

# “Vibrato - The Magic Ingredient for your Flute Section”

**Kaye L. Clements**

Dean of Undergraduate Studies

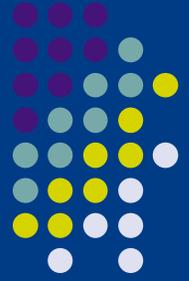
Associate Professor

Applied Flute

Music History

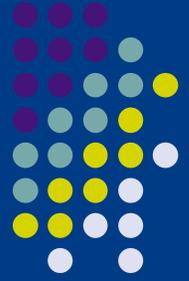


# Vibrato



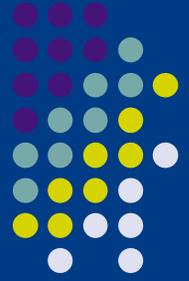
Vibrato is an integral component of the modern classical flute tone. It should not be thought of as a “special effect” or external expressive device. Rather, the vibrato, if properly taught, becomes subsumed in the sound as a natural part of the breath support system. Vibrato is always present in the advanced flute sound except in very special circumstances, such as the instruction “senza vibrato” or “non vibrato” in the music and at the very end of a long morendo or dimenuendo.

# Vibrato



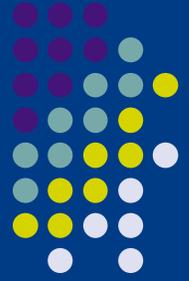
For this reason the flutist should not be told to “play scales” or “tune” without vibrato. Tuning without vibrato is like tuning one instrument, then picking up another one to play. The performer should tune the way they are going to play.

# Teaching Vibrato



A desirable vibrato must sustain a long air column and cannot be effectively produced unless the player has learned to breathe properly. Good vibrato does not develop spontaneously; it should be carefully taught. Once the student is breathing correctly automatically, has learned most of the fingerings on the instrument and has a strong, well-supported, clear tone in all registers it is time to introduce vibrato. Age is not really an issue.

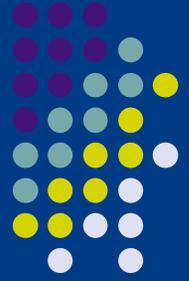
# Steps for Vibrato



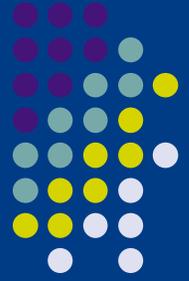
1. The first step is to review correct breathing.
2. The student must then “sing” a sustained note. The pitch should be low enough so the tone resonates from the chest rather than the masque or “head.” The note should be loud, long and steady, with the singer keeping the breath support strong and constant. They should use the syllable “Haaaaa” and open the mouth wide.

(It should be an ugly “fog horn” type sound. )

# Steps for Vibrato



3. The student should now “pant and bark like a dog,” first slowly “bouncing” the diaphragm (the muscle movement is up and down, not in and out) to expel air in an even cycle and then adding a “vocalization” similar to the start of a cough. Be sure the sound is not generated by pushes from the throat.



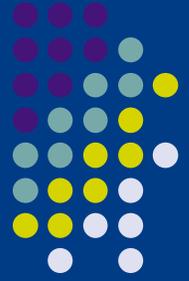
## Steps for Vibrato

4. Next, keep the sound going between “barks” to produce deep, even “pulses.” Again, be sure the pulses are not “sung” from the throat. The pitch should not go up and down.

EXERCISE: 4 pants      4 barks      4 pulses



# Steps for Vibrato



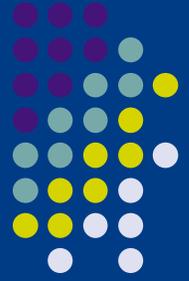
5. Now the student can try to put the “pulses” in the flute sound on a 4th-line D. It is very important that the pulses not exceed M.M. 162/1 pulse per beat.



## Steps for Vibrato

6. Now try a one-octave G Major scale with 8 slow, even pulses on each note. When the pulses can be comfortably maintained at M.M. 162/1 pulse per beat, try to take the scale up and down two octaves.

# Steps for Vibrato



7. An acceptable vibrato falls somewhere between M.M. 160 and 168/2 pulses per beat, depending on the register and individual player. (Pulse speed increases slightly as the player goes into the top octave of the flute.) The student should attempt the following exercise if the scale exercise is comfortable at M.M. 162. If the faster pulses are not even, or if they move up into the throat, go back to the scale exercise and gradually increase the metronome speed to 162. A “nanny goat” throat vibrato is to be avoided at all costs.



# Steps for Vibrato

## 8. VIBRATO EXERCISE

This is the point where we shift to a useable vibrato speed. Compress the diaphragm for four pulses at M.M. 162/1, then let them double up to 162/2.

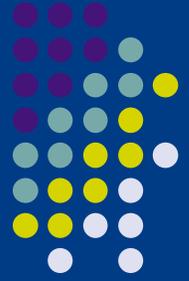
M.M. 162 (relax jaw) **Vibrato** Clements

4 pulses  
1 per beat

8 pulses  
2 per beat

NOT :

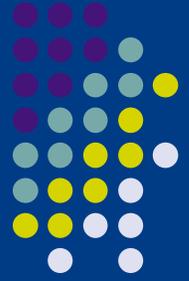
etc.



## Steps for Vibrato

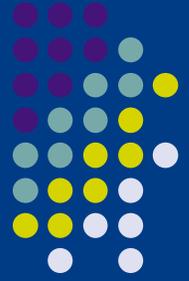
9. Once the student can achieve relaxed pulses at M.M. 162/2 pulses per beat, she\he should be encouraged to put vibrato on any sustained notes that occur in the music. (In some cases, the vibrato may be settling into the tone quite naturally at this point; in others, the student must be taught to relax, stop “counting” pulses and use vibrato in the tone. It helps to encourage them to let the vibrato “fill in” the spaces between the notes. The vibrato is in the air, not on the note!

# Steps for Vibrato



10. The final stages of vibrato work involve using it to effect dynamics and changes of tone color. The vibrato (i.e. the tone) should not be static and unchanging but flowing and flexible in response to the expressive demands of the music. (I use the opening theme of Ravel's Pavane for a Dead Princess to illustrate this. I have the student listen to the recording to become sensitive to the harmonic changes and goal notes, then show them how to use the vibrato to shape the musical lines.)

# Pavane pour une infante defunte



## Pavane pour une infante defunte

Maurice RAVEL

$\text{♩} = 68$

*p*

*En mesure*

*un peu retenu*

*mf*

*cédez*

*eu élargissant*

Clements