

## Vibrato: Wide or Narrow?

### Choosing Appropriate Vibrato

#### Learn

- Vibrato width and vibrato speed are two separate, independent characteristics. Don't confuse them--master them separately.
- Bigger sounds need more vibrato width.
- Softer sounds need a narrower vibrato width.

#### Feel

- All vibrato (except 1/2 position not discussed in this lesson) is generated by the forearm. To increase or decrease the width or amplitude of your vibrato, enlarge or contract the range of motion of the forearm.
- When playing pianissimo passages, very narrow vibrato may require limiting forearm motion. Soften your finger pad; feel lateral flexibility in the pad and first finger joint and imagine your finger moving your forearm. The bow is light on the string and your left hand finger is light as well; do not sink deep into the fingerboard.
- When playing fortissimo passages, a wide and free vibrato requires maximizing the width of your forearm motion. Sink more deeply into the fingerboard with your finger pads; a large amplitude must be well anchored to keep from slipping. Avoid over-tightening your bicep muscle; forcing your vibrato can lead to injury.

#### Think

- Vibrato width and vibrato speed are independent variables. Thus, you have four basic starting points for shaping a phrase with your vibrato: 1) slow and narrow, 2) slow and wide, 3) fast and narrow, and 4) fast and wide. Your musical conceptions of mood, color and dynamic are all inextricably tied to your vibrato.
- Duplicate the video example and practice maintaining one vibrato speed while varying the amplitude: Choose a vibrato speed, slow or fast. Begin piano, crescendo, and then diminuendo to the original dynamic, listening that the speed of the vibrato pulsation (slow or fast) doesn't change. Unify the hands as they sink into the string and then lighten. Goal: don't change the speed of your vibrato, only the width. When done well, the note gets louder and softer, but the sound of the vibrato doesn't change.

#### Listen

- "Attach your ear" directly to the sound of your vibrato. Only listening can tell you how wide or how narrow to vibrate; make your ear attentive to varying vibrato amplitudes in response to changing dynamics. It is all too easy (and common) to slip into using one vibrato regardless of the musical context. Ultimately, music requires everything our imaginations can invent, so after the rules are learned they must also be broken.
- Vibrato, when varied, has its own expressive power. It can add layers of complexity and nuance to your interpretation. "Varied" includes moments of pure sound unadorned by vibrato.