienna Philharmonic in the 1930s, something worth remembering in the discussion at hand here.”

Avins continues in the same letter with another, equally relevant anecdote:

“We know for sure, too, that some of Brahms's favorite instrumentalists--David Popper and Robert Hausmann come to mind immediately--played with vibrato, Popper in particular using it much as it is used today. This was true of his playing even in the 1860s, something documented in an amusing contemporary newspaper controversy. Popper, by the way, was appointed solo cellist at the Court Opera in Vienna in 1868, and it is hard to believe that he gave up his vibrato for the occasion. By his later years, Brahms himself was asking for vibrato in his music, neatly and specifically documented by an eye- and ear-witness to a run-through of his C-Minor Piano Trio with his friends, the great violinist Joseph Joachim, and Hausmann.”

Fair enough, I would say, and Q.E.D.<sup>32</sup>. The problem, however, is that none of this evidence, compelling though it is, can be heard on specific historical recordings because they just don't exist--and so here we see the uncomfortable relationship between recorded and written history. In an ideal world, people would listen to the aural documents that we have and say "They sound so obviously different from today's norms that something must be up." A search of documentary sources might then lead to a possible explanation. But they don't sound that different, and given all the contingent factors that need to be accounted for, the extent to which they do (and the reason for it) is highly subjective and speculative.

So today's scholars and authenticist performers attack the problem backwards. First they formulate a theory of what they believe the reality should be, one that suits their *current* needs as working professionals, and then they search the recordings for "proof." As Nicholas Temperley so aptly put it in an article that appeared over two decades ago in the journal *Early Music*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Feb., 1984):

"Let us then abandon the pretence that our 'authentic' performances are given for the sake of the dead [composers]. We are doing them for ourselves. There is a widespread desire to relive the past, or at least the more attractive aspects of the past. As Joscelyn Godwin has put it in these columns, 'Living in our time, we do well to holiday in saner ages. Many readers will have noticed that music is an excellent vehicle for such voyages.' The essential thing here is the belief that what we hear is historically authentic, whether it actually is or not. And if we are to believe that, then the sound must be conspicuously different from what we are used to. Here lies one of the greatest dangers of the movement, for it puts a stronger premium on novelty than on accuracy, and fosters misrepresentation."

Temperley's warning turns out to be as prescient as it has been largely ignored. In the same article, he notes: "The Harnoncourt-Hogwood attack-and-decay characteristic, for instance, which for many is the essence of 'historical awareness', is not founded on historical evidence; nor is the current belief that Baroque performers used vibrato only as an ornament." What was true in 1984 is still true today. No definitive new evidence has appeared in the past several decades to support a non-vibrato theory of performance. Indeed, the very nature of the question basically precludes the possibility. So with respect to the romantic repertoire the appropriate validation needed to be 'discovered,' or created from existing but hitherto overlooked sources.

Enter historical recordings. It should come as no surprise, given their *modus operandi*, that the more fanatical (or opportunistic) members of the authenticity movement claim to have found in historical recordings some of what they are seeking, but as I think the

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<sup>32</sup> Avins expands on these remarks in her essay "Performing Brahms's music: clues from his letters," included in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style* (Musgrave and Sherman Eds., Cambridge, 2003). Avins' very thoughtful piece is followed by an essay by Clive Brown on Joachim and the performance of Brahms' string music which recapitulates the usual early music cant, and in this company looks even thinner in substance than usual.

above argument shows, the veracity of their observations leaves a lot to be desired and often conflicts with written documentation that should be viewed as equally if not more important than the discs. Furthermore, the problems of logic and consistency that this approach causes extend well beyond the mere question of the existence of continuous vibrato in the work of the specific artists who made recordings. It colors how evidence of all sorts is selected and interpreted.

Consider in this respect the classic case of Leopold Auer, whose well-known fulminations against vibrato at the end of his life in the book *Violin Playing as I Teach It* are frequently quoted with approval by the authenticists as an example of how virulently its use was opposed by the old school generally (Auer was a Joachim pupil, and his statements especially matter because Joachim left no written rants on the subject of vibrato). This perspective always sat oddly with the evidence of the recordings of Auer's own pupils, who used continuous vibrato enthusiastically, and most of whom came to him (as Flesch notes) with their techniques already largely intact, for advanced instruction and artistic "polishing." Let Auer himself put his position in the proper context:

"The one great point I lay stress on in teaching is never to kill the individuality of my various pupils. Each pupil has his own inborn aptitudes, his own personal qualities as regards tone and interpretation. I always have made an individual study of each pupil, and given each pupil individual treatment. And always, always I have encouraged them to develop freely in their own way as regards inspiration and ideals, so long as this was not contrary to esthetic principles and those of my art. My idea has always been to help bring out what nature has already given, rather than to use dogma to force a student's natural inclinations into channels I myself might prefer."

--cited in Martens, p. 10.

The above statement of pedagogical philosophy becomes even more compelling in considering the following anecdote told in Auer's memoirs, *My Long Life in Music* (1923), concerning his encounter with Vieuxtemps around 1859:

"Entering, we were received very cordially by Vieuxtemps himself, and very coldly by his wife, who played the accompaniments at his concerts. After a few polite words regarding my studies had been exchanged, I was permitted to take out my violin--a poor enough instrument--and play.... Vieuxtemps encouraged me with an amiable smile. Then, at the very moment when I was in the midst of a cantabile phrase which I was playing all too sentimentally, Mme. Vieuxtemps leaped from the piano stool and began to walk precipitately around the room. She bent down to the ground, looked here, looked there, beneath the furniture, under the bureau and the piano, as though she were hunting for something she had lost and could not find in spite of all the trouble she took. Brusquely interrupted by her strange action, I stood with wide-open mouth, with no suspicion of what all this might mean. I felt as though I had been cast down from illuminated heights by a fiery explosion rising from the abyss. Vieuxtemps, himself astonished, followed his wife's progress about the room with a surprised air, and asked her what she was looking for so nervously under the furniture. "One or more cats must be



hidden in this room, “ said she, “miaowing in every key!” She was alluding to my over-sentimental glissando in the cantabile phrase. I was so overcome by the shock that I lost consciousness, and my father was obliged to hold me in his arms lest I fall. Vieuxtemps turned the whole affair into a joke, patted me on the cheek, and consoled me by saying that later on everything would go better. I was then no more than fourteen.

The interview was at an end, and my father and I left the hotel with tears in our eyes, discouraged, unhappy, and crushed to earth. From that day on I hated all glissandos and vibratos, and to this very minute I can recall the anguish of my interview with Vieuxtemps.” (pp. 33-5)

What makes this story so revealing is the fact that Auer’s distaste of vibrato stems from a purely personal unhappy experience. He arrived at his audition in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century ready to use portamento and vibrato freely, as presumably most budding virtuosos of the period did. Only Mrs. Vieuxtemps’ reaction put him off the practice. Certainly it was not her husband’s playing, which was noted for its extensive use of vibrato. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a singularly rhapsodic contemporary review in a Toronto newspaper, quoted in *Dwight’s Journal of Music* in May of 1858: “When he [Vieuxtemps] commenced his performance the theme was going on smoothly, but how beautifully was it accompanied. Now a trio—now a quartet, and all enveloped in an exquisite tremolo that quickened your pulses till the sensation became almost agonizing.”

We naturally have to ask the question of just how seriously Auer was exaggerating to make a colorful literary point<sup>33</sup>, and the degree that this encounter actually affected what he was prepared to do technically in order to have a successful career<sup>34</sup>. I confess, though, that I find utterly delightful the notion that because Mrs. Vieuxtemps was a bitch, serious scholars treat Auer’s later diatribe against excessive vibrato as paradigmatic of the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century. You would think someone by now would have pointed out the possibility that Auer’s aversion to vibrato and glissando has less to do with questions of musical style in the absolute sense than it does with, as he himself claims, one woman’s nastiness to a sensitive child.

Happily, Auer was able to overcome the memories of this youthful trauma, and turn out pupils such as Heifetz, Elman, Milstein, and Zimbalist who adopted a modern treatment of vibrato (or was it really “normal” all along?), and he was also able to praise Kreisler, in the article previously quoted, as “one of the greatest artists.” When confronted with the evidence of recordings of Auer’s pupils, however, the authenticists are forced to treat them as representing an aesthetic opposed to his actual teaching, an “evolution” in style, when in reality even a cursory reading both of Auer’s and his students’ statements reveals this to be arrant nonsense. There was nothing in Auer’s aesthetic universe (and by extension Joachim’s) that was inherently opposed to modern vibrato, Mrs. Vieuxtemps

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<sup>33</sup> He actually admits just before the above-cited extract that he has no memory of how he actually played. What stuck in his memory was Mrs. Vieuxtemps’ reaction.

<sup>34</sup> In fact Auer’s recordings of the Brahms First Hungarian Dance and Tchaikovsky’s *Souvenir d’un lieu cher*, though made late in his life (1920), show no obvious lack of either vibrato or portamento—contrary to the suggestion of David Milsom, who seems to be operating with “vibrato filters” on his ears.

notwithstanding, and no reason to view his pupils' practice in this regard as antithetical to his pedagogical method. To interpret the evidence of the recordings this way is simply wrong.

Similarly, the fact that Arnold Rosé may have used vibrato sparingly, as allegedly shown in his few surviving recordings, does not mean that he hated anyone who did otherwise, or hindered their careers. It trivializes both the man, his training, professionalism, and the aesthetic standards of the entire period to imply (as we hear mentioned in the case of Kreisler) that vibrato alone determined who got into the orchestra and who didn't. Rosé himself had little formal instruction in violin after the age of 15. He was a self-made artist, and although he taught conservatory classes for decades, he trained no one of importance. The strings of the Vienna Philharmonic achieved their reputation by selecting the best players available to them, and you can be sure that even if it became an issue, a little extra vibrato would have been viewed as a small price to pay for excellence in all other departments.

One of the more curious aspects of the vibrato controversy as it concerns historical recordings of orchestral music lies in the fact that much of the discussion involves German orchestras for the simple reason that the non-vibrato style was supposedly typical of the "German school"<sup>35</sup>. Given this fact, you would think that the literature would not only focus on recordings of those ensembles, but also on the contemporaneous German-language critical literature (as distinct from personal memoirs such as Otto Strasser's, previously discussed). This is rarely the case. Writers in English on this subject act, somewhat arrogantly in my view, as if the "evidence" of their ears is sufficient to give them a free pass when it comes to looking into these other sources. This places an undue burden on the recordings, and leads to falsely exaggerated claims of their evidentiary significance.

For example, no less an authority than Theodore Adorno, in his review of the 1926 Frankfurt premiere of Joseph Marx's *Symphonischen Nachtmusik* under Clemens Krauss, wrote enthusiastically and poetically of the work as follows: "...die hohen Geigen indes behüten mit ihrem Vibrato die original romantische Flamme"<sup>36</sup>. [...the high violins meanwhile guard, with their vibrato, the original Romantic flame.] Not only does Adorno unequivocally note the presence of vibrato in the violins, he equates it with an authentic "Romantic" sonority, a *traditional* way of composing and playing that he sees Marx, otherwise a modernist, self-consciously evoking.

This raises all kinds of issues relevant to the evaluation of historical recordings, from the relationship of vibrato to the repertoire being played, to the precise nature of performance

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<sup>35</sup> There are other reasons as well. The vibrato controversy tends to focus on the standard German symphonic repertoire of Mozart through Mahler. It seldom comes up in connection with, say, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saëns, or Verdi because most early music specialists who dabble in Romantic repertoire generally avoid these composers, at least when making recordings. The few exceptions (Harnoncourt in Verdi, for example, or Norrington in Tchaikovsky), show that this is probably a good idea.

<sup>36</sup> From *Frankfurter Opern- und Konzertkritiken*, 1926/27.

practice earlier in the Romantic period. The date of this concert precedes the point at which many proponents of the non-vibrato theory of orchestral string playing, including those cited in this essay, claim that it was used by German orchestras, but there is no reason to doubt the fundamental veracity of Adorno's comments on how the orchestra actually performed the music. His observations, made in the context of a discussion of Marx's scoring in general, clearly suggest the use of vibrato as an intrinsic tone quality, a timbral characteristic of the work as a whole, and not an isolated special effect.

Viennese journalist and critic Richard Specht (1870-1932), one of Mahler's first biographers and a keen observer of the Viennese musical scene, offers similarly cogent and unimpeachable evidence of the persistence of vibrato in the Vienna Court Opera Orchestra (and Philharmonic) throughout the latter decades the 19<sup>th</sup> century and well into the 20<sup>th</sup>. In 1919 he wrote a brief but very engaging summary of operatic performance, *The Vienna Opera from Dingelstedt to Schalk and Strauss: Memories of 50 Years*. In discussing the special qualities of the orchestra both in the theater pit and on the concert platform, he notes:

*...of the musicians of the first seventy years there might be scarcely one left; of those from Richter's time only a vanishing few remain. The conductors are different, but the orchestra, its characteristics, its singular finish and sonority, for the past 50 years have invariably remained the same. Today there are acknowledged orchestras of the same rank, but none of the same kind. There is something inimitable in the vibrato and the passionate virtuosity of the violins, in the bloom of the cello cantilena, the power of the basses....*<sup>37</sup>

Once again, here is an authority who has absolutely no axe to grind on the vibrato issue. He is simply reporting what he knows and what he heard. More to the point, his observation, which covers the period 1869-1919, puts paid to the ridiculous notion that Arnold Rosé's presence had a vibrato-dampening effect on the orchestra as a whole. In fact it's far more reasonable, indeed more than likely, that the peculiar Viennese style and approach to vibrato had a stronger influence on Rosé when he played with the ensemble than he had on it. This, after all, is what it means to be part of a tradition, and until modern scholars--blissfully unable to have experienced 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century performance in person--began yammering about historical recordings, no one ever dreamt that this tradition excluded orchestral vibrato or claimed to hear evidence of it in those sources.

Leaving the question of recordings aside for the moment, on the one hand we have the evidence of the scores, of the musicians themselves, of critics and journalists, as well as the scientific findings of men like Carl Seashore, all attesting to and accounting for the omnipresence of some degree of vibrato. In support of the contrary view we have, well, virtually nothing at all beyond inference that speaks of the non-vibrato character of specific performances during the period in question. This is why the illusory evidence of

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<sup>37</sup> *Das Wiener Operntheater von Dingelstedt bis Schalk und Strauss: Erinnerung aus 50 Jahren*; Verlag Paul Knepler, Wien, 1919 (p. 82).

historical recordings is so important to modern scholarship. But these sources, with all of their inherent limitations, should never be given greater weight as indicators of general period performance practice than the unbiased, eyewitness accounts of the people who actually were there. This would be true even if the claims made for some historical recordings with respect to vibrato turned out to be legitimate.

There is no excuse for the tendency of modern writers in the field of applied musicology to ignore all of this evidence--indeed, not even to look for it in the first place. Yes, it destroys their nonsensical theories concerning orchestral vibrato, but isn't finding the truth the purpose of the scholarly endeavor? More to the point, if it is acceptable to look to early treatises and literary sources, sometimes dating back centuries, and apply them to the Romantic and early Modern periods, then why on earth isn't it just as reasonable to use contemporaneous writings which are obviously more germane, accurate, and relevant? The answer, unfortunately, must at least partially be laid at the door of historical recordings, and to the irresistible temptation that they offer as "objective" evidence. Alas, as we have seen, this is precisely what they are not, particularly when auditioned with preconceived notions of what they supposedly reveal.

Singularly absent from all theories of non-vibrato orchestral performance, particularly with respect to recordings, is any substantive discussion of the critical transition point: how long it took, and exactly how it happened. Why can't we hear any sort of steady chronological progression in the existing discography? Did the musicians all take a vote one day and suddenly start employing vibrato continuously? Somehow I doubt it, even if this were physically practical, which it certainly is not for players who until that point avoided using it at all. Alternately, if young, new, vibrato-wielding violinists gradually joined a hitherto non-vibrato section, how did they integrate their sound into that of the ensemble as a whole (and how were they tolerated if this truly were such a big deal)? The inability to provide satisfactory answers to these questions stands, like a bottomless pit of illogic, at the very heart of the zero-vibrato hypothesis.

In the final analysis, Forsyth's claim, cited in the main essay, that orchestral string players in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century used vibrato individually, as they pleased, is the only sensible answer. And use it they most certainly did. The above examples taken from historical recordings show that when they are selected carefully and compared both to each other and to the contemporary visual images, there is no discrepancy between the performance practices captured on film and the purely aural evidence. The theory that orchestras in the 20s and 30s (and presumably earlier) generally refrained from using vibrato, never mind the "continuous" kind, is pure bunk, plain and simple, and it always has been.

If all of this still seems unacceptably impressionistic, try one last listening test: Compare Beecham's 1954 recording of "Miranda" from Sibelius' *Tempest Suite No. 2* (Sony, and other labels) to that in the complete incidental music led by Saraste (Ondine, 1994). Beecham takes 2'23" to Saraste's 1'36". In the former, the contrast between the minimal vibrato *spianato* ("leveled") first violins, highlighting in the upper octave the *espressivo* seconds, and the intense quivering of the solo cello below them both, stands out in high

relief. The much swifter Finnish performance minimizes these differences: there simply isn't time to dwell on them, yet they are audibly there all the same. This is very similar to the timbral contrasts you can hear in comparing the two Berlin State Opera Orchestra recordings of the Tristan Prelude.

A very wide range of interpretive latitude still leaves plenty of room for an audibly idiomatic performance. Which do you prefer? It's a difficult choice. Personally, I lean towards Saraste's fresh and lively tempo (Miranda is a young woman, after all), but I would never want to give up Beecham's ability to delineate the music's special colors and timbres. After all, how often do we meet the term *spianato* in orchestral music, and in a performance that actually lets us hear what it means? The kind of flexibility in performance in evidence here, like vibrato itself, brings the music to life. No interpretation is exactly identical to any other, making all of this non-vibrato dogmatism appear terribly limiting and contrary to an essential quality of our musical tradition.

The Sibelius, which I also discuss in Part One, remains an unusual case. It contrasts a less-vibrato melody with an ornamental vibrato counterpoint, one reduced to a single solo string instrument so that both the timbre itself and its contrast with the principal tune in the violins become extremely noticeable. Instances of this sort of drastic juxtaposition within a single passage are very unusual. I mention this example by way of illustrating how important it is to choose the right subjects for study, and to use the evidence correctly. It isn't enough to put on an early recording, sit back, and say "I don't hear vibrato." Even in the modern era of the allegedly "continuous" kind, its frequency and audibility vary drastically from one work and one performance to the next.

So now we are left with two facts:

1. Most of the time, orchestral string vibrato cannot be detected at all as such, in which case not just historical but the vast majority of recordings are pretty much worthless as evidence in this regard.
2. However, differences in timbre attributable (at least in part) to variations in vibrato can sometimes be heard, however slightly, using certain very carefully selected comparisons. What this means optimally is the opportunity to isolate and hear notated vibrato and non-vibrato textures in close proximity *within the same performance*. In this case, not all historical recordings are worthless, but the number of useful ones is extremely small. Furthermore, while prominent vibrato can sometimes be spotted, at least in some solo playing, the precise degree of its *absence* cannot be definitively established with any certainty by the naked ear alone. This is an irrefutable physiological fact.

Either way, it doesn't look too good for those who advocate using these sonically challenged documents as the kind of objective proof they so desperately need to give their half-baked theories some basis in reality. In other words, when correctly used as evidence historical recordings of orchestral music either tell us nothing, or they prove exactly the opposite of what the foes of vibrato contend. And if the latter is true, then as

we saw in the case of *portamento*, it follows that the pedagogical treatise-writers are not necessarily the most reliable barometers in all matters pertaining to performance practice.

We are on much better ground trusting the composers, because they are guided, first, by the twin pillars of practicality and common sense both in reflecting and creating the stylistics of their time, and second, by the need to write down clearly what they know their musicians might reasonably be expected to do. They deal in the art of the possible, working with seasoned professionals, and not with the theory of how best to instruct raw recruits. Interestingly, the evidence of the scores combined with whatever can be gleaned from historical recordings also tends to vindicate Donington, and by extension Geminiani, at least to the extent that orchestral vibrato appears to be much closer to the “colorful but constant” variety.

At this point, let us also consider Carl Flesch’s thoughts on the historical value of recordings:

“Can the conservation of an outstanding interpretation really exert a beneficial influence, technically or spiritually, on the performances of later generations? I can hardly believe it. If I were to advise a pupil who is studying, say, the Sibelius Concerto, to listen to Heifetz's exemplary recording, he would, as we know from experience, try above all to imitate the virtuoso's manner, and thus be in danger of nipping in the bud the development of his own personality, even if he succeeded in occasionally assimilating devices of minor importance. Has the art of singing improved during the last thirty years because of Caruso's records ? Of course not, even though the sob in Caruso's voice has since become a heavy gun in the technical equipment of the Italian or Italianizing tenor. The gold bar has been melted down to small change for daily use. 'How he hems and how he spits' that's all you can learn from a record; the great interpretation, born of individual feeling, must needs be immediate, spontaneous and unique.” (*Memoirs*, p. 292)

It only remains to explore one final question that today’s scholars dare not touch, because to do so questions the validity of their own sources: How is it that such noted authorities on violin technique can be so vague, confusing, and contradictory when it comes to the subject of vibrato? What makes this matter so complex, and the reactions of the expert pedagogues so strangely equivocal on the one factor that, more than any other, provides the crucial point of contact between vocal and instrumental timbre? We have already mentioned some possible reasons in the course of this discussion, but there is a further, very convincing answer, and in concluding this essay I would like to offer it for your consideration.

### **The Reason Why**

*...every “voice,” whether of the solo instrument or in the orchestra, is constantly employing successions of sounds which are inseparably associated with the movement of human passions. For when the voice had once asserted itself as the means of communication between man and man, every sound, natural or artificial, came to be referred by association to the cadence of the human utterance. Man discovered his*

*sighing in the breeze, his laughter in the ripples, his moaning in the tempest. But it was not until the frets were removed from the old viols that an instrument was found which could really reproduce the cadence of human utterance. Thenceforward the wail of suffering, the portamento of rising emotion, the vibrato of pleading entered into the orchestra and became the primary realities of the world of artificial sound.*

--Anonymous article from *Macmillan's Magazine*, appearing in *The New York Times*, June 11, 1893.

In his *Psychology of Music*, Carl Seashore posed the following question:

“How frequently does the vibrato occur in the best music of today? Among reasons for the existence of confusion upon this issue in musical circles are the following: the failure to know what the vibrato is; the fact that the vibrato cannot be heard by many people; the fact that it is heard as very much smaller than it really is; the assumption that the vibrato is eliminated when only the grosser and uglier forms have been omitted; habits of hearing in terms of tone quality rather than in recognition of periodic pulsations; the fact that an even and satisfying pitch, corresponding to the “true” pitch, is heard; musical versus analytical listening; absence of recording instruments.”

Seashore's colleague Milton Metfessel, in “Vibrato and Artistic Voices” adds a further extremely cogent observation: *There is a tendency to take an ‘all or none’ point of view toward the vibrato in holding that it either should be there or it should not be there. Our point of view is that we would profit by thinking in terms of degrees and rather make our statements to the effect that certain types of vibratos can be there and other types should be excluded.*

All of these factors are as true today as they were when Seashore began his research on vibrato in the 1920s, and most if not all are prevalent in modern scholarship on this issue. Broadly speaking, writers on the subject fall into two categories: those who know what vibrato is scientifically, and those who do not know (or choose to ignore the facts). Needless to say, the “do nots” tend to be more numerous than the “dos.” This matters, because knowing the truth about vibrato, its relationship to notated pitch and how listeners perceive it, leads to a very different reading of the historical sources and our understanding of what their writers really meant<sup>38</sup>, to say nothing of how the evidence of historical recordings may be interpreted.

Hard-core authenticists may well say “Who cares if the early treatise-writers were ignorant with respect to vibrato? They believed what they said and musicians performed

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<sup>38</sup> See Frederick Neumann, “The Vibrato Controversy,” *Performance Practice Review*, Vol. 4 No. 1, 1991, for an excellent example of how the impact of Seashore's findings leads to a far more “vibrato friendly” reading of the historical treatises, and an infinitely more practical and nuanced view of the question of quantity and type of vibrato likely used in the (in this case) 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries--all coming from a highly respected scholar who nonetheless has no problem maintaining on purely stylistic grounds that vibrato was used less frequently in instrumental performance several centuries ago, on the whole, than is typical today.

accordingly.” This argument won’t wash, for the simple reason that understanding the physics of vibrato goes directly to the issue of what both its opponents and proponents describe as acceptable or objectionable performance practice. In other words, as we saw to be the case in evaluating historical recordings, because we now know for a fact that vibrato often cannot be heard distinctly, and that perception varies widely from person to person, a great deal of actual vibrato in the period before sound recording certainly was not identified or described as such at all. It simply fell under the category of a “natural” singing tone with no discernable pitch variation.

These observations are especially valuable and useful in considering the history of violin pedagogy, as they offer a very plausible explanation for the disjunction between performance theory as taught by certain eminent authorities, and the reality of what string players most likely did in concert. For example, that the sound of vibrato is somehow “impure” or distorts perception of notated pitch is simply untrue. Bad intonation will always be heard as such, irrespective of the presence of a correctly made vibrato. Students who were taught falsely along these or similarly mistaken lines likely would have become aware of the truth very quickly as they gained experience over time, in actual performance.

From this perspective, then, we can see clearly that the “vibrato revolution” was not so much a change in methods of playing as it was an effort to correct, rationalize, and stabilize standards of teaching, to make the pedagogy finally conform to reality. This was a huge task, particularly in such a tradition-bound discipline, one that places such a high value on artistic pedigree and obeisance to certain aesthetic ideals of “correct” tone production. It’s like asking the Catholic Church to give up its teaching on birth control because many Catholics use it anyway. Such changes, if they occur at all, happen very slowly and never without a struggle.

The opening salvo in this new battle was fired off in 1910, when Siegfried Eberhardt wrote the first treatise concerned solely with vibrato--its significance as well as the technique for producing it correctly (*Violin Vibrato: Its Mastery and Artistic Uses*, subtitled “Practical Suggestions for Correct Technical Development and Good Violin Tone Production”). He thus earned himself a footnote in the history of violin pedagogy, and he is mentioned in passing by several of the scholars cited in this appendix, who presumably have read him. Unfortunately, their work shows little sign of it, even when they quote him, for not only does Eberhardt deal with vibrato from a purely technical point of view, his rationale in writing his manual offers a more cogent view of what was really going on in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than any current writer on the subject mentioned thus far. And Eberhardt, who actually heard the great virtuosos of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and who was assisted in his work by Carl Flesch, truly was in a position to know.

Eberhardt’s argument has two basic components, one an audible fact, the other a philosophical position. The audible fact is one that I touch on briefly in Part One: vibrato is the principal component that allows a string player to create a unique, personalized timbre. Everyone knows it today as a matter of common sense, which is why I saw no



need to bring Eberhardt into the equation previously. As Gregor Piatigorsky put it: “Nothing is so characteristic of any player as his vibrato, and nothing so much differentiates one string player from another.” [*With the Artists*, Samuel and Sada Applebaum, Markert & Co., 1955, p. 200]. Furthermore, this fact was no less true in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because the very concept is inherent in both the mechanics and aesthetics of violin tone, and has been since the instrument was first invented. As Eberhardt points out:

“The quality common to the tone of all great artists is beauty. How may we then determine--this is our main concern--wherein lies the difference in character of tone? Let us imagine that we hear one after the other of the great artists draw his bow across the open strings of his violin. Could we in an adjoining room distinguish one player from another? At best we might be able to tell Wilhelmj from Sarasate, because the tone of one would be stronger than that of the other. This, it is plain, is only a dynamic difference. Should all play equally *piano*, then every possible difference would be completely removed. This fact has been confirmed by prominent scientists. Nevertheless, the playing of one artist differs from the playing of another artist—aside from difference of interpretation—only in one respect, and that is in *tone*. We have just seen that on the open strings, the tone of one artists is not distinguishable from that of the another. Individuality of tone can arise only when the fingers of the left hand are placed upon the strings. These fingers vibrate. They vibrate differently. Difference in vibrato begets difference in tone.”

Carl Flesch takes over this argument almost verbatim in book one of *The Art of Violin Playing*, further noting, “The fact that the individuality of the player reveals itself most clearly through a tone quality which belongs to him alone, certainly cannot be disputed. The assertion that the individuality of a person’s tone quality is primarily defined by his or her vibrato seems strange at first. But only momentarily....”<sup>39</sup> These lines, by the way apply equally to orchestral strings, and help to explain and validate both the methodology and the findings in the previous section. They also serve to put the final nail in the coffin of those silly theories that maintain that “this orchestra didn’t use vibrato until 19\_\_ [fill in the date].” Hence, we find Wolfgang Schuster, a member of the Vienna Philharmonic, in his article “The Sound of the Vienna Philharmonic,” noting:

“The secret of the Philharmonic string tone, as formulated by Moser/Nösselt, based on remarks by Carl Flesch, would be ‘... a broad, closed vibrato, along with the ability to produce intensive, but constantly free-swinging tone near the bridge.’”

Flesch is speaking of what he himself heard (and saw) at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thanks to him we can extrapolate even further back. In a footnote to his violin method he states, “Former generations, *with the exception of the Viennese School of*

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<sup>39</sup> In his *Memoirs*, Flesch flat-out accuses Eberhardt of stealing his ideas on left-hand technique and publishing them as his own. This essay is not the place to investigate the matter further. The bottom line is that Eberhardt got into print first, and for our purposes, if what he published in 1910 reflects, as Flesch contends, pedagogical ideas formulated over the previous two decades of Flesch’s teaching career, so much the better. It only highlights, in the most graphic and deliciously sleazy manner possible, the existence of a more broadly perceived need for a comprehensive method of producing vibrato reliably.

*Hellmesberger*, favored an extremely narrow type of vibrato, which apparently no longer corresponds to the dominant contemporary taste for our instrument.” Hellmesberger was concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic for much of its early history, a position later filled by his son, Joseph Hellmesberger, Jr., teacher of the young Georges Enescu, among others. We can also see, from this example along with those cited in the previous section, how dangerous it is to let judgment be clouded (and questions of “period style” be determined) by the existence of a few dismal sounding historical recordings of a single violinist, in this case Arnold Rosé.

In short, to the extent one can identify differences in tone between string ensembles playing the same music, these differences must stem to some degree from variations in the cumulative deployment of vibrato. And even though it cannot be heard in the same way as sometimes may be possible with a solo, there are even varieties of vibrato particularly suited to larger groupings, as Flesch observes: “Other peculiar effects, unbearable when applied to solo playing, can also become advantageous expressions of the collective body in orchestral use (slow vibrato, “hacky” accents).” (*The Art of Violin Playing, Book One*).

In any event it is clear that the significance of vibrato as the determinant of timbral identity is as clearly understood by orchestral string players as by professional soloists. This is why I have included multiple recordings of some of the listed works previously discussed, to help facilitate comparison. If all orchestras in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century foreswore the use of vibrato entirely (or nearly so), then their string sections should all sound more or less the same in any given piece of music. Needless to say, they don’t--not by a mile. Just compare the suggested versions of Mahler’s Adagietto to settle that argument once and for all.

As I argue in Part One, the frequent use of vibrato necessarily had a role to play in the gradual transition orchestras experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, progressing from “pick up” status to fully salaried, often self-governing performing arts organizations with a definitive corporate persona as regards tone color. The late conductor and educator Norman Del Mar, in his book *Anatomy of the Orchestra*, agrees with this point of view as well. He writes: “It is to a large extent the combination of many individual vibrati which is the predominant characteristic of the string mass, and which gives it its unique colour, the very colour which identifies the symphony orchestra itself.” (p. 136)

It thus follows that just as violinists will use vibrato to personalize their own sound, so it is with conductors. Artists such as Stokowski and Karajan were noted for their proprietary string sonority. We have already seen that Mahler demanded extra vibrato in expressive passages, as did Scherchen. Furtwängler did too. *The Cambridge Companion to the Orchestra* notes that among the Berlin Philharmonic’s noteworthy qualities under Furtwängler was “especially the vibrato espressivo of the strings.” (p. 129). And we can be sure that he took his approach with him from orchestra to orchestra, including the Vienna Philharmonic, which he first conducted in 1922.

*The Penguin Music Magazine* noted in 1948 that “One of the secrets of Toscanini is that he insists on pianissimos always being ‘warm’--that is, played with vibrato.” Does anyone seriously believe that Toscanini adopted this approach only in the immediate post-War period, at the very end of his life<sup>40</sup>? Furthermore, if the “Toscanini vibrato” is so much a feature of his style, we might very well ask why it is that the experts on the subject of historical recordings fail to mention the fact. At bottom, it would seem that to the extent conductors did not simply leave the string section alone, as Forsythe maintains was the general policy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had no problem or hesitation in characterizing the timbre of their string section through the distinctive handling of vibrato.

Eberhardt’s thesis, then, raises two very interesting questions. The first concerns just “How frequently?” vibrato is necessary to achieve the kind of individuality that we associate with great (i.e. memorable and distinctive) artistry. The second asks “What kind?” of vibrato is being used. Clearly it is not some prefabricated ornament such as Mozart or Spohr describe, for these are notated with rigid specificity (even if they may not all be played identically by different artists). Eberhardt apparently is acknowledging the existence of an intrinsic, “colorful” vibrato of the sort postulated by Donington, Seashore and colleagues, and Geminiani. Whether or not it was used “continuously” he does not say, but it had to be often enough to make it distinguishable by comparatively untutored listeners as a proprietary timbral quality, which in turn suggests its relative prominence.

The second component of Eberhardt’s argument explains why this crucially important, “intrinsic” vibrato is either ignored or very imperfectly taught in all previous treatises (and he claims to have surveyed more than 100, from Leopold Mozart forward, quoting from many in the process). The short answer is that “intrinsic” means what it says, a notion supported independently by the scientific findings of Seashore and Metfessel. Anything that is so uniquely personal to an artist cannot be explained in a systematic pedagogical way; it arises spontaneously from the character of the performer. Eberhardt, quoting lengthily from the Rode-Kreutzer-Ballot Violin School, accepts the notion of timbral individuality but strongly disagrees with the conclusion that, “Beauty of tone begets emotion, and deep in his own soul the pupil discovers the spring from which he draws the power to stir the souls of others.” He continues:

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<sup>40</sup> And here is the Maestro himself on this very subject: “Don’t speak to me about critics! They know nothing! They think because the violins vibrate all the time they make a beautiful tone! No! A fast vibrato make a beautiful tone, not a slow one. Our NBC violins make quick vibrato. That make a beautiful tone.” (cited in Samuel Chotzinoff, *Toscanini: An Intimate Portrait*, Knopf, 1956) Note that this observation is entirely consistent with what just about everyone else cited in this essay has said, from Flesch, to Seashore, to Joachim’s disciples. The unanimity on this point is very striking, and of course it’s worth pointing out that the quicker the vibrato the more it will be perceived simply as attractive tone color, rather than as a distinct wavering of pitch. Does anyone care to suggest that Toscanini’s position on this issue with respect to the NBC Symphony (founded in the 1930s) differs markedly from his views at the start of his career in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? Or are the facts he describes concerning vibrato as valid then as they are now? The answer, I should hope, is obvious.

“This sentence contains a grave error, a fundamental error, which offers opportunity for the most preposterous conclusions. Rightly interpreted it becomes but a half-truth. If the tone, here considered of such great importance, reflects the soul, then the beautiful tone should reveal a noble and deeply sympathetic nature. And since so very many violinists play “with feeling,” I should like to ask the psychologically not uninteresting question: Is it really true that violinists generally possess more nobility of character than other people? For my part, I cannot believe this, for it has been my experience that persons with the crudest natures may sometimes play in the most deeply affecting manner. And every teacher will have found that some pupils, in whom not a trace of a deep or sympathetic nature is to be discovered, often play with beautiful tone, while others, on the contrary, possessing all of the exceptional qualifications of a soulful nature, are not able to find adequate means of expressing on their instruments what they inwardly feel. Now how does the matter stand between the soul and tone? Is the beautiful tone something which must be sought ‘deep in the soul?’ What creates individuality of tone? My answer is: *The tone is beautiful when correctly produced: is not an expression of the soul.*”

Carl Flesch agrees wholeheartedly, observing that, “The legend of inborn, natural talent for tone-production has created no end of trouble since the very beginning of violin instruction.” (*Problems of Tone Production in Violin Playing*, 1931) “A faulty vibrato will always prove to be an unbridgeable obstacle to achieving a higher goal. What has, up to now, been done to help those whose career was endangered by a lack in this respect? Practically nothing. Teachers in general contented themselves by describing vibrato as ‘natural’ and ‘un-learnable,’ confusing its purely personal, aesthetic content with the mechanical aspects of producing it.” (*The Art of Violin Playing, Book One*).

Further support for this perspective comes from Samuel Grimson and Cecil Forsyth, whose splendid little book *Modern Violin-Playing* (1920) must be one of the first, if not *the* first, to set forth the rational basis for modern, flat-side vibrato<sup>41</sup>. Their language is so entertaining that it deserves to be quoted at length:

*About once in a hundred thousand times it happens that a player hits on the correct mechanical procedure by accident, just as about once in a hundred thousand times an engineer might guess the tensions of his steel bridge correctly. The engineer can only repeat his success by the miracle of a second lucky guess. In that respect the violinist has the advantage over him. When once he has hit on the right method, he recognizes its value by its artistic results. He tests it; and finds that, with him, it always works. That gives him the one thing for which he is searching--personal security on his instrument. The physical “why and wherefore” of the matter never crosses his mind.*

*But observe the vast difference between the two cases from the teacher’s point of view! No one, out of a lunatic asylum, would appoint the guessing engineer to a university chair of engineering. The violinist, on the other hand, though he is certain to*

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<sup>41</sup> The practice seems to have been propagated most persuasively by Ivan Galamian in his highly respected book *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching* (1962).

*have all the artist's distaste for definition and all the artist's confusion as between means and sensation, in immediately labeled "genius."*

*Now, so long as he remains in the genius-business, there is not one word to be said against him. But as soon as that cap is stuck on his head, he becomes a potent money-drawing attraction as a teacher. And there the trouble begins.*

*He collects a great many expensive pupils, who come to learn "the mysteries of his art." In the class-room they all stand round him, open-mouthed with the words "How is it done?" And he has not the remotest idea of any satisfactory answer to these terribly searching words. He may "show them how," of course. He may play the actual passage under discussion. If it "comes off" the first time, all he can answer to their question is, "Like that." If it doesn't come off the first or second time, he has to try again, blaming the bow or perhaps the weather for his earlier failures. And even if he plays the passage finally--nay, even if he plays it finally with the most perfect and consummate art--his pupils have learned nothing technically. After the exhibition, one can only say that he differs from them in that he can play the passage sometimes, and they can not.*

*When this position is established as between teacher and pupil, the former's friends have to re-establish the balance with a good deal of window-dressing, all designed to cover up deficiencies in the stock-room behind. Out comes all the old rubbish and hocus-pocus about "genius" and "the divine mystery of the violin" and "the God-given faculty of expression"--all the old skimble-skamble stuff that has done so much harm to the simple honest dignity of the violin for the past three hundred years.*

Such was the state of violin instruction ca. 1920. Grimson and Forsyth also have some equally penetrating remarks on the treatises that form the backbone of today's scholarship on the vibrato questions.

*So far for the living teacher and his pupil. There is, however, another large body of teaching-doctrine laying entombed in the various Violin Schools and Violin Methods that have already been published. A few of these are important works, written by the great players of the past. The great majority are timid recapitulations and adaptations of these few works. They have no importance at all.*

*But even in the best-known and most commonly used Violin Schools the instructions are, in the main, false and misleading. This is a hard but true statement. And the case with which its truth can be proved is an astonishing commentary on the readiness of the human mind to accept as proved that which requires some mental effort to disprove.*

*The authors of these recognized Violin Schools were undoubtedly great as players. But it does not follow that they were great, or even competent, as educators. Their impulse--the artistic impulse--was always to attach more importance to the end than to the means. This involved the ignoring of the one great factor in violin-playing, the mechanism of the human hand. And that factor, once ignored, left the art of violin playing an intangible thing, scarcely capable of adequate treatment. Let us add that the writers of these books were all busy, practical men, and that they certainly had neither the leisure nor the training to analyze sensation, or to define its physiological origin.*

*The Violin Schools which they strung together are primarily collections of musical matter arranged in order of increasing complexity and difficulty. The literary*

*text, containing the instructions, is an afterthought, a mere record of the most obvious methods of dealing with the musical text.*

*These Violin Schools produced no fine players. The fine players produced themselves after a certain point. And as soon as they had sensed and put into practice the right method, they followed the example of their masters, and promptly consigned it to the limbo of incommunicable sensation.*

This is all well and good, I imagine some modern scholars saying, but it doesn't matter if the entire theoretical basis of violin teaching was incorrect in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Our concern as a problem in applied musicology is how people actually played. And that is precisely the point: for if Eberhardt, Flesch, and Grimson/Forsyth are correct, *no one* in real life could possibly have played in a manner that the treatises describe beyond the very limited basics of technique. Right now just about everyone focuses on the question of "how often" vibrato was used, and the issue of its being "continuous," but this seems to me far less important than the issue of "what kind," because this is what the anecdotal sources actually describe with respect to specific players, and this in turn suggests a possible rationale that may help clarify the question of frequency of use.

In other words, as Seashore found, certain types of vibrato allow for more constant application than others because they improve the tone without fatiguing or offending the ear. We have already seen previously, for example, the emphasis placed on vibrato speed as a critical factor in its being tolerable. Therefore, artists who discover the correct method may well use it continuously. Others necessarily might have to make due with a more limited, "ornamental" approach<sup>42</sup>. All of this incidentally is related to, but not quite the same as, the ability to then vary the vibrato to produce an artistically pleasing, wide range of tone colors. Practically speaking, everything depends on the sound that the violinist actually makes. As Grimson and Forsyth point out in what remains, to my mind, the finest theoretical description of vibrato to appear in print:

*Spohr, as we have seen, calls [vibrato] a wavering of the tone alternately above and below the correct pitch.*

*The word "wavering," however, does not at all describe the vibrato which is most commonly heard. It is rather a violent excitement, whose principal effect is to make the timbre of the instrument more penetrating, while obscuring the beauty of the individual notes of a passage. Aesthetically it is unpleasant to the last degree.*

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<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it is always assumed that great artists of the past, such as Auer or Joachim, had perfect technique and abjured vibrato from considered aesthetic preference rather than simple inability to produce it correctly or consistently. No one proposes the perfectly reasonable notion that great interpreters might also have been technically flawed as performers, and consequently what now is credited as adherence to orthodoxy was in fact nothing more than human fallibility, however artfully disguised or ultimately turned to positive account. Certainly no great artist willingly concedes chronic technical shortcomings. In fact, the best argument in favor of less vibrato in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lies in the related problems of general ignorance about what it was, and how badly it seems to have been taught. But this in turn suggests that artists who did manage to acquire the technique naturally used it as much as possible, while only those who lacked the ability necessarily used it less frequently. This presents authenticists with a dilemma, for who takes as their model second rate artists, or those with a flawed technique?

*Besides this vibrato, there is another kind that is heard only a little less frequently--a sort of slow rocking sound, which adds nothing whatever to the musical effect, which is not particularly expressive, and which, repeated over and over again, eventually maddens the listener by its futility.*

*Let us say at one that the sole object of the vibrato is to enhance the beauty of an already existent sound. Incidentally it draws attention to the notes on which it is used. It gives them, at the discretion of the player, an added emotional thrill; and so contrasts them with the notes which have no vibrato. But the moment the vibrato obscures the true sound of any given note, it becomes an ugly nuisance. Furthermore, the true vibrato--that is the say, the beautiful vibrato--must never give the impression that the pitch is being shifted, either up or down. It must lend a ringing sound to the note on which it is used. And this ringing sound can only be appreciated as a continual return to true pitch. In other words, the ear receives the repeated impression of the correct-pitch-note; and so telegraphs to the mind the impression of that note plus the emotional thrill of the vibrato.*

It is also clear in this connection--Eberhardt does not specifically say so, but Flesch touches on it, while Grimson and Forsyth come at the problem from a different angle entirely--that the foundation for the "error" of Baillot and his fellow treatise-writers with regard to vibrato lies to some extent in the deeply held belief, partly practical, partly a spiritual or religious reflection on the "natural order," that instrumental timbre aspires to and reflects that of the human voice. Thanks to Seashore's work, we know that all singers have an intrinsic vibrato which gives a unique color to their individual sound. The technique of singing can be taught, but it must be applied to a temperament and vocal apparatus present at birth. These can only be disciplined and trained, not acquired from an instrument-maker or fundamentally changed. As Manuel Garcia stresses: "*The great object of study is, to develop the natural gifts of an organ; not to transform or extend them beyond their power or capability.*" [Emphasis as in original text]

No one would dispute that this viewpoint, this desire to communicate on the same natural and spontaneous level as with vocal music, permeates the thinking of the early treatise-writers to a profound degree, but it just as potently feeds into the image of "specialness" characteristic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic view of the artist-hero. Although stated in slightly different terms, Eberhardt formulates it like this:

"Beauty of tone has always been considered a special gift; and to acquire it we have contented ourselves with experiments upon the right arm, and have sought for secrets where no secrets exist.

In regard to the vibrato, I can claim that:

--Artistic finish in playing is impossible without a correctly made vibrato....

Let us turn back once more. As we have already seen, the playing of different violinists is not distinguishable when confined to the open strings. The individual characteristics of different artists are also not recognizable as long as the fingers are held passive upon the strings. The difference in playing only becomes apparent when the vibrato is employed. We are able at once to distinguish Hartmann from Ysaÿe, Petschnikoff from Flesch, by the difference in their vibratos alone. The masters do not differ essentially in their handling of the bow, by which only dynamic shadings are

obtained; but they do differ widely in the movements of the left hand. Here alone, in the individualization of tone, clearly lies the great importance of the vibrato.”

If Eberhardt, Flesch, and Grimson/Forsyth are correct on these points, and few would dispute that they are, then we must accept the fact that (1) either the great violinists roundly ignored much of the advice in the treatises themselves (Flesch freely admits as much), or (2) that the injunction to avoid vibrato’s “too frequent” use still meant a much more generous application of the technique than most writers on the subject today admit, or else (3) these virtuosos employed an additional vibrato technique that the pedagogical texts do not discuss directly (with the possible exception of Geminiani). This is true even of virtuosos like Joachim, who may have defined their individuality by minimizing the obtrusive use of vibrato. And if, in turn, Joachim’s contemporaries viewed his sound as drawn from “deep within his soul,” it is very unlikely that he was widely imitated<sup>43</sup>, for each artist necessarily would have felt obligated not to merely copy, but to find a unique timbral “calling card.”

The push for string virtuosos to individualize their timbre through the use of vibrato must have received even greater impetus in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw a move away from violinist-composers playing their own music in favor of a new breed of soloists making their careers playing the works of others. Consider that virtually the entire modern repertoire of 19<sup>th</sup> century concertos consists of scarcely a dozen pieces by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Bruch, Dvorák, Saint-Saëns, Glazunov, Goldmark, Paganini, and Wienawski, and not a single major effort by any of the famed treatise-writers.

The last two names on this list are the only virtuoso violinists in the lot, and they have the most dubious reputations as composers generally. Neither, for example, stands as high in public or scholarly esteem as do specialist writers for the piano, such as Chopin, Liszt, or (at present) Alkan. Even Joachim’s Hungarian Concerto, a splendid work that surely deserves a place in the standard repertoire, and one by a violinist who was also a genuinely talented composer in an absolute sense, remains stubbornly marginal. Joachim’s fame today rests not on his own pieces, fine though some of them are, nor on his importance as a teacher and model for future generations, but simply on the continued popularity of the concertos written for him by the likes of Bruch and Brahms.

Unlike the music of the pedagogues, the above-mentioned works are not the vaguely anonymous products of a particular “school” of violin-writing, blank canvases easily monogrammed when played in the inimitable style of their respective authors. Hans von Bülow’s famous comment about the Tchaikovsky concerto being written “*against* the violin” is singularly apt here. The performer must work hard to establish his own

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<sup>43</sup> Flesch makes just this point in his *Memoirs*, noting that Joachim’s technique was essentially inimitable, his teaching defective from a methodological point of view, and that the violinists who attempted to follow his example literally wound up crippled either interpretively or physically (or both). Flesch even goes so far as to hold Joachim indirectly responsible for the decline of German violin school in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



individuality in concert with, or even in opposition to, that of a composer whose temperament may be very different from his own, and who expects his music to be played more or less as written, whether idiomatic and comfortable for the solo instrument or not. This in turn requires an even greater effort than ever before to find an instantly recognizable timbral identity.

Note, once again, that the vibrato question cannot be answered without considering the requirements of the actual music being performed. Even if we accept the validity of less vibrato being justified in the music of Baillot, or Spohr, or Bériot, would this also be true of Tchaikovsky, Bruch, and Dvorák? Surely it is significant that the great Romantic composers approached the difficult task of writing a violin concerto with great trepidation, most producing only a single work in the medium, or at most two or three, as compared to a couple of dozen from the likes of Viotti or Spohr. What the former's output lacks in quantity it more than makes up for in musical depth and melodic personality, but producing music for violin and orchestra still constituted a tremendous effort.

The need for orchestral musicians to exploit vibrato to the fullest during this period was more pressing still than it was for the soloists (and in reality always has been). Imagine a newly trained conservatory graduate circa 1850, fresh from his mastery of Baillot or Spohr, having to play a repertoire ranging from Mozart and Beethoven to Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, Bellini, Meyerbeer, and Verdi. Eberhardt's dictum that vibrato *characterizes* has never been more true or valuable than here. The fact is, orchestral and theatrical music by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century had become far more advanced than the style in evidence in most concertos. One has only to compare the orchestral habits of Wienawski to earlier music by Weber, Berlioz, Liszt, Tchaikovsky or Wagner.

Concerto composition through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was quite reasonably governed largely by the same schools of technique and age-old conventions advocated by the soloists themselves (particularly if the composer was not himself a virtuoso, and wanted his work to stand a fair chance of being performed by one). Difficult questions of form, as well as the tricky issue of balance between the violin and orchestra, also tended to urge the composer in a more conservative direction. Those who failed to give sufficient attention to these matters paid a heavy price. Consider, for example, how Joachim drove Dvorák crazy with revisions to his Violin Concerto, and then rewarded him for his pains by never playing it. This also explains the success of Brahms, a "natural" conservative who was without question the finest concerto writer in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There is thus no question that as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the standard pedagogical works began to look increasingly out of touch with what we know for a fact orchestral players were being asked to do: perform modern works by advanced composers who were not violinists, and who could have cared less either about the strictures laid down by conservatory committees or treatises written by string virtuosos of the past--however illustrious their reputations. To understand the truth of this observation, one only has to consider Berlioz' experiences attempting to win the Prix de Rome. This is the situation

that Eberhardt was among the first to address, though he naturally enough frames it entirely as the historical treatises do, in terms of the needs of the solo performer.

Having asserted that the special qualities of a string player's timbre arise from vibrato, the correct mechanism for producing which can indeed be taught, Eberhardt moves on to the purely pedagogical exercises that comprise the remainder of his guide. This effort to quantify and rationalize what hitherto had been viewed as an intangible, even transcendental quality places Eberhardt squarely in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His work stands at the crux of a change in artistic philosophy, from that of Romantic individualism to the more "scientific" (and some would say anonymous) view characteristic of string playing today. It's a trade-off that many in the classical musical community regret, but also one more apparent than real. The number of outstanding artistic geniuses in any era is small; at least now everyone below that exalted level plays better.

Far more importantly, Eberhardt's work, in tandem with that of Flesch and Grimsen/Forsyth, reveals that the actual revolution that occurred was not so much one in which vibrato became "continuous," but rather a change in pedagogical approach--from one that forced individual string players to develop their own personalized vibrato through trial and error, however imperfect the result, to one that allowed its method of production to be *standardized* and taught. To do so required not just an adequate technical guide, but a willingness to objectify a major component of what had hitherto been considered as belonging to an artist's mystical, inner being. Even as late as 1955 we find Jascha Heifetz suggesting as much:

"I have devoted much thought to the vibrato, but always return to the conviction that it is part of each individual's musical personality, something one is born with, which comes more or less naturally, expressing one's temperament, whether warm, in overindulgence, or cold, in generally abstaining from its employment." [Applebaum, p. 42]

Is it any wonder, then, that there is no methodologically consistent description of left-hand vibrato--that some authorities describe it as flat, some sharp, and some extending to both sides of notated pitch<sup>44</sup>? And isn't it now clearer just why so many treatises, as Hickman points out, neglect to mention vibrato at all, while others warn against its too frequent *ornamental* use (the regularity of which would obscure rather than enhance the virtuoso's personal timbre)? How amazing, given the personal nature of vibrato and the philosophy of its origins prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that modern scholars can so confidently (and glibly) assert a broad uniformity of style over such a long period.

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<sup>44</sup> Seashore discovered that, as a practical matter, vibrato tends to be both under and over the mean pitch, though the extent varies from player to player. This finding has been challenged in later research, but the bottom line seems to be (not surprisingly) that irrespective of how the violinist was trained and regardless of what they think they may be doing, the critical factor is musical context and, in particular, the direction in which the hand must shift to move on to the next note in the melody. There is, obviously, a difference between the self-conscious vibrato that players will make on single tones in a laboratory setting, and what they do spontaneously in the heat of the moment when playing specific works. In the latter case, musicians instinctively and automatically adjust their intonation constantly, and so the use of vibrato becomes a natural compliment to this larger overall process.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century, far from being an epoch in which the use of vibrato was limited, either by soloists or in the orchestra, was in fact a sort of timbral “Wild West.” The disparate evidence of the scores and the treatises (what the latter say, not necessarily what they teach) broadly agrees on this point. The gradual effort to rationalize musical life, whether in the form of composers’ increasingly detailed score markings, a higher and more consistent standard of education and training, or the establishment of permanent performing arts ensembles, is evident as the century progressed. But these various currents originated at different times, and progressed at different speeds.

Vibrato was one of the last aspects of string technique to undergo this process, not because it was infrequently used or ephemeral, but for exactly the opposite reason: because it was so basic and integral an element of the artist’s individual personality, and had been for so long. It is also at once the most complex, variable, and most important of all of the “coloring” tools a violinist must acquire, the only one that speaks directly to the ideal of an expressive vocal timbre. As Geminiani and Flesch both point out, it cannot truly be notated, just as the particular character of a singer’s voice can’t be written down or literally imitated by anyone else<sup>45</sup>.

Vibrato was, in short, not a lesson for the textbook, but a life experience to be passed on from teacher to student, and one of the principal signposts marking the transition from apprentice to master. Flesch, with his typical clarity, describes the process: “How does the beginner become involved with vibrato? Does he suddenly have a divine revelation? Not in the least. Events are much more prosaic. He has noticed that his teacher, by vibrating, ennobles the tone, and after a while, with the encouragement of the teacher, or responding to an inner need, he tries to imitate this. Therefore every student at first acquires the type of vibrato used by the teacher under whose direction he made his first attempts at vibrato.”

Sometimes the process is even more haphazard than the one Flesch describes. Yehudi Menuhin’s description in his memoirs of his first teacher Siegmund Anker, from whom he took lessons in the early 1920s, makes both amusing and harrowing reading:

“At this distance what I recall most clearly is my conquest of vibrato. To teach vibrato, Anker would shout, “Vibrate! Vibrate!” with never a clue given as to how to do it. Indeed I would have obeyed him if I could. I longed to achieve vibrato, for what use was a violin to a little boy of Russian-Jewish background who could not bring a note to throbbing life? As with my struggle to roll an *r*, the problem was not to imagine the sound so much as to produce it; but vibrato proved a more elusive skill. I had already left Anker’s tutelage and was perhaps six or seven years old when, lo and behold, one bright day my

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<sup>45</sup> Here is Flesch: “This ‘pulsation’ of the left hand cannot be notated with symbols which in themselves would not be subject to misunderstanding; as far as character, liveliness and duration is concerned, it is left to the personality of the violinist.” Further, “Tasteful application of vibrato is one of the most difficult aesthetic problems of violin playing. In this respect there will always be clashes of opinion—for in essence no important violinist likes another violinist’s vibrato.” (*The Art of Violin Playing, Book One*)

muscles had solved the puzzle. By such strokes of illumination, the solution proving as mysterious as the problem and leaving one almost as blind as before, most violinists learned their craft.” [*Unfinished Journey*, p. 28]

Menuhin’s experience was by no means atypical. Szigeti reports much the same. So does Flesch. One has only to browse through the published memoirs of just about any string soloist who put down the bow long enough to take up the pen, to realize just how dire the pedagogical situation was with respect to vibrato well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most students do not turn out to be great artists, managing to solve the “vibrato problem” in a way both tasteful and individual. So it should come as no surprise that many treatises, warning constantly of impending artistic disaster with potentially career-ending consequences, tell most students to stay as far away from frequent vibrato as humanly possible. Indeed, poor early training almost did in Menuhin. But he wanted desperately to learn vibrato, and there’s no doubt that violinists throughout history felt the same and did it anyway, whether the result came out good, bad, or indifferent.

This raises an interesting question for the HIP folks, for if there’s no question that the amount of vibrato in use has increased over time, there’s equally no question that performance standards have also improved immensely. So what exactly should they be imitating? No sane person suggests that authenticist string players should copy typically mediocre 18<sup>th</sup> century playing, including a particularly painful and technically inept vibrato, even if this comes closest to reality. On the other hand, any claim to be recreating a hypothetical ideal performance according to the highest and best aesthetic parameters of the day runs the very real likelihood of misinterpreting the composer’s notated intentions which, after all, generally reflect actual and not hypothetical practice.

In addition, all of today’s period performance specialists are trained on modern instruments to the high standards prevailing at modern conservatories. They then try to “unlearn” some of their technique to the extent they deem necessary in order to imitate earlier methods in everything from bow-grip to the position of the instrument under the chin. But where in all this is the vocal, singing tone--the timbral ideal of previous centuries? This approach obviously cannot give the same results as a violinist trained according to 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics from the start, even if we could postulate (and we can’t) some basic uniformity of instruction in this respect.

The most important aspect of this earlier aesthetic, the one crucial missing ingredient in modern pedagogy, can be summed up in Leopold Mozart’s famous dictum with respect to vibrato that “nature herself is the instructress thereof.” In other words, since vibrato cannot be accurately notated, and only the mechanical basics of its production described, the player must arrive at an individual tonal ideal through a real-world, trial and error process of *listening* and *imitation*. How many students of stringed instruments in our own hyper-specialized day are told “go out, listen to the best singers, and try to make the same sounds that they do?” Yet this is how violinists up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century were supposed to discover their personal timbral ideals. Many undoubtedly failed. Yet this, and not the strictures of a particular pedagogical school, is what really accounts for the theorized

greater variety (or personalization) in all aspects of tone production characteristic of prior eras.

By the time most players today actually get to conservatory and earn the right to choose a specialization in early music performance, their basic technique has already been in place for many years. They have no audible models to teach them the technique of earlier times save for a few historical recordings of highly dubious value. They are not told to *listen* and *imitate*, particularly if this means that the approach to vibrato will not turn out to be vastly different from modern norms. Their approach to 19<sup>th</sup> century style is thus necessarily synthetic, often wavering indecisively between self-conscious anachronism and tasteless eclecticism. In many such cases the result leads inevitably to exaggeration, to difference for its own sake passed off as scholarly authenticity. 19<sup>th</sup> century artists, on the other hand, had no such sounds to “push against,” and thus no need to take an extreme position on issues such as the use of vibrato.

Here, for example, is one possible practical result of the above state of affairs. In an article entitled “Key Colour,” published in *The Musical Times* of November 1, 1886, Franz Groenings discusses the differences in timbre of scales played on the violin, noting: “All of these characteristics of scales on the violin are therefore due to its peculiar uneven construction, and they would disappear if the hard ebony nut, which so firmly determines the beginning of each string at the scroll end, were replaced by one of India-rubber or some soft material of a pressure similar to that of the fleshy finger-end, which gives all stopped tones a slight vibrato.” Here indeed is a form of “intrinsic” vibrato, however minimal. Do today’s HIP artists, out of hyper-conscious concern for issues of supposed “ornamentation,” eliminate even this natural timbre from their playing and conducting? After all, it’s not mentioned in any violin treatise. It would seem that sometimes, perhaps often, they do just that.

Consider also the behavior of more than a few authentically inclined conductors when presented with the opportunity to work with modern instrument ensembles. And I’m not just referring to Roger Norrington. Plenty of “old school” maestros jump on (and off) the period performance bandwagon as suits their convenience, their inclinations, and the need to either appear trendy to demonstrate that they have novel interpretive ideas. Some, such as Bernard Haitink or Charles Mackerras, are such fine musicians that they can integrate certain period elements into their overall conception harmoniously. Others do much less well. Nicholas McGegan, for example, recalls that, “I was astonished a few years ago to have to ask the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to use more vibrato in a Beethoven Symphony; apparently their then-music director, Sir Simon Rattle, preferred to have his Viennese classics virtually vibrato-free.” (*Symphony Magazine*, October/November 2005).

Here we can see that absent gut strings, old-style bows, and the other material paraphernalia of the early music movement, artists who are otherwise largely devoid of significant or characteristic interpretive ideas have no choice but to invoke the latest authenticist dogma and differentiate themselves through a conspicuously exaggerated avoidance of--you guessed it--vibrato. No other aspect of performance technique, when

pushed to such simplistic extremes, has the same impact on either the individual or the corporate sound of string instruments, particularly in repertoire that offers little opportunity for added ornamentation. It's a sad (but hardly surprising) irony that proving this point comes at such a high price in terms of musical expression, and has sucked into its wake so much otherwise worthy and useful scholarship.

In fact, the more you think about it, the clearer it becomes that the authenticity movement's entire view of history is oddly skewed as it applies to the vibrato question. For centuries the evidence has shown a basic pattern: a vocal minority of pedagogues and taste-makers rails against the plague of vibrato running rampant through the string-playing (and singing) community of the time. Aside from a few great virtuosos made conspicuous by their very opposition to what the crowd traditionally seemed to be doing, the plague raged on unabated. The historic performance movement would have us believe that the proponents of vibrato at long last "won" a huge victory in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and ruled unchallenged for a few brief decades until modern scholarship into early music practice challenged the hegemony of continuous vibrato.

This view of history ignores the very real continuities that persist to this day. For example, there have always been vocal critics of vibrato throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some rational, others less so. Here are two of the most interesting and entertaining, both taken from the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* in the early 1920s:

*...it is interesting to note the fondness of the modern writer for the somewhat cold precision and uncompromising qualities of wind instruments. This is almost a mild revulsion against the excessive abuses which have crept into the string-playing of some of our orchestras wherein the strings as a body have full license to wallow in excessive rubato, vibrato, portamento, and other evils, which do so much to detract from the real value of so many impressive passages. Composers nowadays will therefore trust a simple unadorned theme to a wind instrument with far fewer misgivings than would be the case had the passage in question been relegated to the tender mercies of an oversentimental violinist. This may sound exaggerated, but in reality there is a very strong substratum of truth in the matter which leads one very forcibly to the conclusion that in point of actual fact, the strings of the orchestra are far more constantly employed in a rhythmic, figurative or percussive capacity than was the case formerly.*

--Eugene Goossens; "Modern Developments in Music" (January, 1922)

*Women have so much to answer as sinners against music that we must avoid blaming them when innocent. Are they really responsible for the vibrato or wobble ? This epidemic began in Germany before 1850. I remember the disease was rampant in Belgium and France about 1880. Even the cors de chasse outside the cafes chantants had a terrific wobble. The plague is general here, but it is at its height in America, where a chorus sounds muddy, because all the voices are wobbling individually, and even choir-boys of ten or twelve cultivate the microbe. People who are supposed to be musical suffer from the bacillus just as much. Almost every fiddler wobbles furiously whenever he has a long enough note, and the 'cellist is worse as he has more long notes. He will wobble even in the orchestra. The fiddler and the 'cellist do not know that wobble is a disease,*

*and set out to cultivate it with great trouble. It is not only women who wobble. A man singer will make a noise as if he was being jolted on a motor bicycle. The wobble is now so obtrusive that one cannot go to a concert where there is any singing or violin or 'cello, without being irritated almost beyond endurance.*

--J. Swinburne; "Women and Music" (January, 1920)

Eugene Goossens was, of course, a highly respected conductor, while Swinburne is obviously a crank, but they both agree about one thing: orchestral vibrato had been around for quite a while and had become prevalent, indeed *excessive* enough for them to have reason to note the fact well before the scholars of historical recordings claim that it ever existed. How far back can we go? Consider the following comment in an 1877 edition of the Boston-based *Dwight's Journal of Music* (Vol. 35): "But the evil [vibrato] takes on wider range than even our correspondent points out: it has extended very considerably into the instrumental world of music. Solo players on the violin have not been permitted its exclusive use, but all the members of the stringed family freely employ it. The various kinds of wind instruments are following suit : from the gentle flute to the brazen ophicleide, all seem afflicted with the senseless wobble."

It's worth pointing out that this evidence is entirely consistent with that of the scores surveyed in Part One, where we see composers beginning to request *non vibrato* or *senza espressione* in various ways as a special effect beginning in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and increasing in frequency through the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Anecdotal evidence such as this is invaluable, and it's an open question just how much of it we might find buried in memoirs, articles, and diaries of musicians and music lovers (and not merely string players). Each example offers another piece of the vibrato puzzle, a tantalizing fragment of the larger picture. Consider this comment from Francis Walker's *Letters of a Baritone*, a limited edition book published in 1895 in 500 numbered copies, in which the singer describes his training in Florence in the 1880s:

"String players use the vibrato quite as immoderately as singers do, yet how rarely they are criticized for it. Made by the facile fingers, it easily degenerates, by mere rapidity, in a *tremolo*, which is not the case with the voice. To either executant it is so fascinating an ornament, that it is not strange to find it too constantly employed. I have often asked violinists and violoncellists why they use it so much. Some have so long done it as a matter of course that its use was habitual and unconscious, and they were rather surprised to note that their fingers were constantly in vibration upon the strings. Others said: "It makes the tone carry." (p. 163)

From this we learn two intriguing facts from an impartial observer with no special axe to grind. First, that vibrato was in constant, habitual use among (it would seem) reasonably large numbers of string players in the 1880s, and had been for decades. Second, violinists got away with it, suffering little adverse comment. This provides a very different picture of the reality "on the ground" among average musicians than the climate of strenuous general opposition invoked by today's anti-vibrato scholarship--the result of an over-reliance on the language of educational treatises and theoretical writings.

In reality, if Walker is correct (and we have no reason to doubt him), the opposition was certainly far more marginal than we are being led to believe. *Of course* it is more likely that vibrato was used frequently in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (at least in Italy) by many, perhaps even the majority, of string players. It corresponds, first of all, to what most everyone agrees that the singers were doing, and instrumentalists were always trained to follow the voices. But beyond that obvious point, Walker's actual experience sounds far more logical than the "flick of the switch" alternative theory, which has the use of vibrato going from minimal to one hundred percent in a matter of a few short years in the 1910s and 20s (and even later for orchestras).

Returning for a moment to Goosens, he also highlights another significant point that I have been at pains to stress through both parts of this essay: the relationship between performance practice and repertoire. It was the music of the Romantic era that led to a greater need for vibrato among both singers and players in the first place. However, under the influence of the rhythmically charged and emotionally restrained (relatively speaking) new music of the 20s and 30s, portamento almost disappeared entirely--but vibrato remained, a testimony to its dual role both as intrinsic timbre and as additional expression.

Goosens is not calling for the elimination of vibrato--indeed there is no evidence of any conductor before Norrington doing that in the Romantic repertoire--only for an end to "excessive abuses." However, in order for the problem to exist in the first place, and to have become a bad habit, the basic presence of vibrato must have been an accepted and uncontroversial fixture of orchestral string sonority for quite some time, as Walker in turn suggests. Portamento truly is an ornament, and therefore expendable. Vibrato, on the other hand, is not<sup>46</sup>.

And as for the "authentic performance practice" movement itself, a bit of additional historical context couldn't hurt there either:

*An unobtrusive but interesting announcement was made the other day that Mr. Arthur Whiting would this week give a recital for harpsichord and piano in Mendelssohn Hall. This may be considered as part of the remarkable revival of interest in the older, pre-classical art and its methods of expression that has been stirring all the world over in the very midst of the ultimate developments of modern art.... There is a renewed interest in the older music. Scholars are republishing and making accessible the works of the older composers of Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and England. The best of these are sought out and adapted by modern players through careful editing and explanation of the forgotten niceties and peculiarities of their style.... Orchestral undertakings...in this city,*

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<sup>46</sup> Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to this fact can be found in the score of Holst's tone poem Egdon Heath (1927), where the much-divided pianissimo strings are constantly marked *senza portamento* at each entrance, from the opening bars right up to the initial *poco allegro*. Holst was perfectly capable of asking for "dead tone," as he does in the final movement of The Planets. But here he does not. The intrinsically warm vibrato timbre of the strings stays (as long as it's not excessive), the sentimental portamento goes.



*and others abroad, are performing such music in the manner and with the balance of instrumental tone intended by the composers.*

This excellent description was published by New York Times critic Richard Aldrich--on December 8, 1907. Interest in early music really got underway even earlier, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of musicology as an academic discipline, in tandem with the publication of the first complete editions of Bach, Handel, Palestrina, Rameau, and other Baroque and early music masters. Brahms was a card-carrying member (and prominent editor) of this first early music movement. So were Saint-Saëns and d'Indy. Arnold Dolmetsch's path-breaking *The Interpretation of the Music of the 17th and 18th Centuries* was published in 1915, just five years after Eberhardt's book. It contains a fascinating discussion of vibrato wherein we find the following comment:

*Jean Rousseau, "Traité de la Viole," 1687, says:--*

*"The 'Batement' is made when two fingers being held close together, one presses upon the string, and the other beats it very lightly.*

*"The 'Batement' imitates a certain sweet agitation of the voice; this is why it is used on all notes long enough to permit it, and it must last as long as the note. [This is the Close shake.] The 'Langueur' is made by varying the finger upon a fret. It is usually made when the note has to be played with the fourth finger, and that the time permits it. This grace is used instead of the 'Batement,' which cannot be made when the little finger is pressing." This is very clear; but Jean Rousseau was not giving sound advice when saying that the vibrato should be made upon every note long enough to permit it! This practice has unfortunately been carried down to the present day. (P. 205)*

Dolmetsch doesn't approve of continuous vibrato, but from his perspective, he concedes that it has often been used that way--uninterruptedly--since 1687! He reaches this conclusion based both on his personal experience and his study of exactly the same treatises that today's scholars quote to bolster the claim that "continuous vibrato" was a brand new fad in 1915. Dolmetsch obviously cannot attach the stigma of causality to the "new school" of Kreisler. It did not exist as an historical construct that he would have recognized. Nor did he have ready to hand a pile of old recordings that could be selectively auditioned to find "proof" that vibrato was *not* being used. For Dolmetsch, on the ground at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, continuous vibrato was simply a fact of life, and evidently it always had been. There was no point, no agenda, in pretending otherwise.

Dolmetsch certainly understood what the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century string treatises said with respect to vibrato. Not only was he clearly in sympathy with their aims, at least as regards the performance of early music, but his observation in noting the persistence of the age-old habit of its continuous use suggests a far more valid perspective on their underlying motivation. After all, what better explanation of their condemnation of the practice could there be--to the extent that it may have been atypical of standard textbook warnings and admonitions-- than as opposition to a genuine, real-world problem? This idea makes infinitely more sense than does the current view that non-vibrato was in fact the norm for the period in actual performance. For if this had been the case, then the pedagogical

works would surely have been far more liberal and enthusiastic in recommending the use of vibrato to budding string players without fear of its being abused.

These same observations apply particularly to one of the most frequently quoted sources in the current vibrato controversy, Robert Bremner's essay "Some Thoughts on the Performance of Concert Music" (1777). Bremner, a student of Geminiani, comes straight out and says, "Many gentlemen players on bow instruments are so exceeding fond of the *tremolo*, that they apply it wherever they possibly can," even in orchestral music which depends "upon the united effect of all the parts being exactly in tune with each other." So if Bremner is to be believed we know that vibrato was frequently used or, depending on your perspective, abused in the orchestral music of 18<sup>th</sup> century England.

Interestingly, Bremner has no issue whatsoever with vibrato in solo playing. On the contrary:

"A solo-player being the principal entertainer during his performance (for the base part is considered only as a servant), all the different graces of the bow and finger may be applied by him, when and where he pleases. He may also crowd the melody with additional notes, or simplify it. He has it likewise in his option to reject the original, which he often does in slow movements, and to substitute his own immediate fancy in its stead, provided such fancy suits his base. In short, he is at full liberty to make use of all the powers and embellishments of which he is master, and justly; for, whether he rises or falls in the estimation of the public, he does so alone." [Cited in *Early Music*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1979].

As should now be clear, Bremner's reasoning with regard to orchestral performance is based on a false premise: that the use of vibrato, because it involves slight deviations from perfect pitch, is perceived by the listener as being out of tune. We know for a fact from the research of Seashore and others that this is not the case. Accordingly, we may now confidently surmise that purely theoretical positions such as Bremner's, however logical they may have seemed on paper, were largely ignored in concert because they did not tally with the audible reality as experienced by both audiences and performing artists of the day. Poor intonation exists independently of vibrato, which neither creates nor conceals it. And yet we see Bremner cited by scholars such as Hickman to justify the contention that vibrato actually was *not* used in orchestral performance during the classical period. How anyone can arrive at that conclusion, based on Bremner's complaint about what was for him a common practice, remains a major mystery.

So as the above examples show, the modern authenticist attack on vibrato is not new, or original, or even especially authentic, even though it is motivated by a somewhat different agenda--the need to apply certain principles of early music performance to a much later and very different repertoire--and fueled by the highly ambiguous evidence of historical recordings. It is merely a revised continuation of an aesthetic controversy as old as the violin, or even the human voice. A few loud grumblers crying in a vibrato-laden wilderness is not, the evidence shows, the historical exception; it is more likely the rule,

and often the best evidence of the pervasiveness of “the microbe” (to use Swinburne’s felicitous expression).

James Stark, in *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy*, agrees:

“Despite the weight of evidence that points to normal vibrato as a natural and desirable part of the singing voice, there are still detractors, especially among devotees of early vocal styles. As early as 1912, vocal historian Bernhard Ulrich was at a loss to understand why so many sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors considered vibrato to be a desirable quality. Ulrich asserted that every case of vibrato was due to a weakness in breath control, and he rejected every kind of tremulousness out of hand (Ulrich, 1973, 66-76). More recently, early music enthusiast Irving Godt continued to plump for ‘the crystalline perfection of tone and intonation’ associated with straight-tone singing, while deriding modern ‘athletic voices’ for their ‘fog of meaningless vibrato.’ Godt even considered that fact that vibrato avoids acoustical beats to be a defect, calling it a poor substitute for accurate pitch. He maintained that only a straight tone can be perfectly in tune, and he valued accurate intonation above every other consideration. Significantly, recordings of some of the singers he admires reveal clearly discernable vibratos on sustained notes without ornaments; this throws doubt on the acuity of Godt’s perception of vibrato (Godt 1984, 317-18).” [pp. 149-50]

Eberhardt’s position, then, is not one of encouraging the more frequent use of vibrato. There was no need; it was already there, acquired not from treatises but by experience and “word of mouth,” and above all by the demands of the actual music being played. Thus it would be incorrect to regard the cautionary language of the treatises as in any way reflective of what professional string players actually did. There is also a big difference between describing something, which some of these manuals attempt with respect to vibrato, and actually *teaching* it, which most do not. No work of modern scholarship that uses historical treatises as evidence can avoid the necessity of addressing this gap between what the printed page says and what happened in concert. The attitude of Eberhardt, Flesch, and Grimson/Forsyth towards vibrato is thus refreshingly pragmatic and honest: “As long as everyone’s doing it, we might as well teach it correctly.” Why is this same frankness not evident in so much modern scholarship on this subject?

Flesch came to regard Eberhardt as something of a quack based on his later publications (plagiarizations?), contemptuously referring to him as a “faith healer” whose first Holy Grail was vibrato. Frankly, I am not in a position to judge. Flesch voices a genuine if understandable hostility to any school of pedagogy other than his own, and history has certainly upheld the value of his method and his reputation as a teacher. He admits, however, that “out of kindness” he willingly assisted Eberhardt in his first and most significant work, and it may be that this is why its observations remain valid, whether in their original edition or as refined and reformulated thirteen years later in Flesch’s own magnum opus. Either way, both men, as well as Grimson and Forsyth, reach back across the centuries to the Enlightenment and links hands with Geminiani, and in particular with the sentiments so tellingly expressed as long ago as 1751 in *The Art of Playing on the Violin*:

*It is supposed by many that a real good Taste cannot possibly be acquired by any Rules of Art; it being a peculiar Gift of Nature, indulged only to those who have naturally a good Ear: And as most flatter themselves to have this Perfection, hence it happens that he who sings or plays, thinks of nothing so much as to make continually some favorite Passages or Graces, believing that by this Means he shall be thought to be a good Performer, not perceiving that playing in good Taste doth not consist of frequent Passages, but in expressing with Strength and Delicacy the Intention of the Composer. This Expression is what every one should endeavor to acquire, and it may be easily obtained by any Person, who is not too fond of his own Opinion, and doth not obstinately resist the Force of true Evidence.*

Wise words indeed, and singularly applicable to the present discussion, spoken as they were close to the start of a historical process that finds a culminating point in Eberhardt's book. This summation by Carl Seashore is similarly apt, and essentially identical to Schoenberg's formulation previously discussed: "Beauty in the vibrato is found in artistic deviation from the precise and uniform in all the attributes of the tone" [*Psychology of Music*]. In reality, as this discussion has shown, there really isn't a huge chasm between the more reasonable adherents of the "ornamental" and "intrinsic" vibrato schools. Both recognize the role of vibrato in musical expression, and both would agree that variety of tone color at all times, as Seashore suggests, is a paramount artistic consideration.

So the real difference is one of degree, of subtle distinctions, and not the exaggeration to the point of caricature we find either in generalizations about the modern myth of "continuous" vibrato, or in scholarship and performance that seeks validation in going to the opposite extreme. You will search in vain for statements by major modern violinist to the effect that "I use vibrato indiscriminately on all possible notes." The comments at the start of this discussion by the Guarneri Quartet do not suggest any such thing, and neither does objective analysis of Fritz Kreisler's technique in a work that invites as continuous a vibrato as he might be inclined to provide. Perhaps Mischa Elman, certainly not one to stint on vibrato, said it best:

*The extent of vibrato should be in proportion to the intensity of the note in its relation to the whole phrase. A vibrato that is continuous, becomes monotonous and meaningless. Vibrato should be used with discretion—certainly not on every single note! And even when vibrato is being used, there must always be differing degrees of intensity. Some violinists have the idea that continuous use of vibrato expresses playing with 'feeling.' On the contrary, many notes lose their musical value when over-emphasized. 'Lifeless' notes have their importance, so that others that follow will be high-lighted by contrast. [Applebaum, p. 7].*

Cellist Leonard Rose, also cited in Applebaum, agrees: "I do not adhere to the school of thought that every note must have vibrato. I think the sound becomes monotonous. Many notes I play without any vibrato at all." These are not the strictures of Leopold Mozart, or Spohr, or other 19<sup>th</sup> century string pedagogues, but rather the reflections of 20<sup>th</sup> century performing artists describing what they really did in concert (and on recordings). And yet

their remarks would hardly sound out of place had they been attributed to those early sources. We can thus clearly see that exhortations to play tastefully, to avoid excess and maximize timbral variety, are in no way incompatible with modern vibrato.

It further stands to reason that since we know exactly how virtuosos such as Elman and Rose actually performed--what their words meant in audible terms--there plainly is no justification for any artist to claim a license to use little to no vibrato as a function of correct period style (as distinct from its avoidance being an aspect of individual artistic temperament) based on the cautionary language of historical treatises. Vibrato need not, indeed cannot be sacrificed on the altar of authenticity if, as Geminiani urges, we legitimately seek to do justice to the composer's intentions. Frederick Neumann, who as noted previously reveals a thorough grounding in the scientific work of Seashore and his colleagues, made the following singularly cogent observation:

*String vibrato was certainly not as all-pervasive as it is today, and particularly the overly-rich, voluptuous, "schmaltzy" variety practiced by some of today's players is inappropriate for 18<sup>th</sup>-century music. But string vibrato as such was presumably not nearly as rare as some early music scholars believe, and no genuine evidence exists that, as [Neil] Zaslaw contends, it was generally eschewed by orchestral players. Certainly some differences were present between soloistic and orchestral performance, but they had mostly to do with the license to add small ornaments with the former, and the prohibition of doing so in the latter. These differences were greater in the galant and baroque era than they were for Mozart. But string vibrato is a matter of technical skill, and we have no reason to assume that a fine player with the command of a good vibrato would have felt obligated to refrain from applying it in an orchestral performance. Even [Greta] Moens-Haenen, no partisan of frequent pitch vibrato, writes that in the "best orchestras" which had some quite virtuosic performers among their members, "the vibrato surely had its place." ["The Vibrato Controversy," Performance Practice Review, Vol. 4 No. 1, 1991].*

To this eminently sensible statement I would add only one point. Human nature being what it is, I am sure that it was not only fine players with the command of a good vibrato who would have retained it in orchestral performance. Mediocre players consciously imitating fine players, good sight-readers with lousy vibrato looking to make an easy buck, and (always numerous) violinists who were simply delusional as regards their own abilities--all would have used vibrato as well. What is more, thanks to Professor Brown's maladroitness analysis of the <> vibrato accent and other notational conventions, not to mention the evidence of the scores in Part One of this essay, we now know beyond question that (a) composers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century both expected and demanded to hear vibrato in their orchestral music, and (b) the use of specific vibrato indications is by no means inconsistent with its presence as an intrinsic or "blank canvas" timbre.

Neumann's is a voice of reason, and if his observations make sense in considering early music, then how much more applicable are they to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries? Even if we assume that substantially less vibrato in orchestral performance was the norm in past eras-- an assumption which has no demonstrable basis in fact--neither early

recordings nor the written evidence support such a view, especially from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. By all means, let musicians try to emulate something of the individuality that we believe characterized the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and before), and let the world of academia assist them in finding ways to make this goal audible. It's a noble aim and a healthy one too. Keep in mind, however, that pedantic exaggeration for the sake of the point, and the pursuit of difference merely because it provides an obvious contrast with modern standards, creates only bad scholarship--and truly ugly, unmusical performances.

David Hurwitz

...and for one final thought:

### Glinka: Waltz Fantasy (1839/45)

28

Fl. 11

Cl.

Tr. ne solo

*mf vibrato e cantabile*

Cor.

Tr. ne

*mf vibrato*

II solo