The History and Development of Vibrato

Among Classical Saxophonists

Part II

by Jacquelyn B. Lamar

Pedagogical developments in jaw vibrato on the saxophone

Larry Teal, noted saxophone pedagogue, devotes extensive discussion to the various aspects of saxophone vibrato in his book *The Art of Saxophone Playing.*[51] He states that characteristics of a good vibrato should include the following: flexibility of tone without an overemphasis of the pulsating quality, an even rate without being so wide that it becomes monotonous, and some variation in rate and extent. Four different types of vibrato production are discussed: lip, jaw, throat, and diaphragm. Teal prefers the jaw production for saxophone because he feels it more adaptable to the instrument, resulting in greater control of the rate, amplitude, and shape of the oscillation.[52]

At the beginning, Teal recommends that vibrato should be developed as a mechanical skill. Exercises at measured speeds should be practiced with four pulsations to the beat at metronome speeds varying from 60 to 90 beats per minute. This variation of speed control is necessary so that in performance the speed of vibrato can be dictated by the music rather than by the performer's limits. After one develops this control, a more flexible vibrato can be applied in musical contexts, avoiding a given number of pulsations to the beat. The pulsations of vibrato should eventually become independent of the tempo of the music.[53]

In his dissertation *The Basis of Saxophone Tone and Production,* Cecil Leeson also recommends jaw vibrato for saxophone.[54] He discusses the aspects of pitch variation peculiar to the instrument. The saxophone embouchure setting is close to the top of the possible pitch; thus it is physically impossible to extend the vibrato cycle other than a very small distance above the straight tone. The nature of the instrument causes most of the vibrato cycle to lie below the optimum pitch.

That statement is affirmed by Fred Hemke, professor at Northwestern University, in his *Teacher's Guide to the Saxophone.*[55] If diagramed, the saxophone vibrato undulation would dip below actual pitch by .05 to .15 of a semitone and then return to the pitch.

Hemke, a former student of Marcel Mule's at the Paris Conservatoire, includes the Mule technique of vibrato instruction in the above-mentioned pamphlet. Mule suggests that the number of vibrato undulations should vary between 300 and 350 per minute. This would mean a variance of five to six undulations per beat at a metronome setting of 60 beats per minute. Mule also stresses that the speed of vibrato should depend on the tempo of the music being performed.[56] A recorded example of Marcel Mule's playing demonstrates his system of vibrato production (Paul Creston, "With Tranquility" from *Sonata, Op. 19,* Marcel Mule, saxophonist. Selmer LPL 2012-LPL 2013.).

In an *Instrumentalist* magazine article, Rosemary Lang recommends establishing a stable, characteristic tone quality before beginning vibrato instruction.[57] In addition to techniques mentioned by previous authors, Lang discusses the alternation of vowel quality from "ah" to "ee" to correspond respectively to the lower and upper portions of the vibrato cycle. The air pressure should remain constant when utilizing jaw vibrato, but the actual intensity of sound fluctuates due to the changes in pressure on the reed. Lang also recommends a variance in speed from 320 to 360 beats per minute.

Cecil Gold's survey, *Saxophone Performance Practices and Teaching in the United States and Canada,* asks respondents three questions concerning vibrato.[58] The first question asks how often the respondents use vibrato in performance. All answered that they either always or usually use vibrato in performance. No answers indicated only occasional or no use of vibrato. The second question is concerned with the type of vibrato production preferred. Of the 75 respondents, 58 prefer jaw vibrato and 14 prefer lip vibrato, while some comment that they use a combination of the two. Thirteen respondents state that they use throat vibrato; nine prefer diaphragm vibrato production. One respondent comments that he uses diaphragm vibrato due to the fact that he is an oboist, but he teaches jaw vibrato to his saxophone students.

Vibrato as an expressive device

Once a performer develops control over his vibrato, he can consider its function as an expressive musical device. Vibrato is just one of several ways of stressing notes in a musical phrase. A tone usually sounds better with vibrato, but it has a purely mechanical function unless it is under the expressive control of the player so that it can change as the character of the music changes.

Some of the ways that vibrato can be altered include increasing or decreasing the speed, widening or lessening the amplitude, and using non-vibrato.[59] One may equate various kinds of vibrato with various emotional states in music. The greater the amplitude, the more one is aware of it. Excited or intense music calls for a faster vibrato with greater amplitude. When performing accompanying figures, the vibrato should be more peaceful, or slower, and with less amplitude. A single tone can be enhanced by starting the vibrato from the straight tone and then increasing both speed and amplitude to the desired level. The exact degree of change to be introduced into the vibrato cannot be notated by the composer; it is left to the performer's taste. Familiarity with style, harmony, and balance is necessary for the performer to know how to use vibrato as an expressive tool.[60]

Carl Seashore's *Psychology of Music* from 1938 includes extensive research on the subject of vibrato. Seashore defines a good vibrato as a "pulsation of pitch, usually accompanied with synchronous pulsations of loudness and timbre, of such extent and rate as to give a pleasing flexibility, tenderness, and richness to the tone."[61] He goes further to discuss vibrato as an element of musical expression. Seashore believes that vibrato is a physiological rhythm present in man, related to the vibration that occurs "whenever paired muscles are innervated under emotional tension."[62]

Seashore also notes that solo parts give performers more latitude for vibrato prominence than ensemble parts.[63] This statement is reinforced by a study of string performance practices conducted by George Papich and Edward Rainbow in 1974.[64] The results of their testing conclude that while the speed and pitch width of vibrato are the same in solo playing and ensemble playing, the performers tend to use vibrato less often when performing in ensemble than when performing solo.

Saxophonists are encouraged to follow this example. In ensembles where many saxophones are used, a general rule is to eliminate vibrato for the sake of group intonation or blend, except for solo parts. A group or section of saxophones within an ensemble must learn to match styles of vibrato and to eliminate it for specific effects.[65]

Because vibrato is such a personal means of expression, differences in vibrato styles among various individual saxophonists are detected easily. Some generalizations can be made about differences in vibrato styles between the American and French schools of saxophone playing. When asked to define the differences between the two schools, respondents to the Cecil Gold survey state that the greatest difference comes in the area of vibrato. The French sound is defined largely by a fairly rapid, wide, more constant vibrato, while the American concept of vibrato is slower, more varied in width and speed, and used less often.[66]

Recorded examples demonstrate the basic differences in vibrato concept between French and American saxophonists. Jean-Marie Londeix, professor at the Bordeaux Conservatoire, was a student of Marcel Mule's. Londeix's vibrato is fairly constant, with little variation in speed and some variation in depth (Darius Milhaud, "Modere" from *Scaramouche,* Jean-Marie Londeix, saxophonist. Golden Crest RE 7066.).

American saxophonist Fred Hemke was a student of Marcel Mule's. Hemke exhibits the more constant vibrato of the French school, while making some use of non-vibrato, characteristic of the American school (David Ward, *An Abstract,* Fred Hemke, saxophonist. Lapider RG-576.).

Eugene Rousseau, professor at Indiana University, exhibits the American style of vibrato, even though he did some of his saxophone study with Marcel Mule. Rousseau's vibrato varies in both speed and amplitude to fit the musical phrase. The technique of non-vibrato is also evident (Frederic Chopin, "Largo" from *Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op, 65* [arr. Rousseau], Eugene Rousseau, saxophonist. Coronet 1601.).

The American vibrato style can be distinguished easily in the playing of Donald Sinta, professor at the University of Michigan and former student of Larry Teal's. Sinta's vibrato varies a great deal in both speed and amplitude. He also makes frequent use of non-vibrato to emphasize notes (Bernhard Heiden, "Adagio" from *Sonata for E-flat Saxophone and Piano,* Donald Sinta, saxophonist. Mark MRS 22868.). Even though each performer's vibrato is distinctive, the basic differences in French and American styles are evident.

The question remains whether or not one should perform works written prior to 1920 with vibrato.

Vibrato as a contemporary, avant-garde technique

Saxophonists must acquire vibrato control in order to perform in any type of situation, from Guy Lombardo's style to the French school, encompassing all speeds and widths. Flexibility of vibrato is so crucial that young saxophonists should be exposed to as wide a variety of styles as possible.[67]

This flexibility is even more critical in the performance of contemporary music. Vibrato manipulation is an important contemporary technique, easily mastered on the saxophone. Examples range from no vibrato to "vibratissimo," with every possible gradation in between.[68] Graphic representation of vibrato speed is an effective means of notation for communicating the desired vibrato speed to the performer. Bruno Bartolozzi's book *New Sounds for Woodwind* contains a chart that gives examples of graphic notation of vibrato.[69]

In his "Extensions of Technique for Clarinet and Saxophone," Ronald Caravan suggests using the abbreviations *vib.* or *v.* to indicate vibrato, and *non vib.* or *n. v.* to indicate no vibrato. He suggests notating differences in vibrato width or amplitude by increasing or decreasing the depth of the wave.[70] One example of a contemporary saxophone work that employs the technique of vibrato manipulation is *Improvisation I* by Ryo Noda (Paris: Alphonse Leduc Editions Musicales, 1974).

Conclusion

Vibrato has developed from Renaissance and baroque times, in which it played a minor role as an ornamental device; through the classical and romantic periods, when it was used sparingly for expressing passionate feelings; to the 20th century, in which it has become a vital part of musical expression.[71] What caused this emancipation of vibrato? A combination of factors can be cited: the popularity of individual soloists such as Fritz Kreisler, Jascha Heifetz, Marcel Moyse, and Rudy Wiedoeft, an abundance of methods and tutors, and the influence of jazz and popular music.

The question remains whether or not one should perform works written prior to 1920 with vibrato. Vibrato should be adjusted to the style and period of music played; it must be relative and flexible to the character of the music. When a baroque piece is played, the performer should perhaps adjust his vibrato to a more ornamental function.[72] A decision must be made by the performer as to how strictly he should follow performance practice from the time period of the music involved.

Larry Teal writes that vibrato "should be an honest, sincere utterance based on a sensitive control of all the instrumental, musical, and artistic knowledge of the performer."[73] Marcel Mule remarks, "Just as for the string instruments, vibrato confers on the saxophone all its expressive intensity, providing that it is the result of reasoned work."[74] Sigurd Rascher, the German-born saxophonist who immigrated to the United States in the 1930s, writes: "The production and use of vibrato ought to be governed by artistic

purposes and aims."[75] The key to effective vibrato usage is to develop vibrato skills to a level of flexibility where the performer is capable of performing in any manner he chooses, enabling him to support the emotional character of any style of music.

NOTES

51. Larry Teal, *The Art of Saxophone Playing* (Evanston, Ill.: Summy-Birchard Company, 1963), 54.

52. Ibid., 55.

53. Ibid., 60.

54. Cecil Leeson, *The Basis of Saxophone Tone Production: A Critical and Analytical Study,* D.F.A. dissertation, Chicago Musical College, 1955 (Muncie, Ind.: Enchante Enterprises, 1978), 76.

55. Fred Hemke, *Teacher's Guide to the Saxophone* (Elkhart, Ind.: H. & A. Selmer, Inc., 1966), 8.

56. Ibid., 9.

57. Rosemary Lang, "Teaching Vibrato," *The Instrumentalist* (Jan. 1963), reprinted in *Woodwind Anthology: A Compendium of Articles from The Instrumentalist on the Woodwind Instruments* (Evanston, Ill.: The Instrumentalist Co., 1980), 792-93.

58. Cecil Gold, *Saxophone Performance Practices and Teaching in the United States and Canada* (Moscow, Idaho: School of Music Publications, University of Idaho, 1973), 29.

59. Arthur Weisberg, *The Art of Wind Playing* (New York: Schirmer Books division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 130.

60. Ibid., 131.

61. Carl E. Seashore, *Psychology of Music* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1938), 33.

62. Ibid., 51.

63. Ibid., 52.

64. George Papich and Edward Rainbow, "A Pilot Study of Performance Practices of Twentieth-Century Musicians," *Journal of Research in Music Education,* 22 (1974): 33.

65. Hemke, *Teacher's Guide to the Saxophone,* 10.

66. Gold, *Saxophone Performance Practices,* 32-35.

67. Ibid., 31.

68. Bruno Bartolozzi, *New Sounds for Woodwind,* trans. and ed. Reginald Smith Brindle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 25.

69. Ibid., 25.

70. Ronald L. Caravan, "Extensions of Technique for Clarinet and Saxophone," D.M.A. dissertation, Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1974 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1974), 200, 203.

71. Weisberg, *The Art of Wind Playing,* 100.

72. Sigurd Rascher, "The Rational Saxophone: A Discussion of the Most Flexible Wind Instrument," *Woodwind Magazine,* 2, no. 9 (May 1950): 9.

73. Teal, *The Art of Saxophone Playing,* 54.

74. Marcel Mule, "The Saxophone," *The Instrumentalist* April 1958), reprinted in *Woodwind Anthology: A Compendium of Articles from the Instrumentalist on the Woodwind Instruments* (Evanston, Ill.: The Instrumentalist Co., 1980), 787.

75. Sigurd Rascher, Letter to the author, May 22, 1986.

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the use of vibrato on wind instruments, with the technique eventually becoming a more constant tone coloration as well as an expressive device.

Vibrato

Early saxophone methods imply that prior to the 20th century, saxophonists did not use vibrato in their playing. The first saxophone method, Georges Kastner's *Methode Complete et Raisonnee de Saxophone* of 1845, does not mention *vibrato*.[25] In a discussion of how to produce dynamic changes of crescendo and diminuendo, Kastner states that volume changes should be made in a gradual manner with no fluctuation of the tone.

Early 20th-century saxophone methods mention vibrato but discourage its use. Paul de Ville's *Universal Method for Saxophone* of 1908 [26] and Ben Vereecken's *Foundation to Saxophone Playing* of 1917 [27] make identical statements concerning vibrato: "Avoid the tremolo or vibrato style of playing. See that your tone is absolutely clear and pure."

E. Franko Goldman devotes a chapter to the saxophone in his 1934 book, *Band Betterment.*[28] He warns that the tremolo tone acquired by most saxophonists cannot be tolerated in a fine band. He feels that the problem stems from players trying to imitate "laughing jackasses ... neighing horses, and mooing cows." Under general pointers for all bandsmen, he encourages a steady and pure tone without tremolo.[29]

Some early 20th-century saxophonists who performed during the transitional period of adding vibrato continued to adhere to the style of the past, playing without vibrato. Jean Moremans, saxophone soloist with the John Philip Sousa Band in 1885,[30] recorded solos in 1905 with a straight, steady tone.[31] Eugene Coffin, who had played at President McKinley's inauguration in 1896, also recorded in 1905 without vibrato.[32] Marcel Mule recalls that before 1923, his predecessor in the French Guarde Republicaine Band, Francois Combelle, played without vibrato.[33]

As vibrato began to be used in playing the saxophone, various methods of production were explored. The first of these was a breath impulse vibrato like that used on the flute. H. Benne Henton, saxophonist with Sousa in 1905, recorded in 1899 without vibrato.[34] But in a 1916 recording of his solo *Laverne,* he used a slight impulse vibrato on most long notes.[35] Tom Brown, lead player with the Six Brown Brothers Saxophone Sextet, used a very fast impulse vibrato on a 1916 recording, while the others, playing accompanying parts, used none.[36] Some saxophonists developed the very annoying "nanny goat" throat vibrato in the 1920s. These included both classical and popular saxophonists such as Clyde Doerr[37] and Paul Biese.[38]

A second method of vibrato production that enjoyed brief popularity was that of loosening the embouchure and shaking the instrument. Gustav Bumke discusses this method in his *Saxophon-Schule* of 1926 as being a technique of jazz musicians.[39] Cecil Leeson also mentions shaking the instrument as a method of vibrato production in his pamphlet *The Saxophone Comes of Age.*[40] This was the first method of vibrato production that Leeson used before switching to jaw vibrato.[41]

The third method of vibrato production, jaw vibrato, has proved to be the best for the saxophone. Rudy Wiedoeft champions it in his *Three Talks to Saxophonists* of 1923.[42] He believes that the impulse vibrato is too fast and difficult to control and that the proper way to produce vibrato on the saxophone is by alternately tightening or loosening the lips.

Wiedoeft began playing saxophone in 1911, and he made his first recording in 1917 using a full vibrato. He influenced many saxophonists because of his great performing skill and stage presence. His style was a mixture of classical and popular elements, attempting to copy the contemporary violin style of Fritz Kreisler and Jascha Heifetz.[43]

The 1920s became a transitional period for the use of vibrato in the playing of wind instruments, reinforced by widespread vibrato use in jazz and popular music. The Six Brown Brothers' popular vaudeville act helped spur the saxophone craze in America from 1910 to 1920. Popular dance orchestras of this time introduced vibrato in the winds' playing to match that of the strings. Saxophones were used in these bands as substitutes for the strings or the clarinets.[44] The Paul Whiteman Orchestra was one of the first to use a section of alto and tenor saxophones. In a recording of the Whiteman group from 1921, the saxophones match the narrow, fast vibrato of the strings.[45]

Marcel Moyse wrote in 1950, "I often ask myself where the general vibrato opinion would be if jazz hadn't come along as a powerful ally of those who turned in the vibrato direction fifty years ago ...."[46] Percy Grainger, composer and saxophonist, wrote an article for *The Etude* magazine in 1924 titled "What Effect is Jazz Likely to Have Upon the Music of the Future?"[47] He includes the indroduction of vibrato to wind instruments as one of the many great achievements of jazz.

Two important classical saxophonists who began their careers in the 1920s, Cecil Leeson and Marcel Mule, each performed jazz or popular dance music and credit its influence to varying degrees on their own vibratos. Cecil Leeson, an American saxophonist, began studying the instrument in 1919. He chose as his model the foremost saxophone soloist of the day, Rudy Wiedoeft. As mentioned earlier, Leeson first produced his vibrato by shaking the instrument. After reading the Wiedoeft pamphlet *Three Talks to Saxophonists,* he switched to jaw vibrato. When asked if his performance of jazz music influenced his vibrato, Leeson stated no; the jazz band leaders often requested his vibrato to be wider, which was the style, but he preferred to copy the more controlled vibrato of Rudy Wiedoeft.[48] A recording demonstrates Cecil Leeson's vibrato (Paul Creston, "Meditative," from *Concerto, Op. 26.* Cecil Leeson, saxophonist. Enchante ENS-2005).

In France during the 1920s, Marcel Mule played saxophone with the Guarde Republicaine Band. At this time, saxophonists and other wind instrument players played virtually without vibrato. As a former violinist, Mule felt that the expressive possibilities of the saxophone seemed quite limited in comparison with the strings and the human voice. After World War I, Mule first heard American jazz saxophonists who made use of a very wide, pronounced vibrato. In 1921, Mule began to supplement his income by playing in jazz bands, where he learned to produce this intense vibrato. Mule was then forced to play in two completely different styles: with vibrato for jazz playing, and without vibrato for classical playing.[49]

At the World Saxophone Congress in 1979, Marcel Mule related his first experience of utilizing vibrato in his classical playing. In 1927, he was asked to perform various saxophone solo parts with the Paris Opera-Comique orchestra. One such part was for a new ballet that included several popular dance tunes of the time, one of which contained a saxophone solo in blues style. The passage was marked "very expressively, with vibrato." On the first reading Mule played the passage without vibrato, but the composer insisted that Mule play with the indicated vibrato. He did as the composer asked, but tempered his vibrato somewhat from the style he had used in jazz, hoping to avoid "hostile reactions" in a place he "judged improper for this mode of expression." Contrary to what he expected, he received a favorable reaction from his peers and decided to add vibrato judiciously to all of his classical playing.[50]

[Continued next issue]

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Since counters on Video Cassette Recorders (VCR's) are not consistent with each other even in like brand names, we have a running time code on the videotape to assist you in finding specific points on the cassette.

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0:01:37	Opening Remarks
0:05:04	The Beginning Saxophone Player
0:07:12	The Concept
0:10:31	The Strap
0:10:57	Breathing
0:16:48	Embouchure
0:31:08	Producing the Sound—Attacks
0:40:57	Intonation
0:58:15	Vibrato
1:18:10	Dynamics
1:23:16	Technique
1:31:17	Tonguing/Articulation
1:43:08	Range
1:58:04	Closing Remarks

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