



# Vibrato Usage

---

VARYING THE APPROACH WHEN PLAYING IN  
DIFFERENT ENSEMBLES, GENRES, AND ERAS OF MUSIC

DR. ROBERT SEARS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF TRUMPET

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

# Approaches

---

- Jaw *“Yah” or “Wah” syllable*
- Hand *Rocking Motion*
- Breath/Vocal Approach *Flutists Approach*

# Hand Vibrato

---



# Practicing “The Motor”

1. Wind must stay out and in front of the lips. Vibrato is only added to a full and rich sound. Free exhale required.
2. Start straight tone and end straight tone.
3. “X” note heads mean to add vibrato. The syllable “yah” or “wah” can be effective (*jaw vibrato*).

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff shows a whole note followed by three eighth notes, then a whole note with an 'X' over it, followed by three eighth notes, and finally a whole note with an 'X' over it. The second staff starts at measure 4 and shows a whole note followed by two groups of four eighth notes, then a whole note with an 'X' over it, followed by two groups of four eighth notes, and finally a whole note with an 'X' over it. The third staff starts at measure 7 and shows a whole note followed by three groups of three eighth notes, then a whole note with an 'X' over it, followed by three groups of three eighth notes, and finally a whole note with an 'X' over it. The fourth staff starts at measure 10 and shows a whole note followed by four groups of four eighth notes, then a whole note with an 'X' over it, followed by four groups of four eighth notes, and finally a whole note with an 'X' over it. All notes are on a single line (middle C) and are connected by a long slur across the first two measures of each staff.

# Decision Time!

---

- *When to use?*
- *How fast/wide/deep?*
- *What does the tradition imply?*
- *What does the context imply?*
- *What's my voice?*



Courtesy of [Onyx Truth](#)

# Vibrato Comparison

---

- Many options exist. Speed and depth of waves vary according to the phrase and taste of the player.

Matthias Höfs (German)



Phil Smith (American)



Alison Balsom (English)



Tine Thing Helseth (Norwegian)



# Vibrato Tendencies

---

- Begin Straight Tone
- “Vibraphone Effect”
- Slower/Softer
- Climatic Moments
- Terminal

*Establish the note, then add*

*Vibrato is on and runs constantly*

*Less deep waves | Could be slower*

*Deeper waves | Could be faster*

*Add vibrato just at the end*

# Orchestra & Wind Ensemble

---

- Principal

*Shimmer Common\**

*General straight tone playing for Principal trumpeters is common and viable in big brass tutti sections.*

*Shimmer brings attention to the part!*

- 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Trumpet and Below

*Straight Tone*

*Exception could exist if there is a soloistic passage. General rule of thumb – straight tone.*



# Commercial Vibrato | Orchestral Setting

---

*Looney Tunes Themes*



# Commercial Vibrato | Orchestral Setting

---

## PIECE

Sound of Music, *Prelude*

Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory, *Main Title*

Mary Poppins (Original), *Overture*

Sound of Music, *Overture and Preludium*

Coco, *Department of Family Relations*

West Side Story (2021), *Balcony Scene (Tonight)*

## OBSERVATION

*Wide*

*Wide*

*Commercial vs. Symphonic*

*Commercial vs. Symphonic*

*Symphonic vs. Commercial*

*Commercial vs. Symphonic*

# Brass Quintet

---

## “Baroque Brilliance” (aka *Duo Shimmer*)

- Canadian Brass
  - *Pachelbel, Cannon & Gigue in D*
  - *Clarke, Trumpet Voluntary (Prince of Denmark’s March)*
- St. Louis Brass
  - *Albinoni, Sonata ‘St. Mark,’ Mvt. I. Grave*
  - *Albinoni, Sonata ‘St. Mark,’ Mvt. III. Andante*

# Brass Quintet Continued...

---

Not Baroque (*Duo Shimmer lives on*)

- Canadian Brass
  - *A Sousa Collection*
- Seraph Brass
  - *Asteria II. Virgo, Lover of Justice*

# Baroque Era: Ornamental

---

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (2001, Vibrato)

*“[Vibrato] seems always to have been accepted as an ornament until the first quarter of the 20th century, when its continuous use gradually became the norm...*

*During the Baroque era, vibrato was used sparingly, for emphasis on long, accentuated notes in pieces with an affect or character to which it was suited. Being regarded as an ornament, in principle it was used on single notes like any other...*

*Less common ornaments such as vibrato or glissando were in theory used only by soloists... Continuous vibrato is a 20th-century phenomenon.”*

# Baroque Era: Ornamental

---

- Handel, Water Music Suite: Hornpipe
  - *Berlin Philharmonic, Rafael Kubelik (1963)*
  - *English Baroque Soloists, John Eliot Gardiner (1991)*
- Fasch, Trumpet Concerto in D Major, Mvt. II. Largo
  - *Maurice André*
  - *Mark Bennett*
- Handel, Let the Bright Seraphim
  - *Wynton Marsalis*
  - *Niklas Elkund*

# Jazz Vibrato | Trumpet Soloists

---

- West End Blues
  - Louis Armstrong (1928) *Beginning & Improvisation*
  - Nicholas Payton (2000) *Beginning & Improvisation*
- Body and Soul
  - Roy Elderidge (1938-1940) *Beginning*
  - Freddie Hubbard (1988) *Beginning*
- Slow Blues
  - Snooky Young, Mean Dog Blues (1978) *Improvisation*
  - Roy Hargrove, Blues for Booty Green's (2000) *Improvisation*

# Jazz Vibrato | Count Basie Orchestra (1935-Present)

---

Count Basie  
(1904-1984)

Leads players often utilize vibrato. Inner parts can vibrate at times.  
Unison – lead trumpet vibrato is optional.  
Unison - lower parts straight tone.

It's Oh, So Nice (1968)

Who Me? (1959)



# Jazz Vibrato | Duke Ellington Orchestra (1923-1974)

---

*“Vibrato is used quite a bit to warm up the sound. Saxes (who most frequently represent the sensual side of things) usually employ a heavy vibrato on harmonized passages and a slight vibrato on unisons. Trumpets (who very often are used for heat and power) use a little vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. Trombones (who are usually noble) do not use slide vibrato. A little lip vibrato is good at times. Try to match the speed of vibrato. Unisons are played with no vibrato.” –David Berger*

Duke Ellington      Harlem Airshaft  
(1899-1974)

Take the A Train (2005 Remastered)

# Vibrato in the Big Band | David Berger's Advice

---

- It is out of vogue to use vibrato these days.
- When Ellington wanted to hear vibrato, he would say, "Give me some personality." When he wanted no vibrato, he would say, "Dead tone."
- In general, unison passages are without vibrato.
- Harmonized passages that should sound cold and impersonal - no vibrato.
- For warmth on harmonized passages - add vibrato.
- Exceptions do exist.

# Jazz Vibrato | Big Bands Continued

---

- Overall, more straight tone. Leads will still use vibrato to give energy and/or color, but inner parts are almost always straight tone unless the part specifically asks for it.

Maria Schneider    Leads her group the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra.  
(b. 1960)            My Ideal  
                              The Pretty Road

Ken Schaphorst    Leads his group the Ken Schaphorst Big Band.  
◦ (b. 1960)            Green City  
                              How to Say Goodbye  
                              Blues Almighty

# Review & Reflect

---

- Different Approaches
  - Jaw, Breath, Hand
  - Höfs, Smith, Balsom, Helseth, Romm
- Orchestra
  - Principal
    - Shimmer/Str. Tone | Lower Parts – Str. Tone
  - Commercial Sizzle
    - Lyrical, expressive, Broadway/Hollywood, soaring melodies
- Quintet
  - Baroque Brilliance/Duo Shimmer
- Baroque Era
  - Vibrato is ornamental
  - Do you care?
- Early Jazz
  - Heavier Vibrato
- More Modern Jazz (soloist)
  - More terminal (soulful coloring)
- Count Basie
  - Leads add vibrato.
  - Harmonized sections - inner voices add vibrato at times.
- Duke Ellington
  - Tutti - little vibrato in harmonized sections.
  - No vibrato in unison passages.
- Modern Big Bands
  - Leads can sizzle/use vibrato if music asks for it.
  - Inner voices are generally straight tone unless expressly asked for.

# Consider this...

---

- Era appropriate?
- Does it make me sound dated?
- Does it fit in the tradition? Section player vs. soloist?
- What do I like?
- What's my voice?
- How do I hear the music?

# Questions?

---

Dr. Robert Sears  
Assistant Professor of Trumpet  
West Virginia University

-----  
[robert.sears@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:robert.sears@mail.wvu.edu)  
(304) 293-5477

-----  
[www.robertsearsmusic.com](http://www.robertsearsmusic.com)  
[www.music.wvu.edu/trumpet](http://www.music.wvu.edu/trumpet)

