VIOLIN VIBRATO

MASTERY AND ARTISTIC USES

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Practical Suggestions for Correct Technical Development and Good Violin Tone Production

by SIEGFRIED EBERHARDT

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by SIEGFRIED EBERHARDT

Translated from the German by Melzar Chaffee

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I.

IT is only in recent years that the problems of violin technic have been given more careful consideration than was formerly thought necessary. It is true that directions for overcoming certain technical difficulties may be found in the many schools of violin playing, but they rarely touch the essence of the difficulty, and usually neglect entirely to analyze and separate a difficult passage into its simplest forms. The number of works which treat only of violin technic is small in comparison to the great number of theoretical works at the disposal of the pianist. This may, in part, be due to the more difficult and complicated movements necessarily connected with the playing of the violin, the holding and supporting of which alone result in complications of the technical apparatus which do not exist in the case of the piano or 'cello.

The playing of either of these instruments permits of a hanging position of the arms, and the movements of playing do not make such great demands upon the strength of the player.

Although the movements of playing the piano are comparatively simple, they are considered of special importance. In fact, they form the basis of the method of a master.

In playing the violin, the problems of technic are made more complicated by the fact that each arm performs a different function. Naturally, a large number of treatises give attention to the problems of bowing and of the left hand. It is strange that one function of the left hand, and the most important one, has rarely been mentioned. In the following, I wish to call attention to a point which is of the greatest importance to the whole technical apparatus employed in playing the violin. I will say at once, however, that we are concerned here with a purely technical problem, and not with the interpretive side of playing, nor with the declamation of an art work. We will discuss here only those functions and conditions which enable us to express what we feel through the medium of beautiful tone.

It is time that we finally determine what belongs to the spiritual side of music, and what, in contrast thereto, belongs alone to the technic of playing.

First of all, from my personal experience, the following:—

Very many violinists, pupils and amateurs, complain that even when they know

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or can imagine how a piece of music ought to sound, they are unable to play it with the desired beauty of tone. Such a player, for example, might possess sufficient technical equipment and the necessary powers of interpretation to play a Mozart Concerto without, however, being able to satisfy fully the demand for artistic expression which he makes upon himself.

What is the difference, then, aside from interpretation, between the artist and the amateur?

The playing of an artist "sounds" always, and at all times. It differs essentially from the playing of others who strive in vain for artistic perfection, in one point, in point of quality. It is not, as most people seem to believe, the greater technical facility to which the finish of his playing is due. There are amateurs who astonish by their playing of Paganini Caprices. They apparently do everything, but in reality, nothing. It is only astonishing that such difficulties can be overcome even in such an inadequate manner. Were it a matter of technical facility alone, they too, with their limited knowledge, would be able to arouse enthusiasm. On the other hand, an artist like Burmester is able, with unassuming little pieces, to hold the attention of an audience for a whole evening and make a deep impression upon his listeners. For very many laymen, the enjoyment of an evening in a concert hall reaches its climax when a great artist is induced to play a simple little encore piece. Could the artist with a prodigious technic interpret simple pieces perfectly, then all players who perform technically difficult tasks should be able to charm with simple means. This, however, is not the case.

I would here again emphasize the point which many accept as a matter of course, and of which so few seem to realize the full significance:—finish in playing does not necessarily come from agility of fingers acquired by technical study. I maintain that the quality of a performance is never the result of technical work. A certain amount of finish is noticeable in the playing of those beginners whom we are accustomed to consider specially talented. The general belief is that the tonal finish of their playing will improve as their technic develops. This is a great mistake!

Let us here depict the diseased condition, to use an inelegant expression, of a violinist who, starting with these false conceptions, exerts himself to the limit of endurance at his studies, but who never arrives at any degree of successful result. Of him it might justly be said:— "Jubilant unto Heaven—sad unto death." He studies faithfully, and in many respects a certain degree of progress is apparent. Nevertheless, he is not entirely satisfied with his own playing. In comparison with others upon whom he looks as more highly favored

in point of talent, he finds his own work crude and lifeless. He feels that a certain something is lacking in himself which seems to be natural to others. This extra something, which can be but some trifling thing, but which constitutes the very essence of musical delivery, he searches for here and there, calls it inspiration, soul, without being able to satisfactorily define the thing that he is in search of. At last, one day he feels that he has found it. It is there. He can do everything. Each passage so carefully practiced, responds lightly and without effort, and his tone is possessed of uncommon brilliancy. It seems to him that the time has come when his arduous efforts are to be crowned with success. That he might be heard now! The next morning however, he makes the discouraging discovery that the old conditions still exist. His fingers, which yesterday seemed to go of themselves, today refuse to operate in the same masterly manner. His playing again lacks brilliancy and repose. The whole work must begin anew. Most people, following a false train of thought, now say to themselves that a fortunate mood or disposition had, for the time, removed certain hindrances; hence the apparent optical, or more correctly speaking, auricular improvement in his playing! Mood, indeed! Unfortunately the player's mood is rarely, if ever, to be depended upon. The erratic reasoning is continued in the hope that all this will be permanently corrected by increased technical facility. I have never seen this hope realized.

Violinists of recognized artistic ability must often struggle against indisposition. At times they are even at the mercy of what they call indisposition. Their in many respects masterly command of the fingerboard is at times destroyed by influences which they cannot explain. They lose confidence in their own ability. Although their musical taste prevents them from playing badly, only in comparatively few cases do they ever reach that degree of absolute finish which distinguishes the playing of the really great virtuoso. They turn to all manner of expedients in trying to free themselves from these "hindrances." Thus, recently many have tried massage, and not without beneficial results--the reason for this I will mention later—but whatever they do, they still fail to reach that degree of perfection which characterizes the real virtuoso. Even he may suffer at times from indisposition, but he is usually in form. Rarely indeed is he really indisposed. The exception but proves the rule. The concertizing virtuoso, who performs here today, and tomorrow elsewhere, cannot afford to be often indisposed, thereby imperilling his reputation, perhaps to the extent of ruining his whole career. Is this state of "perpetual preparedness" a sign of extraordinary violin talent?

Allow me here to call the attention of teachers to a phenomenon which at first glance seems possible of being explained by the fact that different pupils

possess different degrees of talent. Certain pupils, considered talented, play well from the beginning. Often the playing of pupils materially improves as soon as they attempt to play "with feeling."

Talented pupils may be divided into two groups. The playing of one group varies; today it is good, but at other times, not so good. As regards tone quality, it is uneven and the left hand uncertain. The playing of the second group, on the contrary, is very even always, and one is never unpleasantly surprised by the appearance of indisposition of any kind. They take up the violin and their playing "sounds." They may have practiced but little, but the comparatively good quality of their work never seems to suffer, even when their technic is inadequate. We listen to them with more pleasure than to others who possess greater technical facility. Whatever they play, they give the listener a fair idea of their ability, even when playing something that is technically beyond them. How is this to be explained? What is it here that satisfies, even astonishes, the listener? Is it the manifestation of emotion?

For the present we leave these questions unanswered and, by way of comparison, look into the process of evolution of the great artist. As a child he, too, charms his listeners, even before his technic is thoroughly ripened; that is, his playing, from the beginner's stage, is already stamped with the quality of artistic finish. I quote here a few sentences from the Rode-Kreutzer-Baillot Violin School which help to illustrate the essential characteristics of this quality of artistic finish. The author speaks of the different character of tone of violins, and continuing, says: "but aside from this pliant, peculiar sound of the instrument, there is still another tone which the individual emotion of the musician begets. This tone is so characteristic that the same violin, played upon by two different musicians, appears not to be the same instrument. Even before the theme is ended, and before the listener is able to comprehend the idea of the composition, this tone fastens itself upon his senses and stirs his emotion. The first tone is to the ear what the first glance is to the eye; in it lies the magic power of the irresistible charm and of the deep indissoluble impression. Paganini's tone and that of Tartini are still so clearly remembered that one is well able to distinguish the individual character of each. For a long time Viotti's expressive tone has been silent, but its hold upon us is such that it will never be forgotten. Imperishable is its imprint, which lives in the memory as in the heart. To acquire a beautiful tone, the pupil should prepare himself by the given mechanical exercises. Beauty of tone begets emotion, and deep in his own soul the pupil discovers the spring from which he draws the power to stir the souls of others."

"Even before the listener is able to comprehend the idea of the composition, this tone fastens itself upon his senses and stirs his emotions," etc. Here we find exactly what I said above: the intellect plays no part in the matter.

The tone! "Beauty of tone begets emotion; and, deep in his own soul, the pupil discovers the spring from which he draws the power to stir the souls of others." I desire to call particular attention to this last sentence. First of all, the author rightly states that the tone, more than anything else, takes hold of the listener and keeps him under its spell. That is precisely what I would again emphasize here, namely:—Sound, particularly beautiful sound, is the most important factor of the art of playing the violin. All players strive for the beautiful tone. Perhaps more or less conscientiously, each one endeavors to make his technic "sound." The beautiful sound, the so-called fine, soulful tone—that is the essential characteristic of the whole art of delivery. I remember the playing of a pupil whose technic was not extraordinary, but who played a Mozart Concerto with such a rich, full tone that he completely captivated his audience. Our author continues, "deep in the soul, etc." The soul of the artist, then is reflected in the tone. This sentence contains a grave error, a fundamental error, which offers opportunity for the most preposterous conclusions. Rightly interpreted it becomes but a half-truth. If the tone, here considered of such great importance, reflects the soul, then the beautiful tone should reveal a noble and deeply sympathetic nature. And since so very many violinists play "with feeling," I should like to ask the psychologically not uninteresting question: Is it really true that violinists generally possess more nobility of character than other people? For my part I cannot believe this, for it has been my experience that persons with the crudest natures may sometimes play in a most deeply affecting manner. And every teacher will have found that some pupils, in whom not a trace of a deep or sympathic nature is to be discovered, often play with beautiful tone, while others, on the contrary, possessing all the exceptional qualifications of a soulful nature, are not able to find adequate means of expressing upon their instruments what they inwardly feel. Now how does the matter stand between the soul and tone? Is the beautiful tone something which must be sought "deep in the soul?" What creates individuality of tone? My answer is:-
The tone is beautiful when correctly produced; it is not an expression of the soul.

I do not dispute, however, that tone is individual. Wilhelmj's tone and Sarasate's tone differed essentially. Yet both charmed the world with beauty of tone A large number of works upon the subject of beautiful tone have appeared, offering the student all manner of nonsensical methods for acquiring it. Nobody

will dispute that Flesch, Burmester, Ysaye, Marteau and Wittenberg, for example, each have a beautiful tone. In the case of Sarasate we see that it is not necessary to add the attribute "large." Nevertheless, Sarasate's comparatively weak tone sounded just as distinct and full in the farthermost corner of the large Philharmonic Hall, as in the immediate vicinity of the stage. This "small tone" must have possessed extraordinary carrying-power. The quality common to the tone of all great artists is beauty. How may we then determine—this is our main question—wherein lies the difference in character of tone? Let us imagine that we hear one after the other of the great artists draw his bow across the open strings of his violin. Could we in an adjoining room distinguish one player from another? At best we might be able to tell Wilhelmj from Sarasate, because the tone of one would be stronger than that of the other. This, it is plain, is only a dynamic difference. Should all play equally *piano*, then every possible difference would be completely removed. This fact has been confirmed by prominent scientists. Nevertheless, the playing of one artist differs from the playing of another artist—aside from difference of interpretation—only in one respect, and that is in *tone*. We have just seen that on the open strings, the tone of one artist is not distinguishable from that of another. Individuality of tone can arise only when the fingers of the left hand are placed upon the strings. These fingers vibrate. They vibrate differently. Difference in vibrato begets difference in tone. The reply to this will be that these facts have long been known, but has the importance of this apparently insignificant little movement, in its bearing upon the action of the left hand and upon the work of the right arm, been fully realized? Are we to believe that the vibrato of every famous violinist is correct, even when the effect is different?

The answers to these questions are in no respect simple. Far reaching as they are, they make clear the devious and erroneous paths into which some in the past have been led, because of a false conception of the functions here discussed.

In the following chapters I quote instances from various works which appear to have important bearing upon our problem. From more than 100 works at my disposal, only the Joachim-Moser School and Tottmann's "Booklet on the Violin" touch the heart of the subject.

I. Leopold Mozart: "An Attempt at an Elementary Violin School."

(Augsburg, 1756) Chapter V.

How to bring forth a good tone from the Violin by skillful manipulation of the Bow.

¶ 1.

"It may appear to some that the present discussion is introduced in the wrong place, and should preferably have been inserted in the beginning, in order that the pupil might become skillful in bringing forth a pure tone at the same time that he is learning to hold the violin. Still, when one considers that in order tc play the beginner must necessarily learn to draw the bow, and further, that he has enough to do to correctly observe all the prescribed, necessary rules, and with great pains must give his attention, first to the stroke, then to the notes, and to the time, and to all the other signs, I am, I believe, not to be blamed for having postponed this discussion until the present time.

¶ 2.

It has already been mentioned above that the violin should from the beginning be strung with thick strings, that, with firm pressure of the fingers and a forcible retention of the bow, the muscles become hardened and a powerful, masculine stroke is thereby acquired. For what sounds more insipid than the playing of one who, lacking the confidence to properly attack the instrument, barely touches the string with the bow (often held with but two fingers) producing thereby a sort of artificial whisper, so that only a note here and there can be heard, and all is as indistinct and veiled as in a dream. Therefore, use heavier strings; try also, when using force, to produce a pure tone, whereby a division of the bow into its strong and weak parts will be of great value.

¶ 3.

Every forcibly attacked tone is preceded by an almost imperceptibly weaker sound. Otherwise it would not be a tone, but an unpleasant and unintelligible noise. This weakness is also to be heard at the end of each tone. One must learn how to divide the violin bow into its strong and weak parts, and by means of an even pressure, produce beautiful and effective tones.

¶ 4.

Let this be the first division: Begin the up or down stroke with an agreeable softness of tone; increase the tone by a scarcely perceptible and gradual pressure; apply the greatest pressure at the middle of the bow, and modify this by gradually relaxing the pressure, until, at the end of the bow, the tone becomes inaudible. This must be practiced slowly and with as much retention of the bow as possible, so that one may be able, in an adagio movement, to hold a long, pure and delicate tone. It is similarly most effective when a singer holds a long, beautiful note without taking breath, and alternates between soft and loud. Here it must be especially

noticed that with soft tones the fingers of the left hand may be loosened and the bow moved from the bridge toward the finger-board; but with loud tones, the fingers must press the strings firmly and the bow move nearer the bridge.

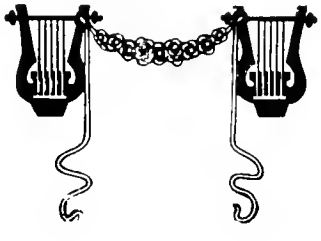
¶ 5.

In this first part particularly, as in the following, the fingers of the left hand should make a slight, slow movement, not sidewise, but forward and backward, alternately toward the bridge and scroll of the violin; with light bow-pressure, slowly, and with stronger bow-pressure quicker."

Here follow a large number of paragraphs upon dynamics and expression.

Chapter XII.

"All depends upon good execution. Daily experience confirms this fact. Many an embryo composer is charmed and flattered upon hearing his works performed by a good player who is able to make effects and lend character to the music of which he himself had never dreamed; thus, by good performance alone, the player makes the whole miserable inanity at least bearable. And who has not often heard the best compositions so miserably executed that the composer had difficulty in recognizing his own works."



II. "The Duties of an Orchestra Violinist," by Johann Friedrich Reichhardt (Berlin 1776).

I. A good, full tone.

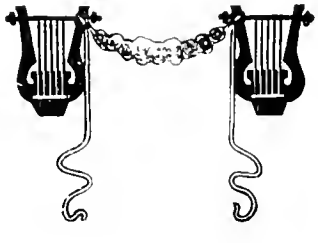
"A good tone is produced as follows: have each finger in the exact place — not a hair too high nor too low; let the pressure of the left hand be as firm as possible; draw the bow in a straight line, not too near the bridge, but not too far away; hold it firmly, but do not press too forcibly against the string, so that all the hair and not, as is commonly the case, the side-hair only touch the string; and do not let the bow always rest upon the strings, particularly where, as we shall presently see, it is permissible to withdraw it.

Reasons: It is not only necessary on account of pure intonation, to place the finger in the exact spot upon the string, but particularly so in order to obtain a fine, clear, full tone. The pitch of a tone may be correct even to the finest ear, yet an ear that is able to distinquish quarter tones and even the eighth and sixteenth part of a tone cannot hear the thirty-second and sixty-fourth part of a tone, when perhaps only the one-hundred-twentieth part is lacking to make the stopped tone clear and full, which is the case only when the vibrations are perfect.

That the pressure of the left hand should be as firm as possible, is necessary because the finger, by shortening the string, fixes the limit of vibration, and should this not be perfectly correct the tone will be impure. The bow should not be drawn obliquely, as the tone will whistle; it should not be drawn too close to the bridge, because there the tension of the strings is greatest, and if, in order to vibrate the strings strongly, exceptional force is applied to the bow, especially when the string is at its entire length, a disagreeable, jarring tone will result; but it should not be drawn too far away from the bridge, because then the force of the bow will not be in the same relation to the tension of the string."

He gives further directions and continues:

"These are all unimportant details to the pupil who can perhaps only play a simple minuet, yet famous virtuosi often stop incorrectly, to a fine ear, and scratch and whistle with the bow, and therefore have a poor tone. Nothing is more rare than violinists and violoncellists who possess a fine tone. The true cause is given in the first directions. Pupils are not made to play scales enough, if at all."



III. Dexterity and Certainty in Placing the Fingers.

This point is of pre-eminent importance, yet it is the least thoroughly considered. The entire instrumental cantilena depends upon it. (In what way, the author does not explain; he speaks only of "Moving the fingers through various positions.")

Froehlich: Violin School.

To attain a beautiful, singing tone, the author confines himself to the rules for bowing.

Karl Courvoisier: Violin Technic. (Cologne, 1878.)

"Furthermore, let us dispense with another extreme remedy for an extreme case, even if sanctioned by habitual use; I refer to the shaking of the finger. The wavering of a finger means uncertainty of pitch; only when this uncertainty is so trifling as to barely be noticeable in a consonant harmony does it relieve the tone of stiffness, and give the impression that the player is a person of feeling. The shake has really no more effect than that, for when too distinct and quick, the tone sounds nervously excited and has a nervous, exciting effect upon the ear, rather than a soothing one, or the tone wails and whines so that the listener is at a loss to know whether to laugh at or sympathize with the player. The whole real power of expression lies rather in the stroke of the bow; primarily in an intelligent accentuation, producing rhythmic clarity, and then particularly in the increase and decrease of tone power."

Piedöhl: "How to Acquire a Large Tone and Expression in Playing."

"Next to a finished technic, large tone and expression in playing are the ideals of every violinist; they are not the gift of Heaven, only bestowed upon genius, but they are the result of studious observation, proper position of the violin and correct bowing. With thorough study, success in these two chief essentials of playing will not be lacking."

Kross.

"So that he may now direct his attention to acquiring a truly beautiful tone. Tone-colors, the nuances from pianissimo to fortissimo, are in music what the arrangements of light and shade are in painting. By these means, in an adagio as well as in the cantilena generally, the violinist makes his greatest effect."

Directions for bowing follow.

Joachim-Moser: Violin School.

"It is of fundamental importance that the musical imagination of the pupil be fostered from the beginning. Tartini said: 'Fine singing demands fine tone.' The young violinist should never play a tone before first singing it, thereby becoming thoroughly conscious of what he intends to produce.

Book II. Next to the portamento, the shake or vibrato is the most important means of expression of the left hand. Spohr said about it: When a singer sings an impassioned movement,

a shake in the voice, similar to the vibration of a bell forcibly struck, is noticeable. The violinist is able to produce a striking imitation of this, as of many other peculiarities of the human voice. It consists of a slight wavering of the tone alternately above and below the correct pitch. and it is produced by a shaking movement of the left hand toward the bridge. But this movement must not be too great, and the deviation from the perfect pitch of the tone hardly noticeable to the ear.' The pupil should, therefore, avoid using it too frequently and in the wrong place. The above mentioned instances, as employed by the singer, serve to indicate to the violinist its proper application. Let it be used only as an expression of passion, and to intensify notes marked *sf* or ⟩. Long notes may also be enlivened and strengthened by this means. The effect is also fine in a crescendo from *piano* to *forte* if the shake begins slowly and becomes quicker as the tone increases in power. The shake may be divided into four kinds:

1. Quick, for strongly accentuated tones.
2. Slower, for broad tones of impassioned cantilena passages.
3. Slow at first and becoming quicker with increasing tone.
4. Quick at first and becoming slower with decreasing tone, and with very long tones.

Both of these last two kinds are difficult, and require much practice in order that the passing from a quick shake to a slow one be done evenly and not suddenly.

To this discussion it is only necessary to add a little advice regarding the use of the shake. The wavering of the intonation, caused by the shake, must not become a cramped kind of trembling in the hand or arm, but — according to the demands of the passage — a more or less quick rocking movement of the hand, with the wrist kept very loose. The latter will perform its function better the less it is required to support the violin. While using the shake it is therefore advisable to allow the neck of the violin to rest only upon the inner side of the thumb joint (in the higher positions, upon the ball of the thumb) so that the instrument does not come in contact with any other part of the hand except the finger-tips. If the violin be held according to directions, firmly under the chin, the shake will in no way interfere with the free movements of the fingers or hand, and it is only a question of time and practice when this means of expression, as indicated by Spohr, may be acquired. The pupil, however, cannot be too emphatically warned against its habitual use, particularly in the wrong place."

Albert Tottmann: "Booklet on the Violin"
Part II. The Character of the Tone.

"Although the production of tone on the violin depends in a large measure upon good bowing, yet the firm, precise stopping of the fingers of the left hand contributes not a little toward giving body, clarity and pregnance to the tone. There are three kinds of violin tones: open string; stopped tones which are the double or octave of the open string with which they vibrate; and covered tones, which, besides themselves, have no other free tone on the violin. Accordingly, the scales may be divided into free (with open strings), and covered (without open strings, as D flat major.) The sound of the covered scales is duller than that of the free or open-string scales. To equalize this unevenness, and at the same time enhance the carrying power of the tone, particularly in slow passages, the vibrato is employed.

By means of the vibrato, the vibration of the string (the life of the tone) is increased and the tone made more clear.

VI. When the pupil is able to keep the given position with ease, the teacher should try to obtain greater surety of the fingers by emancipating the fingers from the hand. This may be done in two ways. First, the teacher should require the pupil to move the thumb slowly back and forth along the neck of the violin, then loosen the lower joint of the first finger from the violin neck, and lightly move the lower part of the hand, at first slowly and then faster. (Preparation for the vibrato.) In this exercise, a firm placing of the fingers and flexibility of the hand are essential. Both of tnese exercises are exceptionally fine for the emancipation of the inner side of the hand from the violin neck, necessary later in shifting positions and for making the fingers more independent of the hand."

Joseph Bloch: "Method of Violin-playing and Violin-teaching." The Vibrato.

"A minute, intentional impurity of pitch is caused by the shaking movement of the finger. Therein originates the vibrato—an imitation of the trembling human voice in moments of passion. The vibrato, like the portamento, should only be used in moderation, or it becomes sentimental and annoys. Leopold Mozart early protested against a too frequent use of the vibrato. 'Some violinists shake on every note, as though they had a fever.' Its beauty depends upon the speed. Only a quick vibrato makes a good effect. The nervous, trembling vibrato, and still more so, the slow shake, even when used in the proper place, sounds unpleasant and is to be avoided. Some French players use a peculiar kind of vibrato, intended less as a means of expression than as a means of making the right arm and wrist independent."

Paul Stoeving: "The Art of Bowing."

How may a beautiful, singing tone on the violin be acquired?

"Naturally, much depends upon the inborn talent of the pupil, and to a certain extent upon the quality of his instrument. It is, however, unquestionable that, even under the most favorable circumstances, a beautiful tone is the result of continuous study, keen observation and conscientious self-criticism, especially upon these points:

(a) Special tone studies—particularly long notes with slowly drawn bow, must be practiced.

The author continues:

(b) Kinds of bowing.

(c) Shading of tone.

(d) No opportunity of hearing great violinists and singers should be lost, and it should be particularly noticed how these artists treat the cantilena, etc."

III.

LET us confine ourselves to the excerpts quoted. We see that the majority of these authorities believe that quality of tone depends essentially upon the bow. Also, those who give some attention to the vibrato and concede something of its significance, admit its importance as a means of enhancing the quality of the tone. In none of the violin schools, nor in any directions for acquiring a fine tone, however, is the great dependence of the functions of the left hand and of the right arm upon this one movement fully recognized. Nowhere is the full significance of the vibrato thoroughly understood and emphasized.

The main point of our subject, then, necessitates a thorough investigation of the effect of the vibrato-movement upon the left hand and the right arm. This movement, the undoubted influence of which must be admitted, has been either entirely neglected, or it has been treated as a matter of only secondary importance. It is not only of more than secondary importance, but it is the principal function of the whole technical apparatus. Beauty of tone has always been considered a special gift; and to acquire it we have contented ourselves with experiments upon the right arm, and have sought for secrets where no secrets exist.

In regard to the vibrato, I can claim that:—

Artistic finish in playing is impossible without a correctly made vibrato. The bow occupies a dependent relationship—is dependent upon the left hand. The left hand is entirely dependent upon the oscillation. No matter how great the technical facility, it will not always be "ready" and to be depended upon unless the vibrato function is correct. There always remains the possibility of the greatest technic failing, if the movements of the left hand are incorrect.

The correct vibrato pre-supposes a full-sounding technic.

Let us turn back once more. As we have already seen, the playing of different violinists is not distinguishable when confined to the open strings. The individual characteristics of different artists are also not recognizable as long as the fingers are held passive upon the strings. The difference in playing only becomes apparent when the vibrato is employed. We are able at once to distinguish Hartmann from Ysaye, Petschnikoff from Flesch, by the difference in their vibratos alone. The masters do not differ essentially in their hand-

ling of the bow, by which only dynamic shadings are obtained; but they do differ widely in the movements of the left hand. Here alone, in the individualization of tone, clearly lies the great importance of the vibrato.

Some artists have an extremely quick shake; others a slower one of greater amplitude. Having excluded differences in interpretation from our question, I will also exclude the shifting of positions at this point. For a clear illustration it is necessary to consider only four tones, played in the first position, and with the shake.

The definition of the word "vibrato" reads:—To vibrate, in a musical sense, is to alter the pitch. Vibration (oscillation) is the forward and backward movement made by a body or part thereof, held in a fixed position or balance, when this balance is disturbed by any cause and the body is released to the forces which re-establish the original position or balance. A complete forward and backward movement, for example, from the lowest to the highest position and return to the lowest, is reckoned as a vibration, and these are designated as the number of vibrations per second of time.

Vibration, then, is the alteration of pitch, caused by the movement of a body or part thereof, forward and backward of a certain fixed position or balance. The mistake made by most players is that they confuse trembling with vibrating; that is, they tremble with the hand without thereby conveying a specific movement to the finger. The result is a wavering of the pitch, similar to that of the correct vibrato, but not an alteration of the pitch according to fundamental principles. Naturally, the tone is affected. The effect might be expressed physically by the following lines:—the trembling movement results in points instead of waves as must be the case with the correct movement. The effect upon all the muscles of the arm, of the trembling shake, (which is more or less of a convulsive movement), can be most convincingly ascertained by experiments upon one's self or upon pupils. Not only does the trembling shake hold the hand cramped upon one point, instead of freeing and lightening it, but—what is of much greater importance—its direction is false.

In comparison, imagine a runner with his body inclined in the direction he goes. Let this runner incline his body sidewards in another direction from his course and imagine what his progress would be like. The trembling shake is exactly the same idea. Instead of only one movement there are two, each of which continually interferes with the other, tending to throw it out of its original direction. Some players find particular difficulty in playing scales, because the lightness of the hand is interfered with by an incorrect vibrato, and the hand is thereby prevented from moving easily in the desired direction.

The scale is a run which moves step by step in one direction toward a certain point. Here the effect of this movement is most plainly evident. Fatigue of the arm is another result. The groups of muscles, not sufficiently emancipated from each other, being connected with the arm, or constantly strained by the convulsive shake, finally become numb and fatigued. I would recall to your attention the favorable circumstances of disposition. By some chance (here massage is of good effect) the hand is brought into a natural state. At once the entire technical apparatus operates; the arms become exceptionally light; the fingers seem to move to a certain extent of their own volition, and for some reason the tone sounds full and round. The reason for this is that the correct vibrato relaxes the muscles of the hand and arm, while the incorrect vibrato contracts them.

The cause of the uncertainty of the left hand originates alone in these conditions. It is not natural that on one day passages come out smoothly and easily, and on the next fail entirely, as though they had never been studied. This condition discourages many who, in spite of their endeavors, continue to fail in points which they believed had long ago been mastered.

Massage is of value because it frees, lightens, and, in the case of muscles that are stiffened and cramped by an incorrect vibrato, makes the natural, easy movements again possible. Its continued use will even help, to a certain degree, to overcome the fault.

The remarkable ease with which the left hand sometimes operates, is also caused by chance conditions. Some people play particularly well when they have not practiced for a considerable length of time. It is not, however, to be supposed that the less one practices, the better he plays. The playing is better because the muscles have become rested and free. The old hindrances again appear after a long period of work.

But not only the left hand is affected by the vibrato; the tone, and the bow are also dependent upon it.

The bow, by friction between the bridge and finger-board, sets the string in motion—causes it to vibrate. The intensity of the tone depends upon the amplitude of the vibrations. The string vibrates freely and unhindered from bridge to saddle, where the vibrations are sharply cut off. (Proficiency in the mechanical part of bowing, I naturally take for granted.) The art of bowing is an independent subject, and, in its way, of great importance. It is, however, a comparatively simple matter to make an open string vibrate evenly. The matter becomes complicated only when the fingers of the left hand assume their functions. If the finger is placed firmly and immovably upon the string, the ef-

fect will be the same as with the open string. The finger shortens the string and, in a way, forms a new saddle. The fingers of my left hand, however, do not remain in repose. They move, that is, they vibrate. The string is then set in motion at two points:—by the bow which vibrates it and by the left hand, which brings about an alteration in the tone. The oscillation of the tone is added to the free vibration caused by the bow.

The bow, which is not disturbed by any outside influences when on the open string, is affected, even though unnoticeably so, by this movable saddle. For example, in playing pianissimo the vibrato of the left hand must not be over-done or the bow will be made to tremble. In playing loudly this is not the case, for then the bow more easily overcomes this defect. Nevertheless, the hindrance is there. Again, I would call attention to the peculiar relationship existing between the disposition of the left hand and an improved condition of the right arm. Through the absence of hindrances in the left hand, the bow, freed of all disturbing elements, acquires the correct contact with the string. When the vibrato is correct, that is, when the waved and not the pointed line is created, there is no trembling of the bow, which is felt even when existing in the slightest degree. The regular, even, wave-motion does not break the contact between bow and string. The false vibrato need not materially injure the quality of tone (the shake may be too weak in proportion to the intensity of vibration) but it must, in any case, effect the absolute purity of tone.

Alteration of tone is only possible at this point. Given the bow and the open string, all degrees of dynamic variation, from the softest pianissimo to the loudest fortissimo, are possible. That which we are accustomed to call emotion proceeds only from the left hand.

Courvoisier writes very curiously:—"The vibrato relieves the tone of stiffness, and conveys the impression that the player is a person of feeling." He then naïvely continues:—"The shake has really no more effect than that."

Is it wholly essential that we feel that the player is a person of feeling? Is a beautiful tone, produced by means of a correct vibrato, an expression of feeling? This I most emphatically deny. Since the vibrato is produced mechanically, the beautiful tone is the result of correct mechanical treatment. Let a pupil, who has learned to play only upon the open strings, place the second finger, on the A string, and then move the finger quickly and slowly, backward and forward, at the proper pitch. The finger should be made to execute the proper vibrato movement by a second person. (See figure 1.) Immediately, a surprising change in the tone takes place. It becomes metallic, larger and "emo-

tional." In spite of this apparent "emotion" it must be acknowledged that the "soul" of the pupil has in no way taken part in the performance. The mistake consists in confusing a beautiful sound with an expression of feeling. Many teachers comfort their pupils who would learn to play "with feeling," with the explanation that this will come of itself when they become older and more developed. Then, naturally, "feeling" finally does assert itself. The pupil begins to imitate, after a fashion, the vibrato of his teacher. If chance favors, the oscillation will be correct, consequently the tone will be beautiful. Perhaps he may acquire a more beautiful tone than his teacher, who, at a loss for the explanation, finally concludes that the pupil is exceptionally talented.

Figure 1.

The study of vibrato, however, should not be left to chance, as is commonly the case. By means of exercises and clear explanation, the pupil should be taught the correct manner of acquiring this very important part of the technic.

This may be done even with beginners, as the correct thing is never harmful but always of assistance. Very many teachers are opposed to the use of the vibrato; in fact, they insist that in the study of etudes, the hand be kept thoroughly in repose. The explanation of this probably is, that from experience with themselves and with pupils, they have found the vibrato to be detrimental to the development of technic. The vibrato can be detrimental only when incorrectly made, and it is, of course, better to ignore a movement entirely than to perform it incorrectly.

Figure 2.

With advanced pupils, it is of primary importance that the functions of the left hand be minutely examined.

In case of the existence of the fundamental error, against which we here take the field, that should be corrected before proceeding further.

Rules and examples for acquiring the vibrato:—For the beginner, it is important that he first learn to emancipate the hand from the arm. Let him place the finger upon a table, firmly holding the left wrist with the right hand; then by rocking the whole left hand, perform the vibrato movement with each finger singly. (Figure 2.)

Then the exercises on the instrument may be commenced. Here it is of assistance to prop up the violin so that the hand is not hindered by the necessity of holding the instrument, and may move freely and easily.

It is necessary, in the case of advanced pupils, to determine first of all whether the vibrato movement is correctly or incorrectly made. The incorrect vibrato is comparatively easy to detect, particularly when made with the first finger. When this finger in vibrating remains in its place (firmly pressed against the violin-neck) and trembles and does not enliven the tone by a free vacillating movement within itself, we have a typical case of the false vibrato. (Figure 3).

Also, in the case of the fourth finger, we may often find a somewhat similar condition. In this incorrect manner of vibrating, the muscles of the arm are always, in some way or other, concerned, preventing the hand from swinging at the wrist, free and independent of the arm. The properly executed vibrato taxes the arm muscles in no way, and permits of no contraction thereof. Through relieving the muscles of contraction (by rolling movements or massage) it may become possible, to a certain extent, to acquire the correct vibrato.

Figure 3.

The difficulty caused by the position in playing consists in the fact that it is necessary to lift the left arm. This taxes the muscles, and naturally tends to induce contraction. Therefore, the pupil's arm should be pressed downward from the instrument, in order to relieve all unnecessary tension. (Figure 4.)

To free and lighten the arm, rolling movements of every kind should be practiced. In this way much may be accomplished, especially if the advice of a trained masseur be obtained.

The exercises should be played first in the fourth position, because there the hand finds a point of support and the action of the arm muscles is mini-

Figure 4.

mized. (Figure 5.) The same thing is true in the third position. The exercises should be played in the first position last. Here, the position of the first finger, only the tip of which should be allowed to come in contact with the instrument, is of the greatest importance. The palm of the hand must also be kept from touching the neck of the violin. (Figure 6.)

Double-stops offer particular difficulty. In the study of these it is also advisable to begin in the fourth position and go to the first position last.

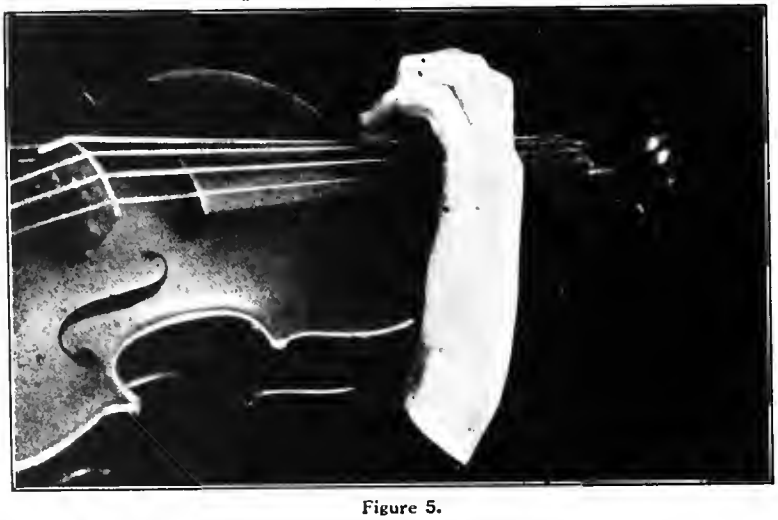


Figure 5.

In concluding, I wish to warn the student against the nervous, exaggerated vibrato. Like the excessive tremolo in the voice, it is disagreeable. One's artistic taste should be his guide.

The experience of

Prof. Carl Flesch is of special interest. He, too, has of late given special attention to the correction of the false vibrato movements of his pupils. His views, which he kindly explained to me, bear directly upon the main point of our discussion here.

Figure 6.

He, too, distinguishes between a correct and an incorrect vibrato, and describes the incorrect one as a movement, the impulse of which comes from some point in the arm and not from the fingers. The incorrect movement begins either at the elbow (the effect being a quick, trembling oscillation), or at the wrist (too slow). Both lack charm and cause a cramped kind of contraction of the arm muscles. The correct vibrato, according to the views of Prof. Flesch, is a combined movement of fingers and wrist in which the arm in no way participates.

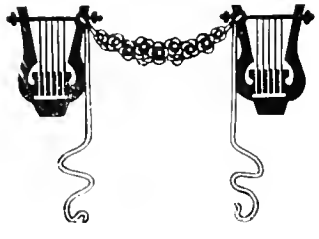
Through the kindness of Prof. Flesch, I am able to present here an excellent exercise for the study of this much neglected branch of violin technic, by the prominent French violinist, Prof. Rivarde, teacher at the Royal College of Music, London.

Figure 7.

To acquire the necessary repose of the hand, Prof. Rivarde directs that the palm of the hand be held close to the neck of the violin (Figure 7), like the position taken by beginners or very primitive violinists. With the first finger (B natural), on the A string, hold a whole note; at the last 32nd only the finger makes an extraordinarily quick movement toward the bridge. (Figure 8). Should an alteration of pitch be noticeable, the effect ought to be as though C were played a little flat. This movement should be practiced with each finger, not longer than five minutes in succession. (See examples.)

Figure 8.

The required position minimizes the action of elbow and wrist muscles, consequently the action is confined entirely to the finger. It is important that the finger be placed as flatly as possible on the string, to allow sufficient play for the forward movement. Disregard of this point brings the finger-nail too firmly upon the string, thereby, as is well known, diminishing the volume and quality of the tone.

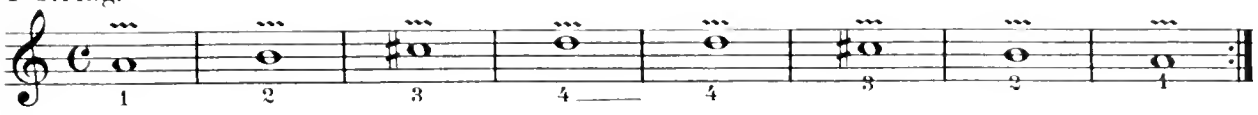


Vibrato Exercises.

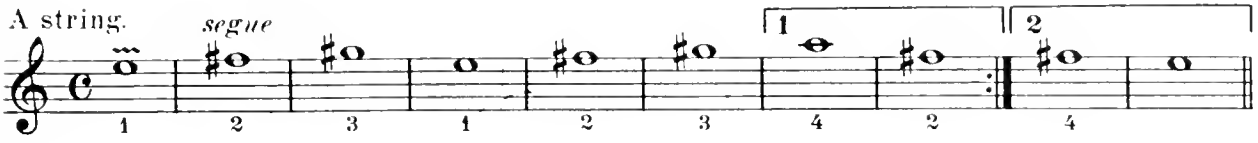
To isolate the hand from the arm, the hand should be placed against the edge of the violin, and the vibrato made only with the finger while a rocking movement is carried out by the hand. The following exercises are to be played in the $4\frac{th}{}$ position.

I.

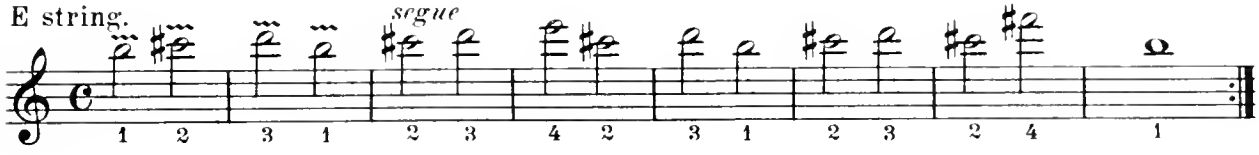
D string.



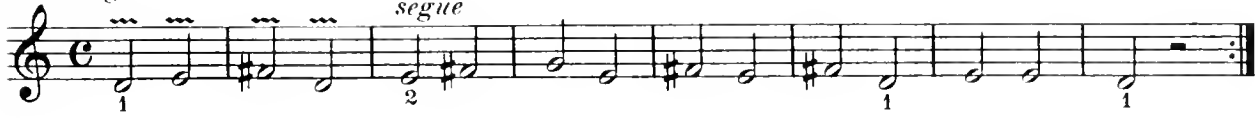
A string. *segue*



E string. *segue*

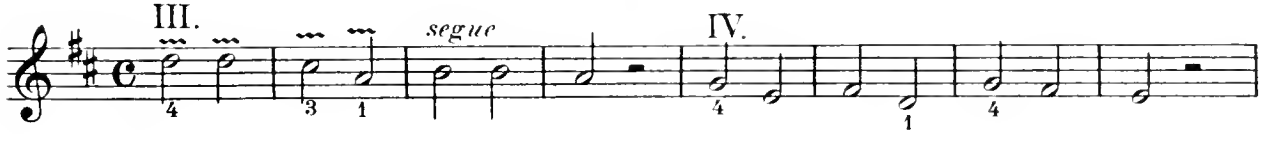


G string. *segue*

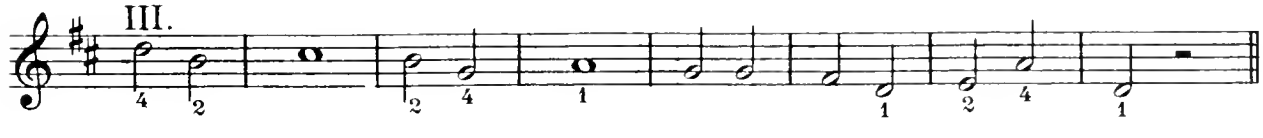


II.

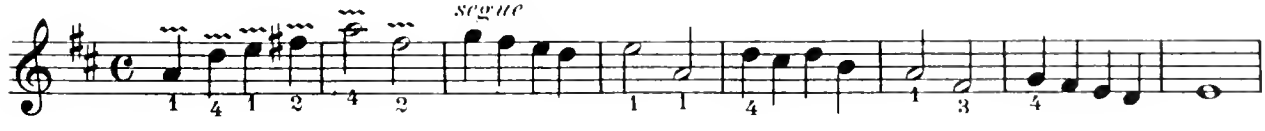
III. *segue* IV.



III.



segue



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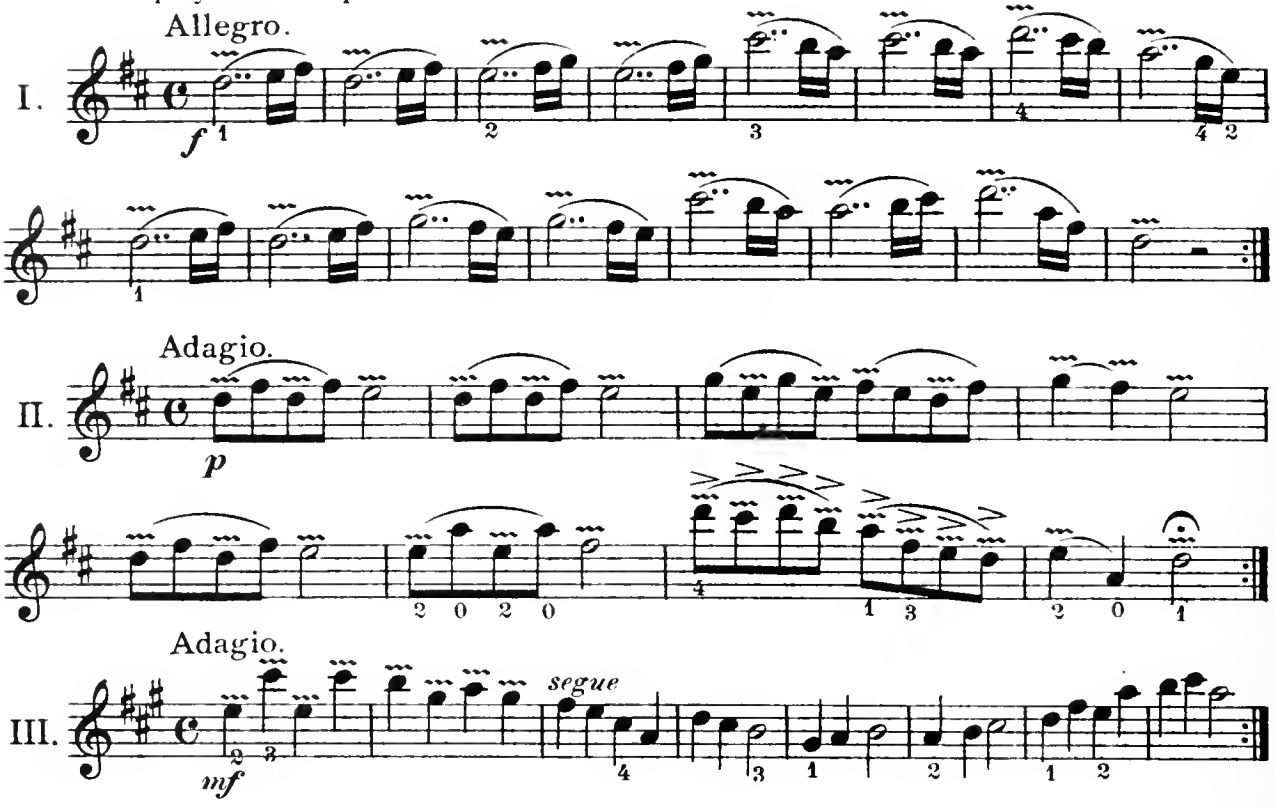
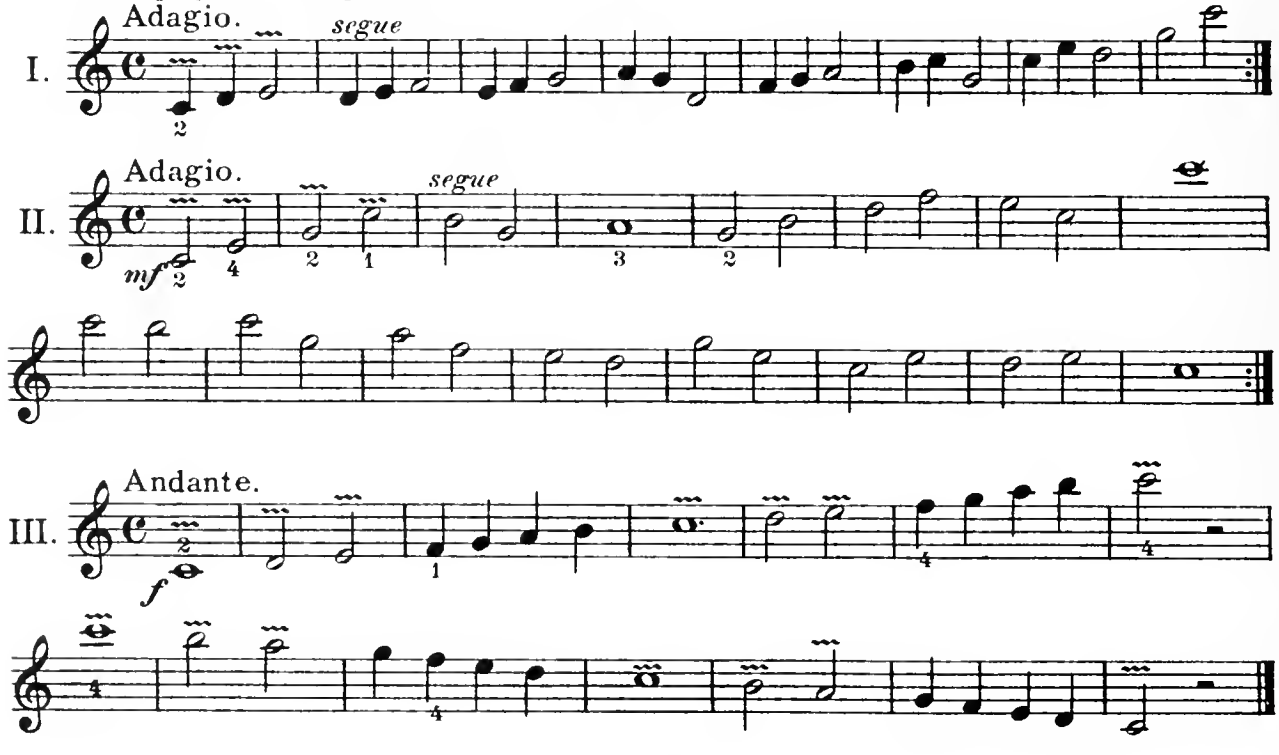
III.

To be played in 3d position.



IV.

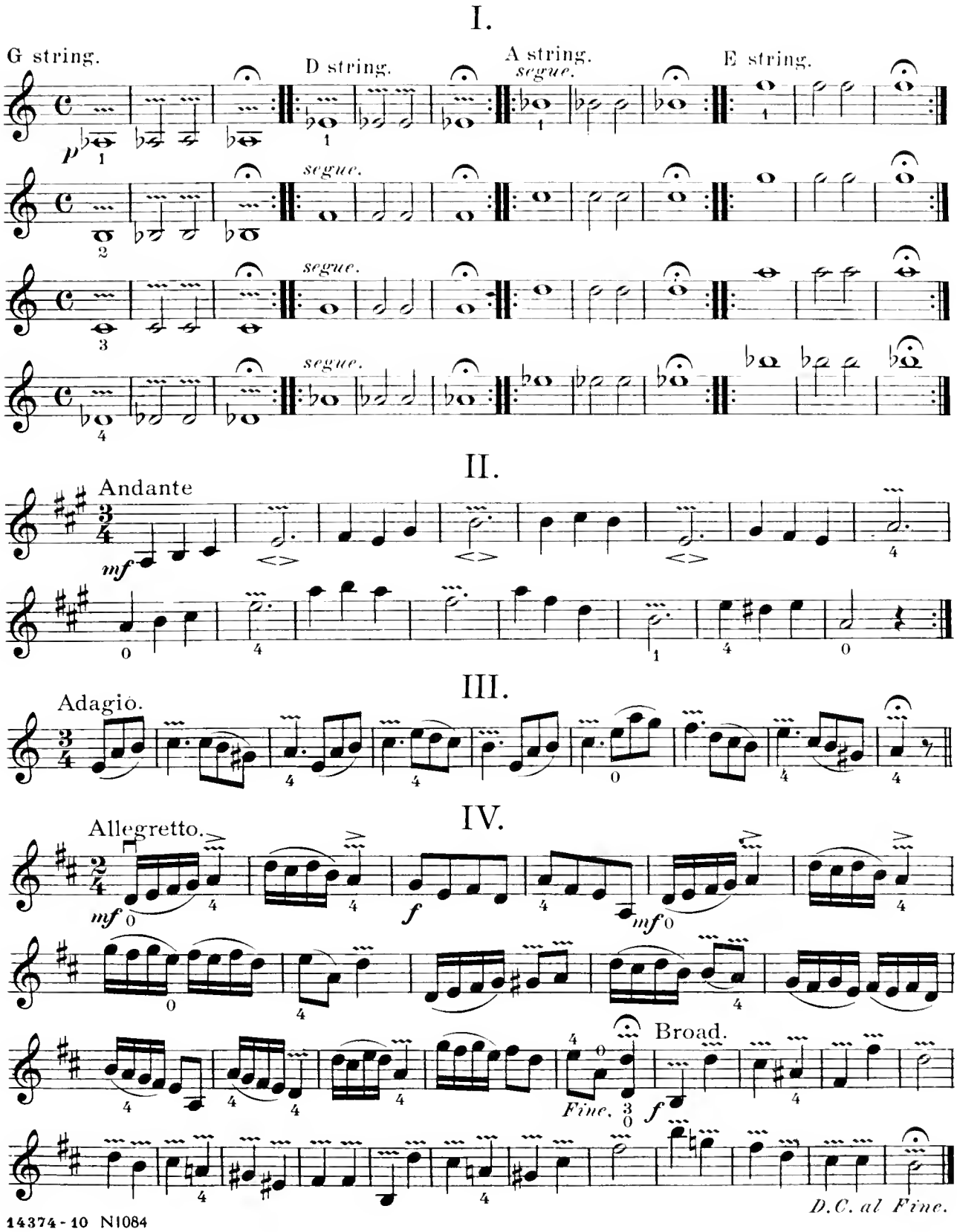
To be played in 2d position.



The hand should be held flat, so that the lower part touches the edge of the violin.

Exercises for Vibrato in the First Position.

In the first position, the vibrato demands great freedom in the position of the left hand,and especially of the first finger. See Fig. V.



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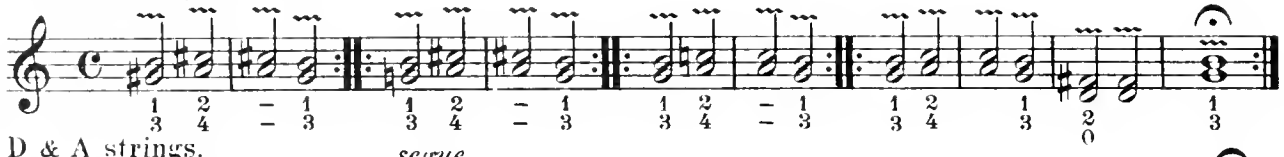
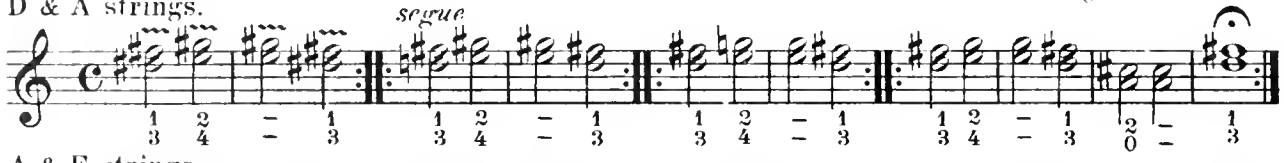
Vibrato Exercises in Double Stops.

I. Thirds.

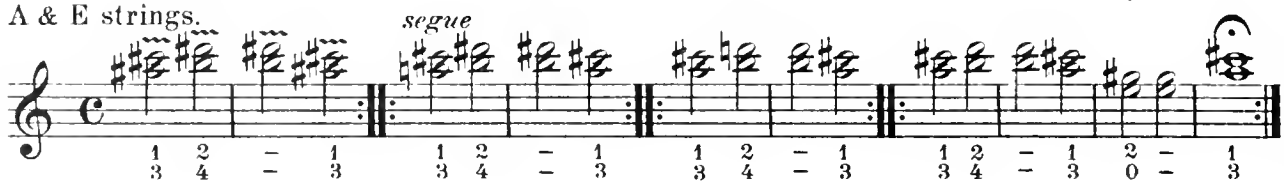
Begin in the 5th position.
G & D strings.



D & A strings.

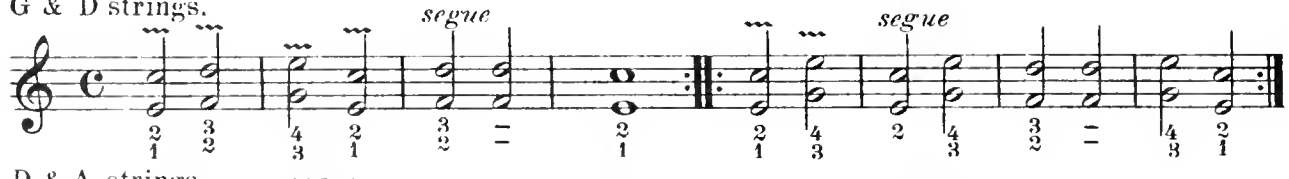


A & E strings.

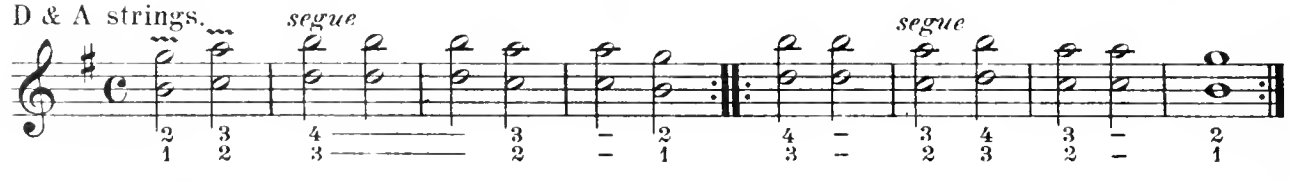


II. Sixths.

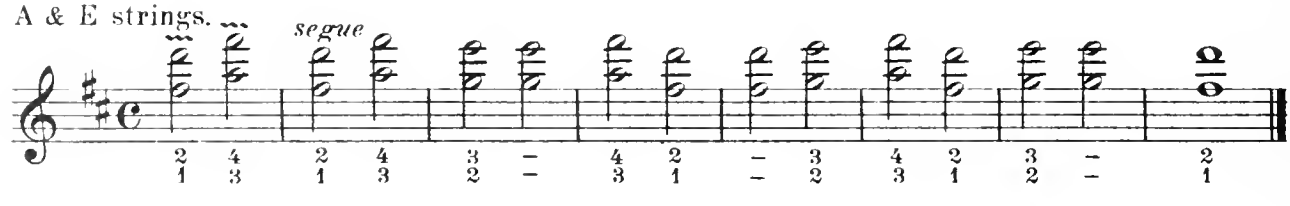
5th position.
G & D strings.



D & A strings.

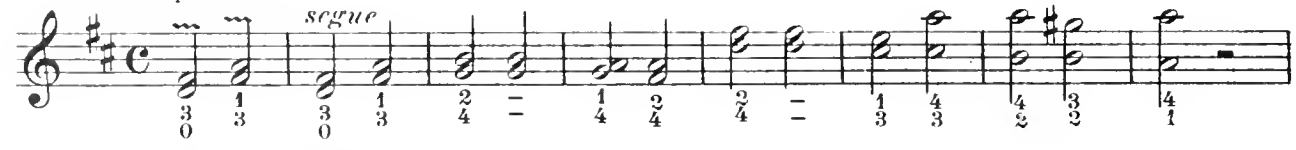


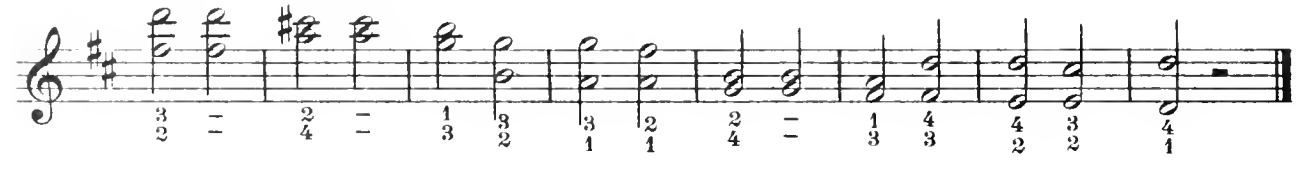
A & E strings.



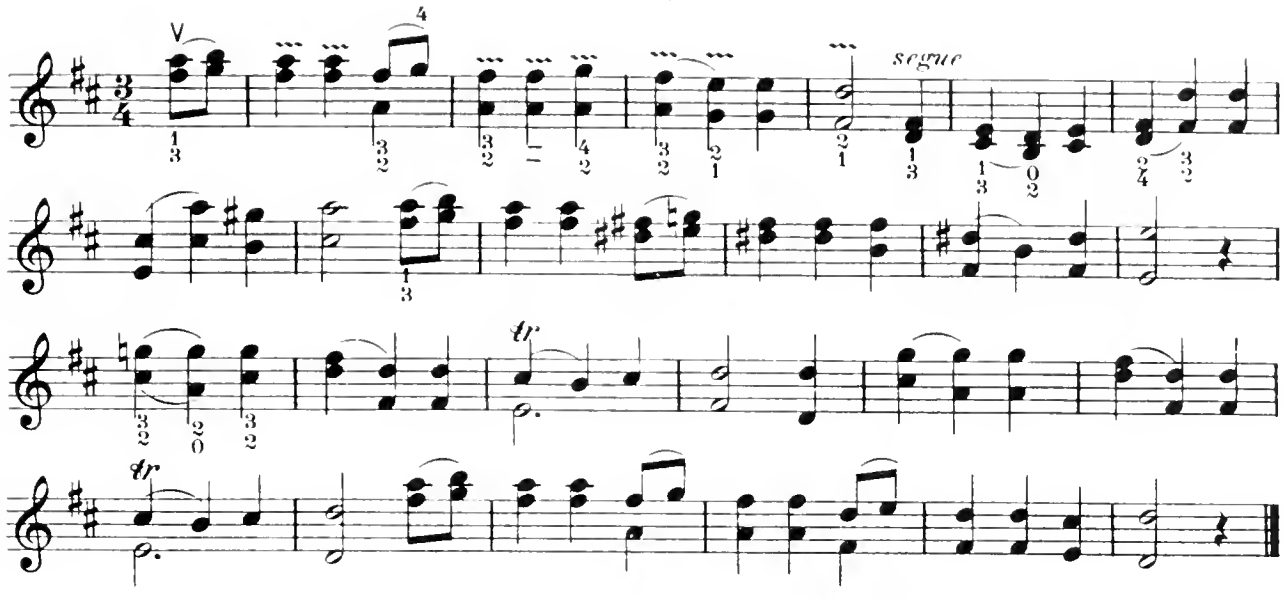
III.

In the 4th position.





IV.



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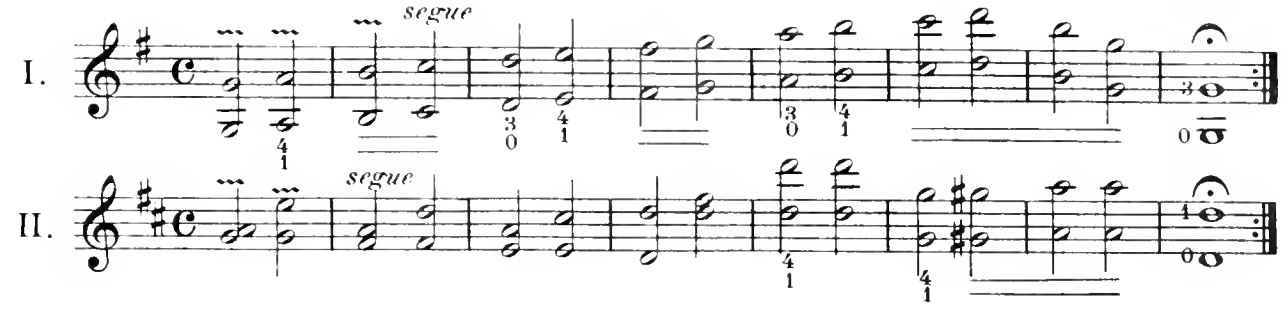
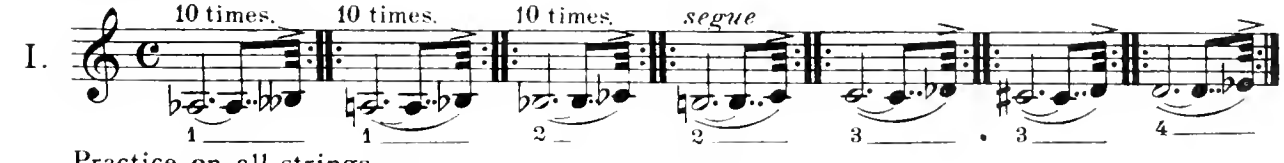
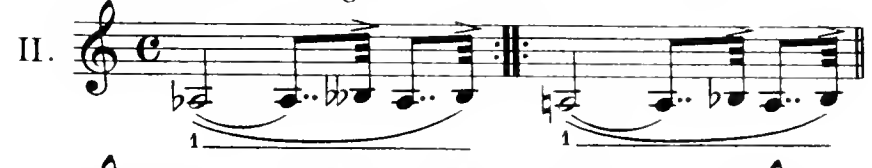


Exercises by Professor Rivarde.

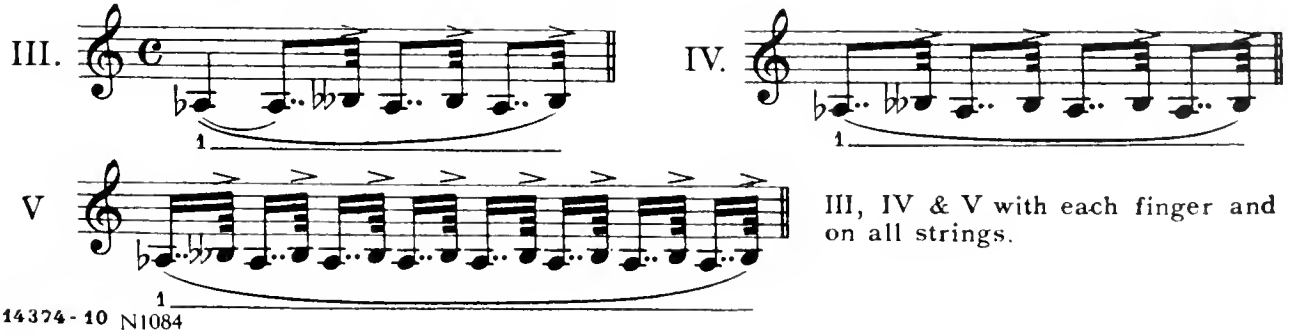
Directions for playing the following exercises will be found on page 30 of the text. See Fig. VII.



Practice on all strings.



Practice with each finger and on all strings.



III, IV & V with each finger and on all strings.

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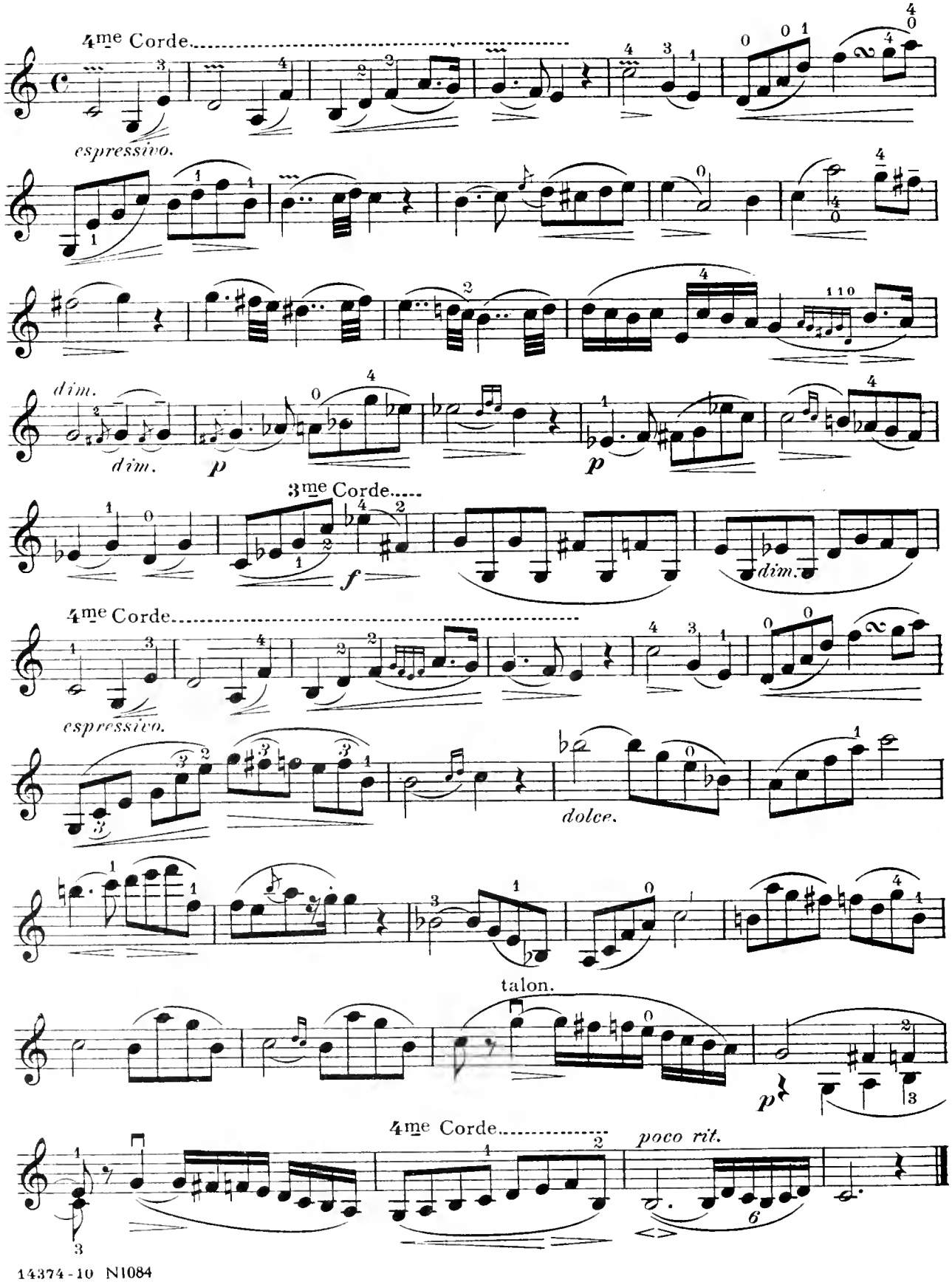
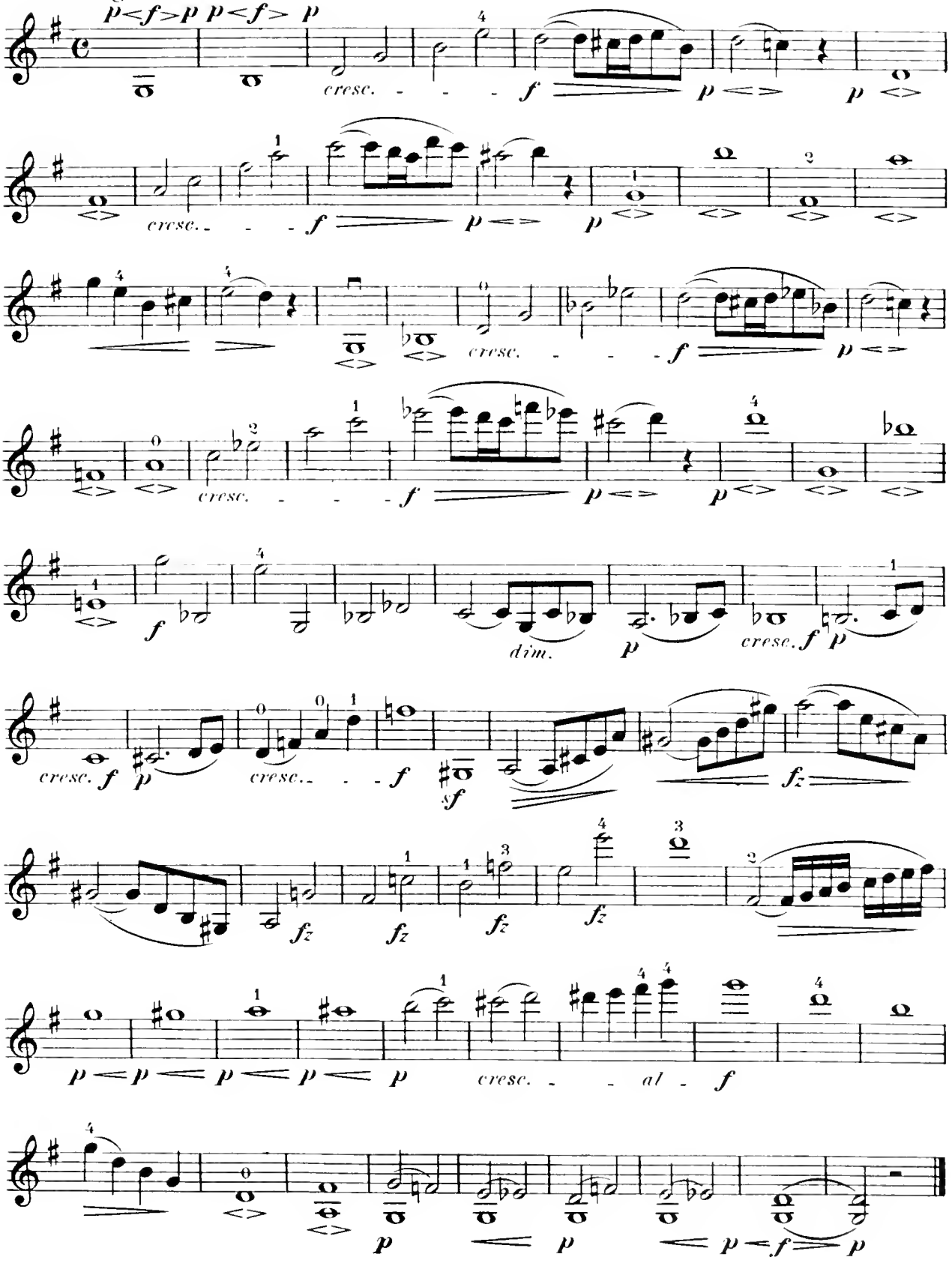
Exercises for the Singing Tone,

with application of the Vibrato.

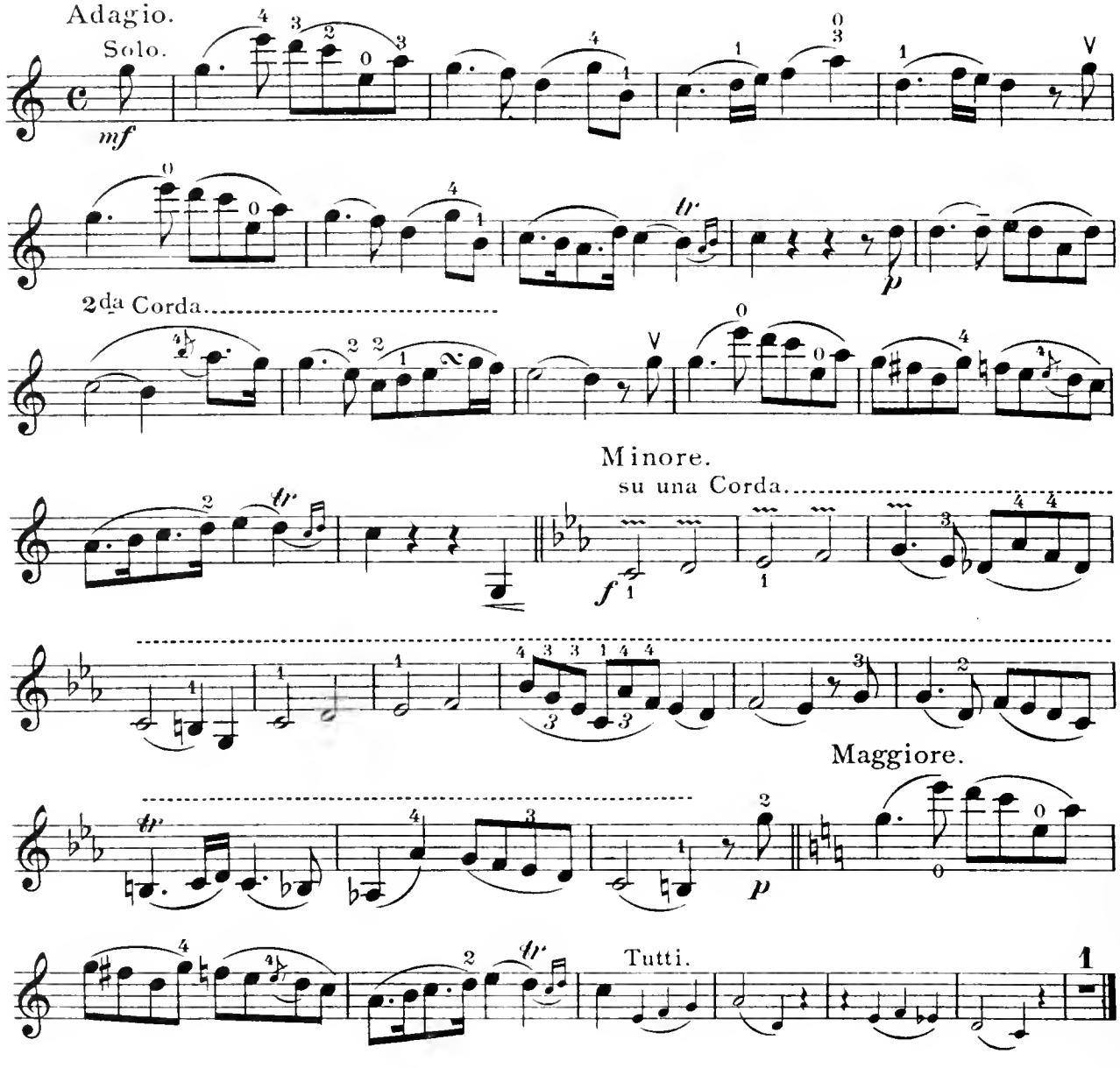
F. Mazas.



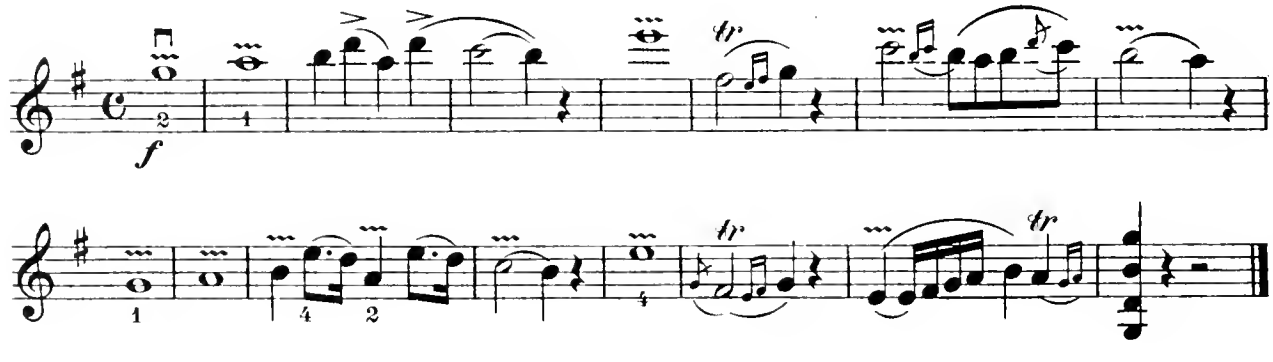
Largo. F. Mazas, Op. 36.



Adagio from the Seventh Concerto by Rode.



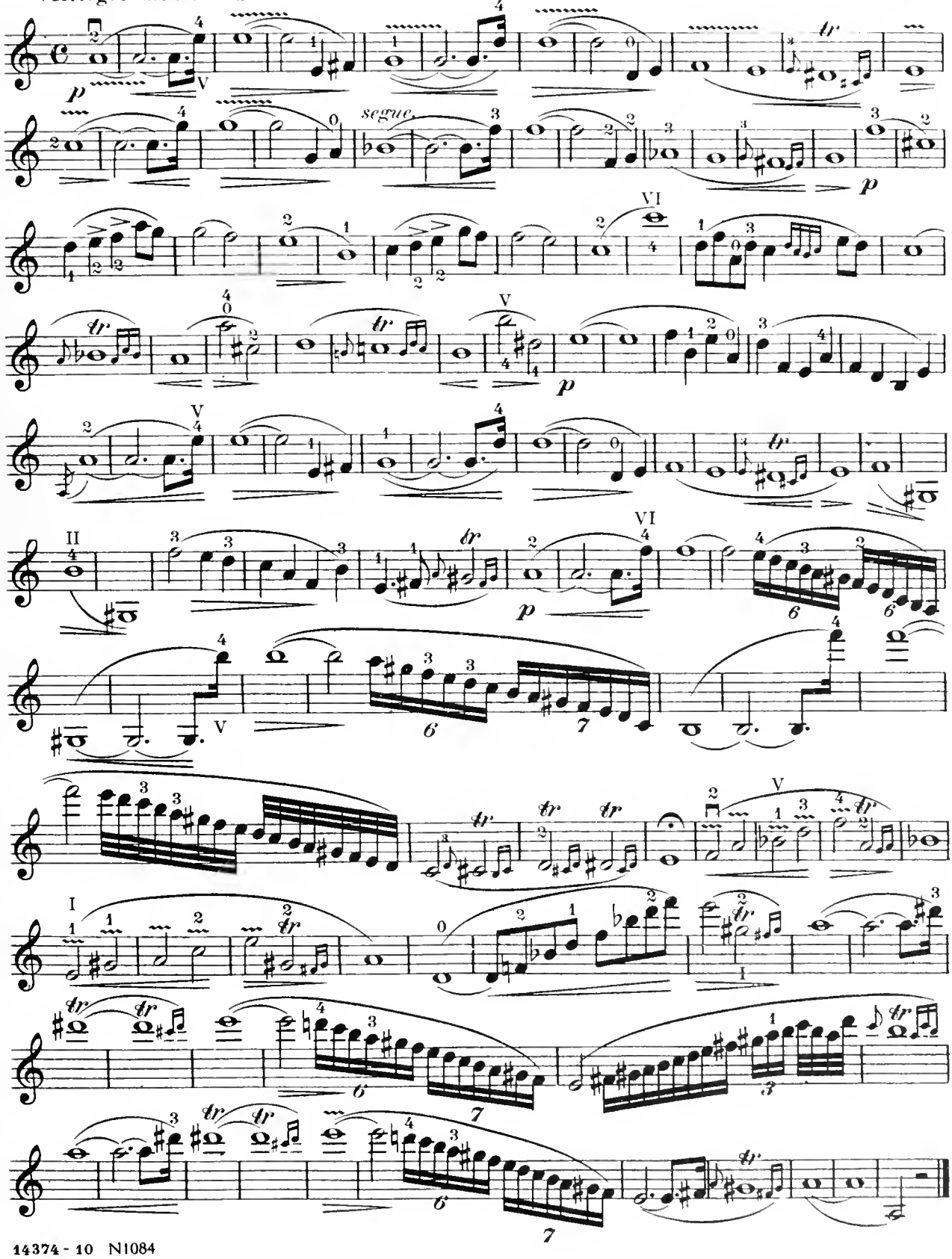
Twenty-third Concerto by Viotti, First Solo.



Exercise for the Slow Vibrato.

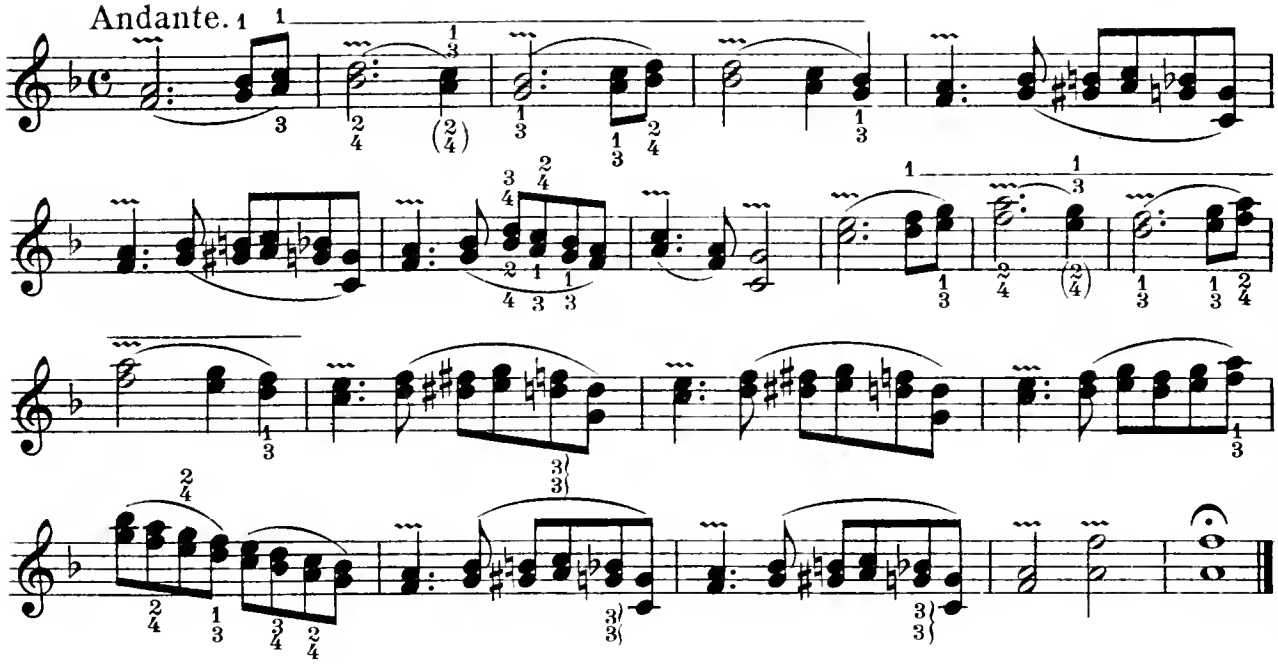
Adagio sostenuto. Kreutzer.

(Allegro moderato.)

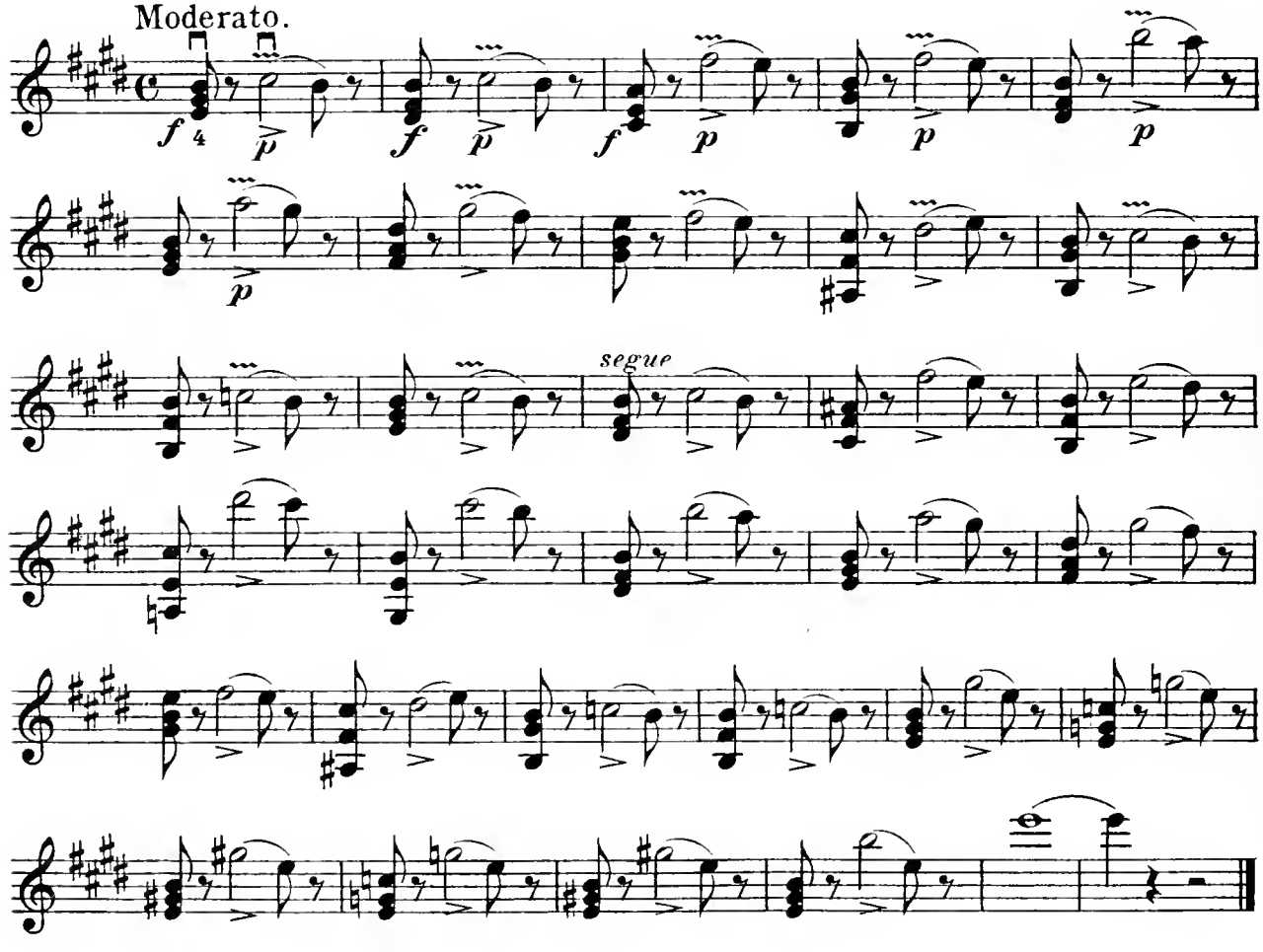


Exercises for Vibrato in Double Stops.

Kreutzer.



Ch. de Beriot.



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