

I. VIBRATO READINESS

Vibrato is a balanced, rocking movement. It is much like waving hello, knocking on a door, salting your food, or patting a dog. When you are balanced, the vibrato rocks easily; vibrato “just happens.” When you are out of balance, muscles tighten, parts of you squeeze and pinch, and vibrato is difficult.

Before we actually begin vibrato exercises, let’s run through a Vibrato Readiness Checklist.

Vibrato Readiness Checklist

✓ **Body.** Does your body swing easily backward and forward, from left to right, and around in small circles? Of course it does! You’ve been an expert at those motions since long before you learned to play. Do these gentle movements again, and notice how easily you move.

Now place your instrument in playing position. Again, move left to right, back and forward, and in small circles. Are you still moving as easily? If so, good; you have successfully included your instrument into your balanced body system. If not, ask your teacher if you are holding (balancing) your instrument correctly.

✓ **Arm.** Put your left hand in playing position. Does your elbow swing freely? If not, you are tense in the shoulder, and you may have the elbow too high or too low. Move the elbow. Can you now release some left arm tension that perhaps you didn’t even know you had? Swing your left elbow again.

Now it’s time for our first **Swingercise!**



#1: SWINGPLOP

1. With your instrument in playing position, use your legs and knees to keep it steady and secure. Let your left arm hang by your side. Now swing your left arm in a lazy arc, forward and backward.
2. After a few lazy swings, use a forward *swing* to toss the hand up and over the instrument, then drop the arm so that the fingers *plop* on the fingerboard. Let the fingers “spring” a little on the fingerboard. See *Photo #1*.
3. Do Swingplop three to five times.

Photo #1

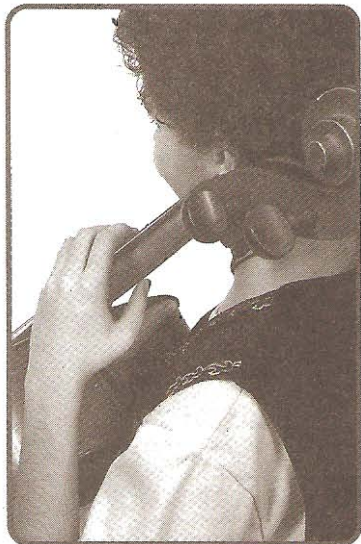


Photo #2



✓ **Hand.** In playing position, does your hand balance easily on the end of your forearm? Does it move freely from the wrist? Check the line from fingers through hand and forearm to elbow: there should be no unusual bends or kinks. See *Photo #2*.

Photo #3

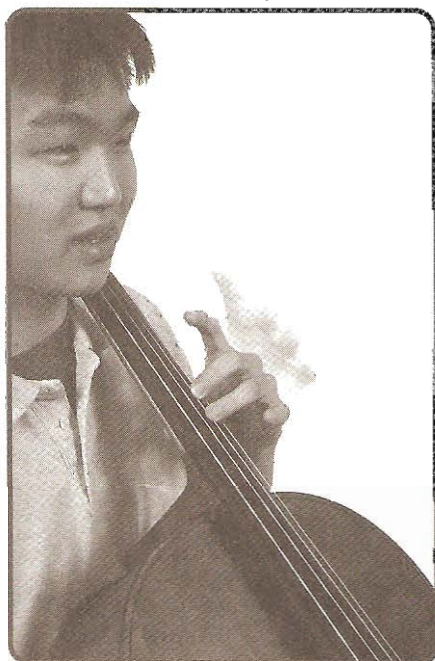


✓ **Thumb and Fingers.** No squeezing allowed! Tap your thumb. It should be flexible, touching the cello neck toward the inside edge, not the center, of the thumb pad. See *Photo #3*.

Tap your fingers. They should bounce and float, touching the string on the fleshy pad behind the fingernail, where delicious tone is found, not near the nail, where you may produce a more pinched sound.

Contact should be made with just the thumb and finger pad; if anything else is touching your vibrato will get stuck. Take care not to collapse the hand or pinch the neck like a lobster claw!

Photo #4



#2: HAPPYTAPPY

1. Tap your thumb again. Tap, tap, tap! Now tap your third finger. Tap, taptap, tap! And again the thumb.
2. Now third and fourth together. Then thumb. Now fourth alone. And (guess what?) thumb.
3. Next, middle fingers together, then thumb. Then second alone, and thumb.
4. Now first and second, followed by thumb. And first alone, then thumb.
5. Now mix them up some more, switching regularly between fingers and thumb. See *Photo #4*.

Photo #5



#3: SHAKE, RATTLE, AND ROLL

1. Without your instrument, hold in your left hand a (real or imaginary) matchbox half-filled with rice kernels.
2. Now with your left hand, knock on an imaginary door in front of you. As you shake and rattle, roll your arm around to simulate your playing position. See *Photo #5*.
3. Continue the shake and rattle as you play vibrato on your on your "air" cello.

Extra tip: it can be fun and instructive to do *Swingercise #3* with both hands, mirroring the actions of the left hand with the right.

✓ With our Vibrato Readiness Checklist in good order, it's time to move on to actual vibrato exercises, and to give birth to a beautiful new vibrato!

II. THE BIRTH OF A VIBRATO

A selection of the exercises in this section should be repeated every day, even two or three times through the course of a day, until your vibrato is born, and for a while thereafter. Some will be more useful to you than others; your teacher will help you decide from week to week which combination of exercises is best for you. You will probably be doing these exercises for several weeks to several months. Vibrato comes sooner to some than to others, but everyone gets it eventually.

You should do these exercises during your regular daily practice sessions, of course. Additionally, some of them are good "TV Games"—they can be done while doing other things, such as reading or even watching television! The more often you practice these movements each day, the sooner your vibrato will come.

Photo #6

Swingercise

#4: HANDPATS

1. With your instrument in playing position, place your left thumb on the cello rib near the neck.
2. Now with the side of your left hand, pat the rib. Patpatpat! Let your whole arm follow in motion with the hand. The thumb stays in one place. See *Photo #6*.
3. You can do Handpats with your hand placed at the curve of the cello's shoulder as well. Let the thumb rest comfortably on the rib. Try out both locations.
4. Handpat Rhythms. Pat the following rhythm patterns 10 times each:

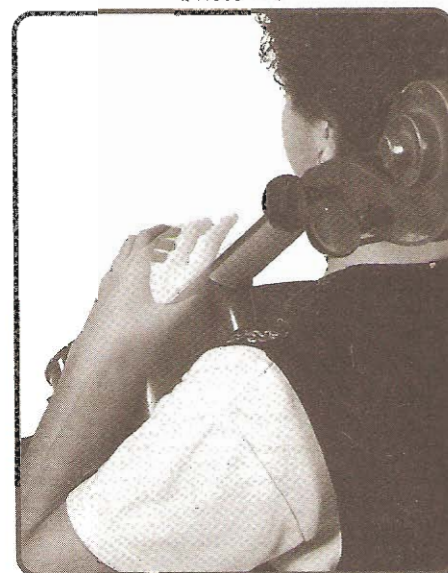


Photo #7

Swingercise

#5: TOPTAPS

1. Put your instrument in playing position, and use your legs and knees to hold it steady and secure.
2. With your left thumb pad on the high string edge of the fingerboard in the middle to high register, swing your hand over the fingerboard and tap on the C string edge of the fingerboard.
 - For right now, just to get the "swing" of it, tap at moderate, comfortable speed, in no particular rhythm.
 - Your hand and fingers should be very loose and floppy, with curved, springy fingers. See *Photo #7*.
3. Name rhythms. Tap "Jiminy Cricket! Jiminy Cricket!"

Tap your teacher's name. Tap *your* name. Tap the names of some of your friends!

Write the rhythm of your teacher's name here: _____

Write the rhythm of your name: _____



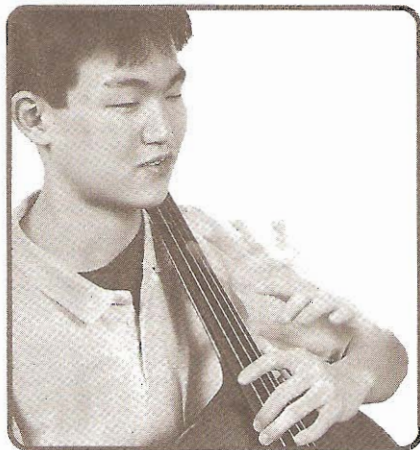


Photo #9a

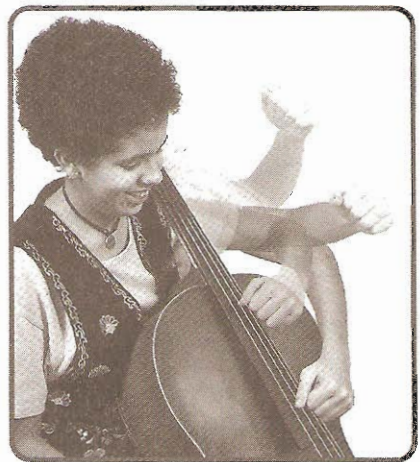


Photo #9b



Photo #9c



4. Toptap Rhythms. To the following rhythms, tap the C string edge of the fingerboard as in Step 2. During the rest, swing your hand up and back towards first position, as a kind of "windup" to the next Toptap. Stay above the fingerboard with the fingers. Pivot on the thumb, which stays in place. See *Photo #8*.

Tap the following rhythm patterns 10 times each ($\text{♩} = 60$):



#6A: 'ROOBOINGBOING

1. With your cello in playing position, close your left fingers into a gentle fist.
2. In about fifth position, start bouncing your hand on the fingerboard, like a hopping kangaroo.
3. Now bounce forward, to the higher positions, gradually to near the end of the fingerboard.
4. Next, bounce backward, gradually back to about fifth position.
5. Continue backward, eventually to first position; then turn around, and hop back to about fifth position. See *Photo #9a*.
6. Repeat Steps 2-5 three or four times.



#6B: CHICKEN WING

1. Bring the left fingers together into a point.
2. Place the tip of the fingers into the left shoulder.
3. Raise your left elbow so that it is not quite parallel to the floor.
4. Rock your forearm at the wrist up and down, in a vibrato motion.
5. Do the same with your right arm, together with your left.



#6D: STRING POLISHING (CONTRACTING WOBBLE)

1. Hold your cello in playing position with your left hand in about fifth position.
2. Sliding up and down the fingerboard, polish a string with one of your middle fingers.
 - Polish most of the string, from first position to near the end of the fingerboard.
 - Slide on the fleshy finger pad.
 - Slide light as a feather.
 - When you change directions, the finger should flex a little, from all joints.
 - Notice that in the lower positions, the thumb is also polishing the neck. See *Photo #9b*.
 - As you move to the upper positions, the thumb comes around from under the neck and glides on the string behind the fingers. As you move back to the lower positions, the thumb tucks back under the neck. See *Photo #9c*.
3. Now gradually make the polishing motion smaller and smaller, and a little faster.
4. Eventually, the finger pad centers on one spot, somewhere around fifth position. The thumb is still polishing.
5. Now anchor the thumb, under the 2nd finger.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 five times.



#7: THE PARADE WAVE

Photo #10



1. With your instrument in playing position, bring your left hand up to about fourth position. Open the hand so that the palm is above the strings facing the fingerboard. Now wave to your cello!
2. Pick up your bow. Play long, slow strokes on the D string. Wave to your cello again. Listen to your pretty vibrato! See Photo #10.
3. Play your Parade Wave Vibrato on other strings.
4. Play *Wave Duet* using your Wave Vibrato on Part A, which should be played entirely using open strings. Play Part B using smooth string crossing waves.

1. Wave Duet ♩ = 96

Hermann Op. 20, no. 2

①

⑤

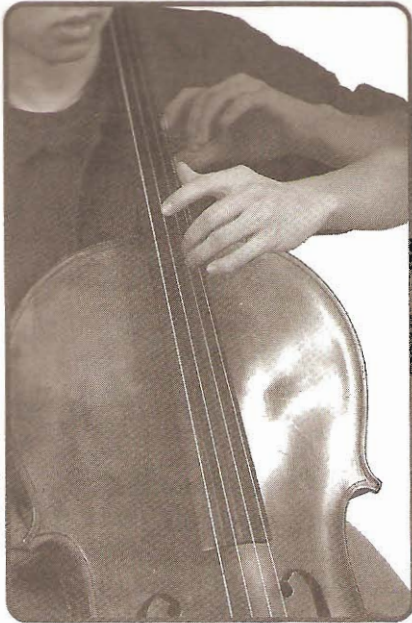
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Photo #11



Swingercise

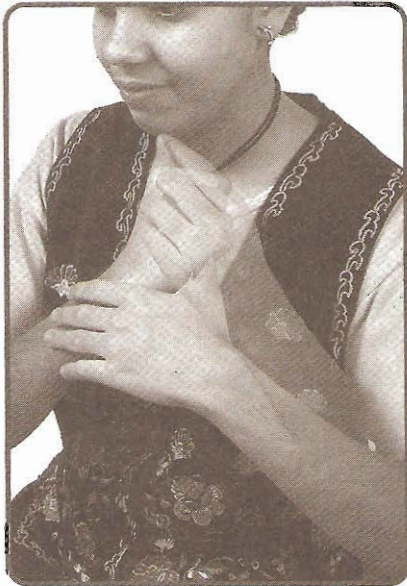
#8: 'TWEENTAPS

1. 'Tweentaps is just like Toptaps (Swingercise #5), except it is performed on the fingerboard, in a high position, in between your D and A strings.
2. Go through the Toptap Rhythms again, 10 times each. (See page 5.)
3. Use your second or third finger.
4. Be sure your wrist and finger joints stay springy and flexible.
5. Do aim for the space in between strings; if you tap on a string instead, you may find your fingers and wrist getting stiff. See Photo #11.

Swingercise

#9: HANDSHINE

Photo #12



1. With the palm of your right hand facing you, place the tip of your left thumb in your right palm. Now embrace your left thumb loosely in your right fist.
2. With a handshaking motion of the left hand and arm, use your middle fingers to gently polish the back of your right hand and wrist. See Photo #12.
 - Feel the left hand swinging from the bottom of the thumb, way down near the wrist.
 - There should be free movement from all joints of the finger, thumb, and wrist.
3. Gradually narrow the motion so that the second or third finger pad settles into one spot.

Photo #13



Swingercise

#10: STRINGSHINE

Now we will move Handshine to the cello. With your thumb in fourth position, polish the D string as in steps 2-3 of Swingercise #9. See Photo #13.

Let's Rap!

2. Rap Music

1. Play the following "Rap Tune" to Swingercise #8, 9, or 10.

4/4

I've got a start on my vi - bra - to, Ot - to, look at me now; rap-pin' and a - tap-pin', a - flap-pin' and a - slap-pin'; rap-pin' tap-pin', flap-pin' slap-pin', rock-in' roll-in', WOW!

2. Make up and tap out your own Rap Tunes!

Sticky taps is just like 'Tweentaps, with one important difference: magic super glue!

1. Put a drop of this (pretend) magic super glue on your third finger pad.
2. Now start 'Tweentaps, using the Toptap Rhythms. ♩ = 60. Tap the following rhythm patterns 10 times each:

3/4 A.  B.  C.  D.  E. 

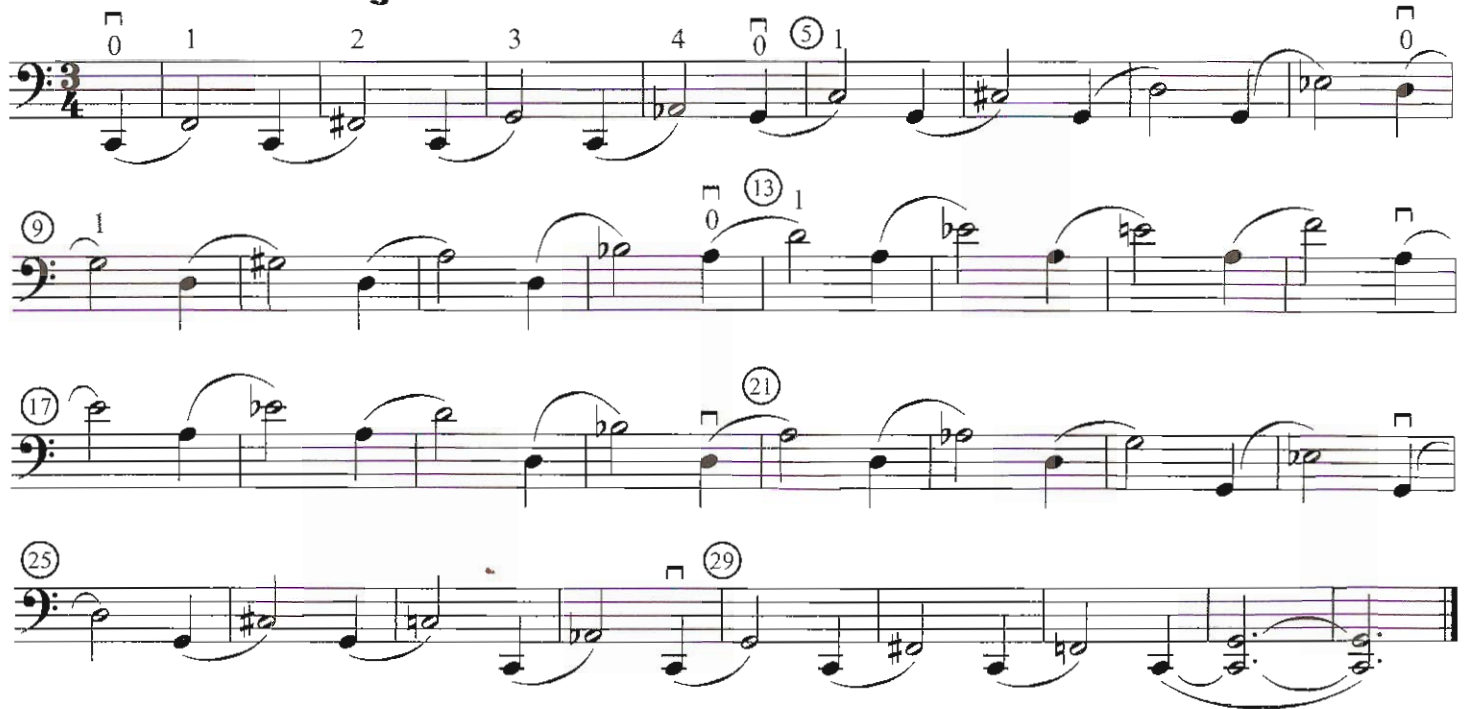
3. Here's the magic part:

- On the first tapping of each rhythm, the super glue has no effect—tap as usual.
- On the second, the glue works instantly, and you continue the tapping motion with your finger stuck to the fingerboard. Notice how flexible your finger and wrist joints are.
- On the rest before the third tapping, the super glue magically lets go, so that you tap again as usual.
- Continue through the 10 repetitions with the odd-numbered repetitions “unglued,” and the even-numbered ones “glued.”

Now let's take your "magic super glue" vibrato on a ride to one of the moons of Jupiter!

3. Sunrise on Ganymede

Fischbach-Frost



4. Merry Maiden Waltz

Lehár

