General Conclusion:

When I decided to tackle the Classical period in this series of essays on orchestral vibrato, I feared the subject would be much more difficult than the two previous parts. The lack of a consistent terminology combined with less copiously annotated scores threatened to leave more issues in doubt than I usually prefer. In the event, the actual research and writing turned out to be by far the easiest (and most fun) among these three essays. The quantity and quality of evidence was literally staggering in its abundance and clarity, from Zelenaka, to Gluck, to Boccherini, to Haydn, not to mention colleagues such as Piccinni, Hasse, Vinci, Handel, Vivaldi, C.P.E. Bach, Mozart, Rossini, Beethoven, the composers at Mannheim, and many, many others. It's all in the scores.

So I need not have worried. After all, what was the great discovery of the Classical period other than the means of exploiting timbre and tonality as the twin pillars of a new expressive language for purely instrumental music? And what better way could there be to explain this new style to practical musicians and music lovers other than to notate it clearly, using well-understood and historically proven methods? In short, Baillot was right. Very little that matters is left to chance--certainly not vibrato, which has been a central component of musical expression since the dawn of orchestral composition. The closer you look, the more important and necessary a stylistic element vibrato appears, and the weirder its banishment from the Classical orchestra accordingly seems.

The period instrument movement has achieved some wonderful things in the study and interpretation of 18th century and earlier music. Although it may seem that I regard "the current orthodoxy" as a monolithic (and moronic) block, I hope I have made it clear that the proponents of the total non-vibrato approach are in fact a minority--a loud, trendy, and very public one, to be sure, but a minority nonetheless, both among scholars and musicians. Far more typical, and rational, are the views of scholars such as Neumann, or the late (d. 1990) Robert Donington, who has this to say about vibrato in his *Baroque music, style and performance: a handbook*:

"Vibrato requires great discretion in Baroque music, but there are good acoustic as well as historical reasons for including it in proper moderation.

Recent acoustical researches put the time-span after which it is possible for our own faculties to perceive a new aural event (and indeed other kinds of event) as such, and not merely as an undifferentiated continuation, at about one-twentieth to one-eighteenth of a second. Any absolutely unvarying persistence of the same aural signal beyond this time-span very rapidly fatigues that band of fibers in the basilar membrane of the ear which is involved in detecting it: there is then a subjective decline both in the volume and the colorfulness of the sound perceived. It seems to go a little dead on us; and this is the acoustic consideration which makes vibrato a natural rather than an artificial recourse on melodic instruments. The vibrato just mitigates that deadening experience.

Vibrato is a more or less slight frequency (pitch) modulation combined with a still slighter element of amplitude (loudness) modulation, which, however, very often assumes an apparent prominence, so that we experience something more like a soft tremolo. Experiment shows that the rate of modulation preferred is around six cycles per second, and the degree of differentiation variable but by no means excessive. Very fast or narrow vibrato becomes unpleasantly agitated; very slow or wide vibrato becomes heavily obtrusive: the happy mean varies with the context but is certain in any baroque music to be moderate. For vibrato on close chords or counterpoint, the range of pitch must be small enough to produce no uncertainty about the harmony. Romantic contexts tolerate more and classical contexts tolerate less vibrato; but the use of enough vibrato to enliven without confusing the flow of the sound has ample historical support. There is also good evidence for a rather more prominent vibrato, serving on selected notes as a specific ornament….

Vibrato as an ornament in Baroque music should be massive enough to draw attention to itself, but only occurs on certain notes selected for reasons of expression. Vibrato as tone coloring should be light enough not to draw attention to itself, but may occur freely. It is not authentic to exclude vibrato from Baroque music. It is not appropriate to introduce it continuously. Excepting as an ornament, Baroque vibrato differs from romantic vibrato in being less intense, less sustained, less insistent in every way, but certainly not in being altogether absent. How much is used depends to a very large extent on taste, as it always has; still more on the actual character of the passage, the final arbiter in all such matters of educated judgment and experience. But the neutral effect of lacking any vibrato where vibrato should naturally be is somewhat unfeeling, and runs contrary to some excellent historical and artistic precedents." (pp. 35-7)

The later generation of early music scholars will tell you that Donington's view is no longer current, that it does not reflect the latest research. This is pure bunk. There is no latest research to reflect. All of the "heavy lifting" in the period instrument movement was done in the early to mid-20th century. Since then, scholars have occasionally produced interesting work on specific composers, and they have often made superb contributions as editors and publishers of early music. But when it comes to issues such as vibrato, there truly is "nothing new under the sun." All that has happened recently is a change of opinion brought on, as I have already noted, by the complimentary needs of early music conductors to find work with modern orchestras, and of academics to justify their tenure by exaggerating the significance of what they do.

Views such as Robert Donington's may be reasonable, balanced, true to the sources, and carefully formulated, but they are not exciting. They don't show the differences between earlier periods and our own to be appreciably large. Vibrato (in his view) tends to be self-regulating, its application naturally limited by the style of the music being played. Furthermore, his prescription won't take your average philharmonic orchestra, playing on modern instruments, and gain plaudits for producing a radically different sound if you happen to be a conductor who is a self-

styled expert in authenticity. Only an extreme, even ridiculous approach will do that. All of the other nonsense follows accordingly.

Rabid authenticists actually have written to me claiming that the only valid evidence for the presence of vibrato in the Classical orchestra is the use of the actual word "vibrato." Aside from the fact that the word does indeed occur occasionally, once again this completely misses the point of what both the notation and the verbal terminology tell us. Composers don't usually need to write "vibrato" because for them the issue is not whether vibrato is or is not present in an absolute sense, but because they are entirely concerned with *what kind* of vibrato suits the emotional character of the music. That is what both the notation and the words "dolce," "cantabile," and "espressivo" mean, and this is also what the treatises tell us. These words all presuppose the existence of a basic expressive timbre, and they are both more emotionally precise and less subject to terminological confusion than the purely technical term "vibrato."

Think of it this way. If someone offers you a piece of fruit, asking you to choose between an orange, a lemon, or a grapefruit, do you ask for the certain type that you want or do you say "I'll have citrus" and hope that they hand you the orange? Composers do not tell the players "I want dynamics" in one passage, and then say "no dynamics" in another. They specify *which* dynamics they require--piano, forte, or something in between. Why should it be different with vibrato, or any other musical quality that varies over a wide range of intensities? The modern view of vibrato fits nicely into the digital age: it resembles a form of binary code with only two characters, 0 and 1, "on" or "off," with nothing in between. It makes for a nice lecture, dissertation, or academic publication, but it has nothing to do with music written prior to the mid 20th century.

Demanding to see the purely technical term "vibrato" (or its equivalents) every time a composer wants it is, in any case, an unconscionably ingenuous position to take. Some treatises try to notate vibrato in various ways with actual notes, writing it sharp, flat, or both equally. All of them get it wrong. Geminiani throws up his hands and honestly concedes, "This cannot possibly be described by notes, as in the former examples." He says this not just because vibrato consists of micro-intervals, but because both the degree of pitch oscillation and speed are constantly variable, *and every historical source that describes pitch vibrato agrees on this score, without exception*.

So even if our traditional system of musical notation did permit graphic representation of unmeasured micro-intervallic pitch oscillations, vibrato would still be all but impossible to notate with the kind of expressive accuracy that sensitive players routinely achieve simply by letting the musical context be their guide. What is so amazing, however, is not that vibrato cannot be written down literally, but the extent to which composers found ways to get around the limitations of traditional notation and suggest what type best suites any given situation. In reality, they did succeed in coming up with effective *descriptive or symbolic* methods to signal its

frequent presence, its quality and quantity. So if the flakey few refuse to acknowledge this achievement, that's their problem.

By the 18th century, then, the use of vibrato could be taken for granted. It had spawned a sophisticated and precise range of notational options from which composers and performers could select to enrich their music. What today's anti-vibrato lunatic fringe is really complaining about when they say that composers of the period don't use the word "vibrato" is that they don't ask for "citrus," when in fact they are really asking for an abundance of oranges, lemons, and grapefruits. Modern scholars may then smugly conclude that vibrato was not present in the orchestra, even though their conclusion arises from a transparently false premise. To deny the presence of vibrato in the face of all of this evidence is akin to a district attorney refusing to prosecute a serial killer who signed a confession after being captured in his home with a freezer full of his victims' body parts, simply because the police were not physically present when the murders occurred.

The Classical style had its origins, as Baillot contends, in orchestral music for the Church, and particularly in the need for composers to find ways to make instruments accompany and illustrate the most profoundly moving image (for Christians at least) in Western music: that of Christ crucified, his death at once horrible in itself, but also a joyous redemption for all mankind. In this almost schizophrenic contrast of emotions, the "Crucificus" of the Mass followed immediately by "Et resurrexit," we find not only the justification and source of the new Classical language, but continuity as well; its expression according to a standard notational system, albeit one used in specifically characteristic way. This process can be seen very plainly by comparing pieces such as Zelenka's Masses with Haydn's *Seven Last Words*, a magnificent culmination in purely orchestral terms of a centuries-old liturgical tradition.

By the time Classical composers arrived at their mature style in the latter half of the 18th century, vibrato notation already had a significance for compositional practice beyond its mere existence as a diverse notational system of wavy lines, dots, slurs, accents, and verbal terms. The ability of composers to regulate the specific intensity of vibrato within the same piece, or even the same melody, took it outside the category of ornamentation. Vibrato became an intrinsic component of instrumental music, operating in tandem with harmony, dynamics, and timbre as a subtle but important energizing force. It was not a rare occurrence but an integral element, and of course one essential to basic string technique (and that of wind instruments as well). Geminiani and Robert Bremner both make this clear, whether or not you happen to agree with either of them.

Thus, the evidence of both the scores and the treatises reveals as completely untrue the assertion that vibrato was viewed exclusively as an ornament in the 18th century. It also reveals the limitation of our current, excessively rigid views of periodicity and style, for it was in the Baroque period, from the late 1600s onward, that composers first discovered how to use vibrato as expressive timbre in orchestral accompaniments. So when Classical musicians found ways to

exploit timbre as a means of articulating large-scale musical forms, sonata form in particular, vibrato naturally played its part. This is not theory; it is fact. The notation plainly shows it, and it suggests that we must revise some of our ideas concerning ornamentation in the Baroque era in order to accommodate both the notational and audible realities that we find in the music itself.

Gluck was perhaps the most enthusiastic user of the full panoply of available vibrato signs and signals, but he wrote almost no purely orchestral works aside from overtures and ballet music. During his lifetime, the sonata style made possible much larger instrumental pieces, with individual movements containing a wide range of material, all of which needed to be characterized. The result demanded a simplification of vibrato notation, a greater need for expressive contrast within a movement, and a concurrent emphasis on verbal terminology to describe lengthier passages--a process perhaps aided and encouraged by (1) the decline of the virtuoso violinist/composer (and the Italian school generally), (2) the rise of the virtuoso pianist/composers of the First Viennese School, (3) the emancipation of the orchestra from the Baroque continuo, and (4) the convenient notational identity between keyboard vibrato and string portato.

By the 1750s, authorities such as Leopold Mozart, Tartini, and Geminiani recognized only one type of vibrato: the oscillation in pitch produced by the left hand. Pitch vibrato came, as Donington suggests, in two basic classes: an unobtrusive enhancement of sonority applied by the players at will, and a more definite, exaggerated ornament which, in orchestral music, had to be specially notated to be heard at all. The presence of the former is a bit harder to prove from scores because by definition it does not need to be requested specifically, though it is amply documented anecdotally by sources such as Bremner, Cramer, and Spohr.

However it also can be reasonably inferred by those examples, such as we saw in Boccherini or in the slow movement of Haydn's "Schoolmaster" Symphony, where the composer presupposes a timbral contrast between vibrato and non-vibrato textures, and also by the fact that composers such as Haydn clearly expected solo and orchestral musicians to execute all of the same expressive effects. As for the latter exaggerated technique that Donington describes, the evidence for vibrato occurring in tandem with wavy lines or portato, as well as a whole host of verbal instructions and accent signs is, I should hope at this point, truly overwhelming.

Additional compelling proof of the reasonableness of this story can be found in Baillot's treatise of 1835. He retains bow vibrato as a special effect in connection with portato articulation, to be used specifically on open strings or in passages of a "calm and pure expression." All of his other examples require pitch vibrato either alone, or in combination with portato articulation. He accepts without question the presence of vibrato as an intrinsic component of Classical orchestral music, and provides specific examples of how and where it might be used.

At the same time, and most significantly for our understanding of what really happened in the Classical period, Baillot frees vibrato from the category of "ornaments" and places it within the broader range of "accents," a practice also largely followed by Bach and Türk in their keyboard manuals. This curious mixture of modern and old-fashioned in Baillot can be easily (and interestingly) explained as the result of his playing in the Paris Opera Orchestra under his own student, Habeneck. We know that this orchestra used both pitch and bow vibrato in their performances of Gluck as part of a long tradition dating back to the composer himself. And thanks to the Pelletan-Damcke edition of *Alcest* from 1874, we can also ratify independently (nice but not really necessary) Berlioz' reading of Gluck's notation.

We also now know, thanks to Ebenezer Prout, that musical scholars in the 19th century, and one of the most trusted authorities in the English language on the subject of orchestration, had no issue whatsoever with the idea that Haydn required his orchestra to play with vibrato. None. This also quashes once and for all the theory that orchestras remained largely free of vibrato until well into the 20th century.

I began this essay with a comment sent to me by an angry conductor that there was not "a shred" of evidence that vibrato ever was used in the classical orchestra. It's very depressing that this view passes for expertise today, and it's even more outrageous that artists can barter their ignorance into an active career ruining the classics before a paying public. But then, a vocal minority has been sounding the vibrato alarm for several centuries. It's surely not the least of several ironies that perhaps the only historically authentic thing about today's current orthodoxy is the fact that when it comes to the vibrato question, it unwittingly follows a long-standing and illustrious tradition of wrong-thinking quackery on the subject.

The story of vibrato in the orchestra is, as I hope you have seen, a much bigger and more varied one than the apostles of Applied Musicology willingly concede. It encompasses issues far beyond the question of who has the right to add a specific ornament to the individual notes of a melody. It never has been correctly described in the simplistic generalizations of so much of today's scholarship. Since the dawn of notated music for large ensembles, composers have understood that certain timbral effects can only be achieved using pitch vibrato, and they have marked their scores accordingly. The use of vibrato in accompaniments, in recitative, in subsidiary voices, in sectional "solos," and by orchestral strings, woodwinds, and brass, particularly after the keyboard continuo was abandoned in the Classical period, played a vital role in creating the sound of the modern orchestra.

At the heart of the vibrato question stands a very basic issue: How do we know what music expresses, and how do our performance traditions embody and transmit this knowledge? Historical sources can help us to clarify points of confusion, or bring to our notice matters that may have fallen by the wayside over the course of time. But ultimately they cannot replace what composers tell us in scores whose notation has been consistently used and understood in the overwhelming majority of its details since at least the early 17th century. Nor can they take

precedence over our own confidence that human emotion today is fundamentally the same as human emotion several centuries ago, which means that the various techniques of musical expression also have been employed relatively consistently, with only minor variations.

This is clearly what the evidence shows and, at least with respect to vibrato, it is what traditional performance practice reflects: the accumulated experience of generations of musicians based on the requirements of the actual music that they played, rather than what a few treatises and anecdotal reports of varying relevance say perhaps ought to have been done. In choosing to base its case almost entirely on the latter sources, frequently misread and divorced from their original context, the discipline of Applied Musicology belies its very name. It has concocted a wholly impractical set of rules purportedly applicable to vibrato that, when viewed in normal performance situations, produces expressive nonsense and results in the need to ignore much of what the notation plainly means.

The early music movement began as a revolt against tradition, a healthy "back to basics" reexamination of performance practice that not coincidentally thumbed its nose at the fusty, conservative, and pretentious post-War performing arts infrastructure that's still very much with us. But like so many revolutions, in its very success it has become what it initially despised: a hidebound, pedantic, academic orthodoxy further corrupted through its intellectual closeness to an equally sclerotic musical avant-garde that questions our basic assumptions about what music is, and what it can and should express (if anything). Don't get me wrong: I am not denying the right of the avant-garde to ask its questions, or the legitimacy of the artistic results. Good music is good music whatever its philosophical basis, and needs to be judged on its own merits.

However, while the Romantic notion of "art for art's sake," and its 20th century corollary that "art can be anything" may be interesting and valid for (some of) us at the present time, it is completely illegitimate as applied to the reading and interpretation of historical sources. You may find this argument purely theoretical and farfetched, but it has very real implications for what the current orthodoxy says about vibrato. It underpins and validates its official mantra: that vibrato in the Baroque and Classical periods is an "ornament." As already demonstrated, the anti-vibrato school understands "vibrato as ornament" neither as composers and performers in the 17th and 18th century explained and used the concept, nor as the historical treatises themselves define it. Rather, it appears in contrast to that convenient straw man "modern continuous vibrato," which as we have seen does not exist--and never has. It is the creation of a purely contemporary mentality that posits vibrato's "right" to exist and operate independently, beyond what the music itself requires in specific circumstances.

This construct is necessary in order to substantiate the opposite extreme: that if continuous vibrato is today's norm, then very little or, in the case of orchestral music, no vibrato at all must be historically correct because some early sources, as a theoretical proposition apart from real-life performance situations, decry its too frequent use. And so we see how our modern intellectual bias infects an increasing number of scholars and performers, severely distorting

their views about what the early violin treatises and other historical documents actually say--even to the absurd point where their conclusions directly contradict the plain meaning of the sources that they enlist in support of their position. Indeed, even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that vibrato was never notated, and concede that 18th century artists did view it exclusively as an ornament just like all other improvised melodic ornaments, then the current orthodoxy would *still* characterize the attitude of Classical composers and performers incorrectly.

Witness C.P.E. Bach's comments on ornamentation in the preface to his "Sonatas with varied reprises," some extracts of which we cited previously (again, from the G. Schirmer Edition):

"Nowadays (1759) one cannot do without ornamentation of repeats. It is expected of every performer. One of my friends exerts all possible effort to perform a composition as it was written, cleanly and according to the all the rules of good execution: why should he not be applauded? Another has to rely on his prowess at ornamentation to hide his inability to express adequately the prescribed notes; and yet, the public prefers him to the first. Audiences want almost every idea ornamented on repetition, without always examining whether such procedure will suit the nature of the piece or the ability of the performer. Often, only this kind of ornamentation, especially when accompanied by a long and elaborately ornamented cadenza, will squeeze applause from most listeners. What misuse, therefore, of these two real virtues of performance. No one has the patience anymore to play the prescribed notes the first time through; the long absence of applause becomes unbearable. Often this premature ornamentation is against the sense of the composition, against the intended emotion, and against the way ideas should interrelate, a disagreeable thing to do to a composer. Assuming, however, that the performer possesses all requisites to perform ornamentations property, is he always in the mood for it? Might he not face new difficulties when tackling unknown repertoire? Isn't the principal aim of ornamentation to do honor to the performer as well as the composition? Shouldn't the repeat produce ideas as good as the original? Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties and misuses, good ornamentation is always worthwhile."

Aside from the delightful, common sense wisdom of this statement, that last sentence sums up all that separates the modern historical performance school from the real thing. No one understood the potential for producing musical trash better than C.P.E. Bach, as you can plainly see. That's the reason he wrote and published his set of "reprise" sonatas in the first place. Nevertheless, in the end he still concludes that, "good ornamentation is always worthwhile." And the principal determinant of what makes the ornamentation good is whether or not the music requires it to realize its expressive intent. Vibrato, indeed the art of embellishment generally, cannot be discussed independently of the human emotions that ornaments exist to enhance. That is why they are so important, so necessary, and it's why Bach reaches the above conclusion.

Performers and composers in Bach's day understood this. It explains why in the Classical period composers gradually took on the responsibility of writing out as much expressive detail as they dared, and why performers continued to embellish away well into the 19th century. These artists were fearless when it came to ornamentation. Modern performers, on the other hand, particularly those who subscribe to the current orthodoxy regarding historical performance practice, are fearful. Their timidity reaches terrifying levels in considering the use of vibrato both in solo and orchestral playing. Limiting it to the extent possible, and ruling it out entirely in the latter case eliminates the opportunity for performers to use their good (or bad) judgment in bringing to their interpretations one of the most critical components of musical expression. It is an abdication of their artistic responsibility. In the final analysis, the foes of vibrato are cowards, fobbing off their expressive inhibitions as scholarship. We can only imagine what Bach would have had to say to them.

The fact is, there isn't one single iota of evidence from any historical source that would dispute the assertion that:

Continuous expression begets continuous vibrato.

The word "continuous" here has never meant "all the time no matter what." That charge is nothing more than a piece of propaganda that serves to buttress a series of fallacious arguments.

What this motto really means is that the principal determinant of how much vibrato a piece requires is the music itself; how it is written, and what feelings is seeks to evoke. The desire of musicians to imitate the singing voice means that they have always understood, and the written treatises confirm, that vibrato needs to be kept continuously available and continuously variable, appropriate to the expressive context, and subject to all of the artistry composers and performers bring to tonal music embodying human emotion. That anyone can seriously suggest otherwise despite basic common sense, a mountain of written evidence, and centuries of well-documented performance tradition, speaks less of an understanding of period practice than it does, first, of our own alienation from the aesthetic goals of former times, and second, of plain opportunism and the desire create and sustain successful careers in today's academic and performing arts professions.

David Hurwitz

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And for one final thought (see next page)….

Finale

Allegro

vibrato

1 Flauto [f]

2 Oboi a2 vibrato [f] pp

2 Clarinetti *in Do* a2 vibrato [f] pp

1 Fagotto vibrato [f] pp

2 Corni *in Re* vibrato a2 [f]

Allegro

Violini I vibrato [f] p

Violini II vibrato [f] pp

Viole vibrato [f] pp

Violoncelli e Contrabbassi vibrato [f] pp

Rossini: *L'occasione fa il ladro* (1812, Critical Edition)