

LEARN A

Beautiful Vibrato

ON THE VIOLIN

MINI MASTERCLASS



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Mini Masterclass: Learn a Beautiful Vibrato on the Violin

Hi there, my name is Zlata Brouwer, a violin teacher from Holland specialized in bowing technique and vibrato. I am so happy you signed up for my free mini masterclass about learning a beautiful vibrato on the violin. I made this masterclass because I see so many violin players struggle unnecessarily with their vibrato.

This mini masterclass is interesting for you if you recognize one or more of the following:

- You really want to learn vibrato and you don't know how
- Sometimes your vibrato works and sometimes it doesn't: you want a consistent vibrato
- You're not satisfied with the sound of your vibrato
- You'd like to have more sound colors in your vibrato, so you can adjust it to the style of music you play and the emotions you want to express

“Vibrato is your unique fingerprint as a violinist”

It's the most personal part of your violin playing and the most important tool of expression. That's why it is so important for you to learn how to continuously improve it.

What you're going to learn in this mini masterclass are the four most common mistakes in vibrato and how to avoid them. Then, I am going to share with you my four-step formula to a beautiful expressive vibrato. After that I am going to present you the opportunity to get my personal guidance in learning vibrato.

Here's what you're going to learn in this mini masterclass:

4 Common Mistakes in Vibrato and How to Avoid them

1. Vibrato movement in the wrong direction
2. Tensed and/or too narrow vibrato
3. 'Drunk' uncontrolled and a-rhythmical vibrato
4. No consistent practice or wrong exercises

4 Steps to a Beautiful Expressive Vibrato

1. Lay the foundation
2. Learn the skill
3. Improve your vibrato
4. Apply in music

Mistake nr 1: Vibrato movement in the wrong direction

▶ (1:26) The first mistake people make is that they make the right movement, but they move in the wrong direction. The movement of vibrato is rolling over your fingertip, so you shorten and lengthen the string and the pitch goes up and down. That's what a vibrato is.

You can imagine that if you make the right movement, but you're not doing this in the direction of the string length, it doesn't have an effect on your sound. When you struggle with this it's a good idea to record yourself while doing vibrato, so you can see what you're doing exactly. A lot of people don't really know how they vibrate. You can also try to do a very slow vibrato and adjust the movement if necessary.



Another thing I sometimes see, is that people make the right wrist movement, but it doesn't have an effect on the finger. This way you still don't get the movement that shortens and lengthens the string, so the vibrato doesn't work. If you're only moving your wrist, the solution is to keep your arm still and try to transfer the motion that you had in your wrist to your fingertip, so your fingertip starts rolling over the string. You can practice this with the exercise "knocking the door" ([see video](#)).



Mistake nr 2: Tensed and/or too narrow vibrato

🎵 (3:19) The second common mistake that people make, is that they have a tensed and narrow vibrato instead of a lush and relaxed vibrato. The solution is to make your wrist and your fingers more flexible. I'll give you two good exercises for this.

The first exercise is to put your finger on the soundboard and roll over your finger tip in different rhythms and different tempi with the help of your metronome. Start for example with four notes at 60 beats per minute and slowly increase it to 120 beats per minute. This way you learn to control the tempo of your vibrato. If you want to make your fingers more flexible, you can do the same exercise while only using your finger (no wrist movement).

The second exercise to increase your finger flexibility is to play a chromatic scale in which you slide with your fingers (one-one, two-two, three-three, four). When you do this, it is important that you only move your fingers (curve and stretch) and don't make 'position shifts' with your whole hand.

After this you can practice vibrato with a metronome in the third position. As soon as you have a relaxed vibrato in the third position, you can move to the first position.

Some people tend to have a tensed vibrato because their thumb is locked. When you're playing, try to move around your thumb and see if your hand is relaxed. Tension in your left hand in general, causes your vibrato to be tensed as well. If you're squeezing with your thumb, do some vibrato exercises without the violin and do them on the violin later. When you notice along the way that your hand gets tensed, go back to the larger and fluent motions and slowly try to make them smaller again until you feel the tension. If you do this often enough, you'll notice that it takes longer and longer before the tension starts and one day it'll disappear completely.



Mistake nr 3: 'Drunk' uncontrolled and a-rhythmical vibrato

🎵 (6:45) The third mistake a lot of people make is a “drunk” vibrato sound. A lot of people think they’re doing something wrong in the movement when this occurs, while they’re actually making the right vibrato movement. The speed, oscillation and regularity of your vibrato determine if your vibrato sounds “drunk” or beautiful. First try to get a regular vibrato by playing sixteenths notes at 60 beats per minute and then slowly speed it up by four or six beats per minute until you can play sixteenths notes at 120 beats per minute. In that tempo you’re in control of your vibrato and it will sound a lot better.



Mistake nr 4: 'No consistent practice or wrong exercises

🎵 (7:51) The fourth common mistake is what really holds most people back; they've never consistently practiced vibrato. I heard a soloist saying some time ago that it takes a year or two of consistent dedicated vibrato practice fifteen minutes a day, to really master the art of the vibrato and get a vibrato you're happy with. Of course, you can achieve a basic vibrato way faster. When people come to me and they want me to help them with their vibrato, they expect me to give them some kind of secret or magic trick to unlock their vibrato. It just doesn't work that way: It's just a lot of practice.

My first question to private students complaining about vibrato always is: have you ever done fifteen minutes of dedicated vibrato practice a day for ten weeks? Most of the time the answer is: no! If you really want to learn a good vibrato, you need daily practice. Maybe that's bad news for you if you were waiting for the magic trick, but on the other side it is good news because it means that vibrato is a learnable skill.



Vibrato is a learnable skill

Some teachers say vibrato is something you have or don't have. If there's only one thing you remember from this masterclass, it should be that a beautiful vibrato is a learnable skill. There's a step by step way to learn vibrato. Knowing this, it's important that you free up your time for dedicated vibrato practice and that you do exactly the right exercises. You know it doesn't work to just imitate your teacher or to do the same boring exercises every day. You need a big variation in exercises to build a good vibrato (in a fun way!), which brings me to the four steps to learn a beautiful vibrato.

Step 1: Lay the foundation

🎵 (10:22) The first step is to lay the foundation. You need to have a good left-hand technique. Your left hand and arm need to be relaxed so you can move them fluently. Your index finger should be able to be loose from the neck of the violin. This means that your thumb, which is always an important counterplayer of your left-hand finger, becomes even more important.

You can place your thumb a little bit below the neck of the violin, because we must maintain the balance of the violin's weight between our collarbone and our left hand. When your left hand is completely free and you start vibrating, your intonation can become a little bit unstable and uncontrolled. You need to have that contact with the neck of the violin. Also, you can hurt your neck and shoulders if you don't support the violin partially with your left hand.

Your thumb suddenly has a very important role to play: it's the counterplayer of your left-hand fingers and you hold the violin with it, certainly when your index finger is not touching the neck of the violin. When you notice that your thumb is tensed, it helps to move around your thumb or do some vibrato exercises with the scroll against the wall or resting on a music stand. In this way you free up your hand and it's easier to have a flexible thumb in the normal position.

If your thumb is very tensed and rigid, it can't be a good counterplayer to your fingers, your violin hold is unstable, and you'll have more difficulty doing a good vibrato. Make sure your thumb is flexible and your violin hold is balanced before you proceed to the actual vibrato exercises.



Step 2: Learn the skill

▶ (12:25) The second step is to learn the vibrato skills. We start by “knocking the door”, then we make larger movements with the whole wrist and arm on the violin. You can do these exercises while pushing the string to the fingerboard, on the harmonic or with a piece of paper. Start with smooth movements over the whole fingerboard. After a while you make them smaller, and maybe do some exercises on the sound board, as I explained earlier.

Move to the third, fourth or fifth position, place your thumb at the violin’s heel and make the movement smaller and smaller. We start in a higher position, because in it you’ve got support from the violin’s heel and it’s easier to make a good wrist movement. Think of the vibrato movement as a circular motion. Just as with silent bow changes, this is helpful to smoothen your movements even though the actual movement is vertical.

You can slowly move to a vibrato by making the movement smaller and smaller until you can leave your fingertip on the same spot and start rolling over your finger tip. Sometimes it will work and sometimes it doesn’t. You should practice the vibrato with all fingers on all strings. When you’ve mastered a basic vibrato, we can go to the third step of learning vibrato.



Step 3: Improve your vibrato

▶ (14:24) There are many exercises to improve your vibrato and to practice different aspects of your vibrato. The most important exercises are the ones in which you practice your vibrato with a metronome. You should practice it very consistently while speeding up the tempo just a little bit every day. We've talked about sixteenth notes, but you can also practice different rhythms. Being creative in your practice will make the movement smoother and gives you control over the tempo and sound color.

There are two proportions in the vibrato: the speed and the oscillation: fast vs slow and narrow vs wide. You should experiment with all sorts of combinations: narrow and slow, fast and wide et cetera. You should be able to master those proportions in different tempi and rhythms to create an expressive vibrato that you can adjust to the music style and emotions you want to express.



Step 4: Apply in music

🎵 (15:44) The fourth step is to apply your vibrato in music. You now have a toolbox of narrow and wide, fast and slow, being able to go from one vibrato tempo to another and switch fluently between all sorts of vibrato. You now can make all these different sound colors: different herbs to spice the music you make. This is a beautiful skill to have as a violin player.

When you start applying vibrato to music, just start with some long notes first and when you get those right go to the shorter notes and after some time you can even play very fast runs with vibrato. When you play a piece with a certain emotion or mood, adjust your vibrato accordingly. Really search for the sound that you want to have and experiment with that.



Learn more...

In this mini masterclass I don't have time to go through all the exercises and all the exact steps, because you need dozens of videos and exercises for that. The good news is that I can offer you those videos, those exercises, masterclasses from concert violinists and my personal guidance in my online program "Free Your Vibrato".

You've probably noticed that imitating your favorite soloist or your teacher doesn't work. Doing the same exercises over and over again doesn't work either. What you need is a fun variation of exercises, crystal clear practice instructions and personal guidance to keep you on track and to get feedback. "Free your Vibrato" is the only place where you can learn the vibrato step by step, so you actually get the results you want. Also, you'll learn exactly how to keep improving your vibrato for years to come.

Do you desire to develop this beautiful tone quality that belongs to you alone? Do you yearn to express the emotions you feel in music? Then there's no reason why you should postpone learning a beautiful vibrato.

You just need to know exactly what and how to practice...

I'm happy to guide you on your personal vibrato journey in my online program "Free Your Vibrato". [Click here](#) to read more and sign up!

Thanks for downloading this free mini masterclass and make sure to share it with all violin players you know who struggle with their vibrato or just want to improve it.

I hope to see you in one of my programs!

Lots of Love,

Zlata Brouwer
Your online violin teacher

