



# Teaching Shifting and Vibrato in Group Settings

Dr. Kristen Pellegrino  
Professor of Music Education  
University of Texas at San Antonio, USA  
President of ASTA  
CMEA, Saturday, January 8, 2022

## Shifting and Vibrato Readiness

Consistently  
good  
position &  
relaxed  
posture

+

Match pitch  
when singing  
& playing  
instruments

=

Ready for  
Precursor  
Exercises!

## Shifting: Key Position Concepts

- ▶ Good position & posture
- ▶ Play without tension (especially in the left hand)
  - ▶ Violin & Viola:
    - ▶ Balanced on shoulder, using weight from head
    - ▶ **Strings** parallel to floor (Use Gravity!)
    - ▶ Left hand is free
  - ▶ Cello & Bass:
    - ▶ Stools (bass)
    - ▶ Left arm weight
    - ▶ Gravity
- ▶ Strong Left Hand Frame
- ▶ All: Shifting is not a big deal!

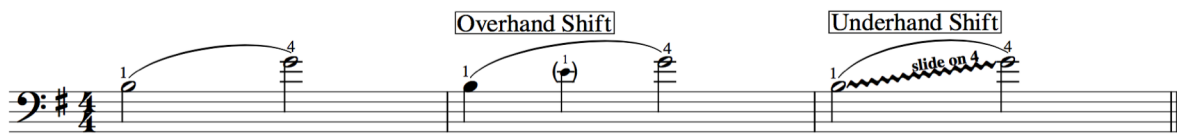
## Pre-Shifting Activities

- ▶ Establish motion without tension and build confidence
- ▶ Activities
  - ▶ Teach Violinists and Violists Push Aways
  - ▶ Polish the Strings
  - ▶ Ski jumps (cello and bass, especially)
  - ▶ Sirens, Zombie Sirens, Musical Conversations
  - ▶ Harmonics
  - ▶ Play familiar tunes:
    - ▶ all on one string (Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star)
    - ▶ beginning on this string on this note
      - ▶ Example, play a B and tell students to play Hot Cross Buns on the D string



## Advanced Shifting Concepts

- ▶ Types of Shifts: Left Hand
  - ▶ Old finger shifts with new note going overhand
    - ▶ ghost tones and choreograph new finger
  - ▶ Combination of Old and New: Romantic shift
  - ▶ New finger shift: glissando



- ▶ Compress hand
- ▶ Hand in position first
- ▶ Change finger pattern while shifting

## Advanced Shifting Concepts, Continued

- ▶ Types of Shifts: Right Hand
  - ▶ Hidden between the bow changes
  - ▶ Shift on old
  - ▶ Shift on new bow
  - ▶ Plan where you are in the bow
- ▶ General Concepts
  - ▶ Bottom note is Gold, Top note is Silver
  - ▶ Shift in Rhythm
- ▶ Part of Meditation of Thais for examples

## Types of Cello Extensions

- ▶ Backward extensions
  - ▶ Thumb ( **☐** ) and fingers 2, 3, 4 remain in position; 1<sup>st</sup> finger extends back a half-step.
  - ▶ Bass position: 1<sup>st</sup> finger may be straight; side of 1<sup>st</sup> finger depresses string (not finger pad).
- ▶ Forward extensions
  - ▶ 1<sup>st</sup> finger works as an anchor while **☐** and fingers 2, 3, 4 extend forward a half-step.
  - ▶ Exception: extended note is between two open strings

## Teaching Cello Extensions

- ▶ Key concepts:
  - ▶ Buddy fingers (thumb **☐** and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger)
  - ▶ Closing the hand is just as important as extending hand
  - ▶ 3<sup>rd</sup> finger is RARELY used during extensions
  - ▶ Plan ahead: extend/close while playing first finger

| Symbol  | EX                                 | CL                               | x2   | L1   |
|---------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Meaning | Extended position<br>(move thumb!) | Closed position<br>(move thumb!) | Extend 2 <sup>nd</sup> finger<br>and thumb | Low 1 <sup>st</sup> finger<br>(backward extension) |

Cello Extension Exercises

Erin M. Hansen

#1

1

Hang from the 1st finger while sliding the thumb up and down the neck.

#2

0 1 3

Slide thumb under 3rd finger. Place 2nd finger over thumb.

Extended

0 1 x2

Slide thumb to original place. Place 2nd finger over thumb.

#3

0 1 3 4

Slide thumb under 3rd finger. Place 2nd finger over thumb.

Extended

0 1 x2 4

(Pivot on thumb & 2)

Slide thumb to original place. Place 2nd finger over thumb.

#4

1 1 4 4

Slide thumb forward while playing E. Place 2nd finger over thumb to play G#. Slide thumb back while playing E to close hand.

Extended

1 1 x4 4

#5

0 x4 0

Pivot on the thumb.

#6

1x 0 4 2

Slide thumb while playing E.

Close thumb while playing A.

Solving Mysteries

| Common Problems                                     | Root of Problem | Remedies |
|---|-----------------|----------|
| Not making it up to the note or going past the note |                 |          |
| Sounds too intense on top note                      |                 |          |
| Stutters  |                 |          |
| Hear the shift or too much of the shift             |                 |          |
| Sounds nervous                                      |                 |          |
| Other?  |                 |          |

## Solving Mysteries

| Common Problems                                     | Root of Problem  | Remedies  |
|---|--|---|
| Not making it up to the note or going past the note | Not Audiating; not shifting in a musically rhythmic time; tension in your hand; +++?     | Audiate; shift rhythmically; plan placement in the bow; use ghost tones; release tension, thumb vs. |
| Sounds too intense on top note                      | Too much emphasis on goal note and not on floating to the top.                           | Bottom note gold, top note silver; vibrate the note before the shift                                |
| Stutters  | Squeezing  | Push away + release finger to glide on top of string, thumb/unit                                    |
| Hear the shift or too much of the shift             | Bow not coordinating with left hand; wrong kind of shift; beginning on new note too soon | Plan how much time you spend on new note and coordinate with right hand (between bows, etc.)        |
| Sounds nervous                                      | Arriving too soon or shift too quickly.  | Shift rhythmically, plan where you are in the bow; Gold/silver                                      |
| Other?  |  |   |

## Teaching Vibrato

### Key Concepts

- ▶ Practice vibrato without playing to develop the correct movement
- ▶ Left hand must be free of tension and away from side of instrument
- ▶ Even, rhythmic motion (tension free)
- ▶ 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> finger are easiest to vibrate

## Teaching Pre-Vibrato Exercises

- ▶ Disguised repetition to establish correct motion
- ▶ Pre-vibrato exercises
  - ▶ Swing plops
  - ▶ Top taps
  - ▶ Palm pats
- ▶ “Beak” polishing
- ▶ Peg Knocks (VL & VA)
- ▶ Push Aways and Polish the Strings
- ▶ “Rhythmic” Polishing

Credit: Dr. Fischbach  
“The Art of Vibrato” (video) or  
“Viva Vibrato” (book)

## Wrist Vibrato: Violin and Viola

- ▶ Motion: Hand moves back forth at wrist while arm is still and balanced
  - ▶ Italian shaking hand: make a circle with middle finger and thumb; shake your hand while saying, “What’s the mattah, you?” or “What’a you doin’?”
  - ▶ Southern woman sitting on porch fanning herself: “Oh, my. It’s so hot!”
  - ▶ Use an egg shaker in your hand



## Arm Vibrato: Violin and Viola (I AVOID AT FIRST)

- ▶ Middle Finger in crook on wrist
  - ▶ Pull back and notice:
    - ▶ you roll on fingertip
    - ▶ your knuckle is loose
- ▶ Open and close elbow hinge (Polish the Strings)
- ▶ Push-away
- ▶ Put fingertips on the shoulder of the violin
  - ▶ Roll on finger tips until your hand moves away from shoulder of violin and back
  - ▶ Imaginary glue on fingertip and move hand to strings

## Vibrato: Cello and Bass

- ▶ Key concepts:
  - ▶ Avoid pronation/supination motion in the arm
    - ▶ Move from the elbow, not the wrist
    - ▶ Pretend the arm has a cast on it
    - ▶ Middle finger in crook of collarbone
  - ▶ Too much thumb pressure creates incorrect motion and a fast, jittery vibrato
  - ▶ The thicker the string, the slower the vibrato
  - ▶ Move from glissandos to vibrato
  - ▶ 2<sup>nd</sup> finger is easiest to vibrato (for most)

## Adding the Bow

### ► Students:

1. Get the correct vibrato motion
  2. **Close eyes** while **you (or another student)** draw(s) the bow across the string
- Vibrato open string notes (ex. A, D, G)
  - Vibrato fingered notes on a string while playing a different open string

## Practicing Vibrato Over Time

- After the first (or second) day, **only spend 2-5 minutes on vibrato each day**. As they improve, they can add their own bow. Develop a checklist.
  - For example, WRIST VIBRATO CHECKLIST:
    - Imaginary super glue base of wrist to violin/viola ribs
    - Push away
    - One drop of imaginary super glue on middle finger
    - Get the vibrato motion going
    - Land bow silently half way between bridge and fingerboard
    - Keep left hand motion going. **Breath, exhale, and pull bow.**
    - If successful, repeat steps with another finger

## Advanced Vibrato Concepts

- ▶ Constant vibrato continuing from finger to finger
- ▶ Vary width and speed
- ▶ Variations of vibrato within a note
  - ▶ examples (blossoming notes, etc.)
- ▶ Vibrate the note BEFORE the most beautiful target note.
- ▶ Research tells us to go below and above pitch but many believe you should go from below up to a note.
- ▶ Wider and faster vibrato in higher positions
- ▶ Part of Meditation of Thais for examples

## Solving Mysteries

| Common Problems             | Root of Problem           | Remedies                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Moving wrist back and forth | Hand squeezes fingerboard | Push-Aways (VL/VA)<br>Play without thumb |
| Moving fingers up and down  |                           |  |
| Moving fingers only         |                           |  |
| Sliding on string           |                           |  |
| Jittery sounding vibrato    |                           |  |
| Pitch sounds flat           |                           |  |
| Other?                      |                           |  |

## Solving Mysteries - Possible Remedies

| Common Problems             | Root of Problem                      | Remedies  |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Moving wrist back and forth | Hand squeezes fingerboard            | Push-Aways (VL/VA)<br>Play without thumb                                |
| Moving fingers up and down  | Not rolling on fingertips            | Motion in crook of wrist/back of arm                                    |
| Moving fingers only         | Squeezing/tension or stuck thumb     | Push-Away; buddies; play on back of arm;<br>play w/o thumb              |
| Sliding fingers on string   | Not rolling on fingertips            | Motion in crook of wrist/back of arm;<br>feel weight of arm             |
| Jittery sounding vibrato    | Tension in thumb or incorrect motion | Release thumb; review pre-cursor exercises for motion (speed and width) |
| Pitch sounds flat           | Hand pulls back; vib. up to pitch    | Vibrato below & above pitch   |
| Other?                      |                                      |   |

# Thank you!!!

Kristen Pellegrino

kristen.pellegrino@utsa.edu

**UTSA**



AUDITION DATES

**November 6th, 2021** (INSTRUMENTS ONLY)

**November 13th, 2021** (VOICE ONLY)

**February 19th, 2022** **SCHOLARSHIP DATE**

**March 5th, 2022** **SCHOLARSHIP DATE**

**May 7th, 2022** (NO KEYBOARD)

**UTSA** Music | WE CULTIVATE ARTISTS