



# B a s s

## Multi-tasking for Vibrato

by Paul Ousley

The human race has been doing it for centuries. Now we have a name for it: Multi-tasking. Before we had computers that were not capable of running two programs at once, we thought nothing of killing two birds with one stone in our daily lives. It was called “efficiency” when we helped the kids with their homework while fixing dinner, or washed dishes while talking on the phone. Some among us have taken the practice to new and dangerous heights: driving, while changing lanes and talking on the phone.

There are lessons for us in this new world of the Technological Age. We have all encountered the student making his or her first foray into the world of vibrato. How many times have we seen the hand/arm motion work fine until the bow was engaged? Many students get quite frustrated at the unmusical nature of their

first efforts. Either the vibrato is uneven and halting, or the bow doesn't get the kind of steady sound that begs for a dose of vibrato. There are two tasks going on here and it may take some students awhile to acquire enough megahertz to get the desired effect.

Many students seem to learn it by simply imitating a sound that they like. But most need to be taken through the litany of drills that exaggerate the basic motion of the left hand and arm. What often happens is that the bow arm loses control: so much so that it never really has time to get a good sound before it reaches the tip. Then the student has to stop the vibrato in order to think about the change of bow direction.

Time to upgrade.

In order to get these two applications going together, I have found success in a

kind of multi-tasking. The student plays a good strong tone on the open D string: a slow heavy stroke that sustains for four to six beats (mm=60). Then, while fingering but not playing an A on the G string, the left hand can begin to find its way through the waves and wriggles of vibrato.

Once the student can keep the long tone going in the bow and get a relaxed, even vacillation in the left hand, it is time to try the two tasks together.

It is simple. And it works!

*Paul Ousley teaches at St. Olaf and Augsburg Colleges, conducts with the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies and is Program Coordinator of the Madeline Island Music Camp. †*