

9. Vibrato

Bernard Blanc tells us:

"...These bagpipes (smallpipes from central France) do not possess, as is the case with the Scottish bagpipes, a standard and compulsory fingering.

The flexibility of this fingering is even one of the characteristics of the style in which the vibrato intervenes for a large part in the quality and accuracy of the note produced. This 'vibrato', which allows the aware listener to distinguish surely between the different musicians, is not defined by a theoretical position of the fingers in a summarizing table. Everything intervenes in its quality: amplitude, speed, position of the fingers in relation to the fingerholes, pressure on the bag...

It is impossible to account for it in writing, so the fingers mentioned are the basic fingerings. There is no ideal vibrato, and your personal sensitivity will allow you, once the first stages are past, to explore all its resources.

Only good control of the pressure and clever practise of the vibrato allows you to render the singing and emotional tone so pleasing to sensitive hearts on summers' evenings..."

*Bernard Blanc, «Doigté et entretien de la musette»
("Fingering and maintenance of the smallpipes")*

The vibrato is one of the essential points of bagpipe technique which interests us. It contributes in a large part to the character of the pieces (and surely that of the musician...) and will intervene every (or nearly every) time a note lasts long enough to allow its execution. So you must conceive the note with vibrato as a complete note of the melody, the 'flat' note thus hardly existing at all (except of course in some pieces where it is better to do without, I especially think of the Scottish repertoire which manages very well without it).

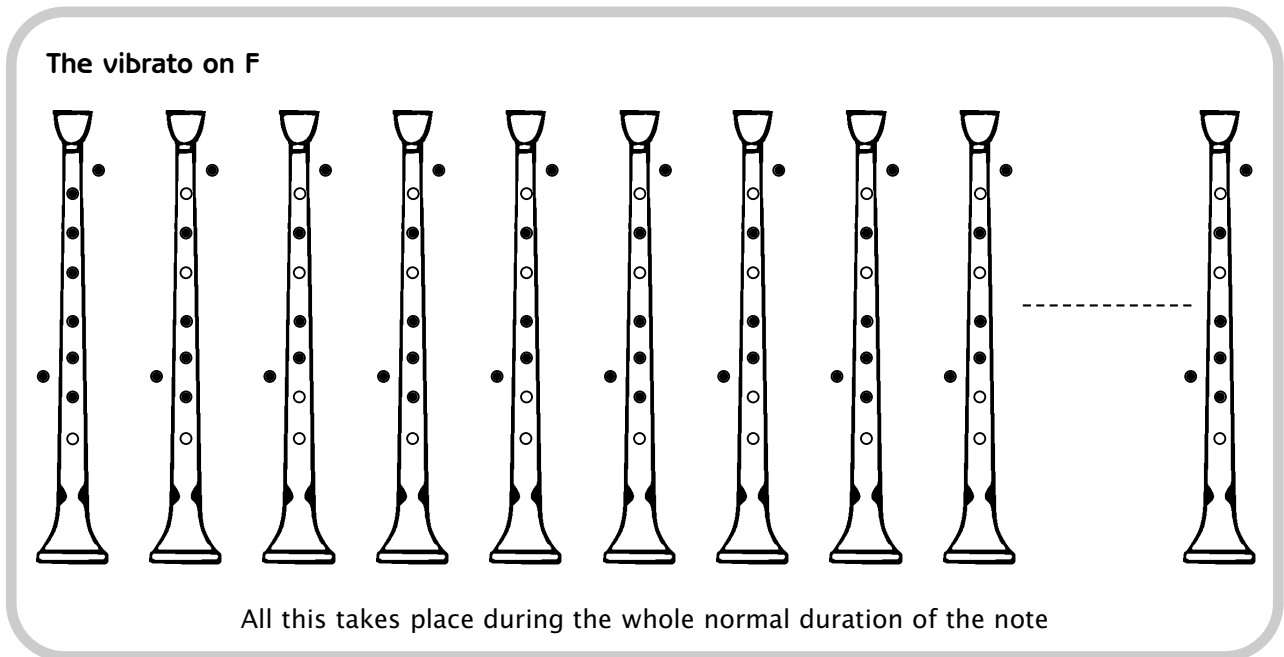
As to the technique, one thing is certain: once the melody note is produced, it will be given a vibrato by a more or less rapid beating of one or several fingers so as to vary very slightly the height of this note (and this during the whole duration of its execution).

The note with vibrato will then be divided as follows:

main note - slightly lower note - main note - slightly lower note ...

The ensemble 'main note - slightly lower note' lasting exactly as long as if this note was played 'bare'.

Example of vibrato:

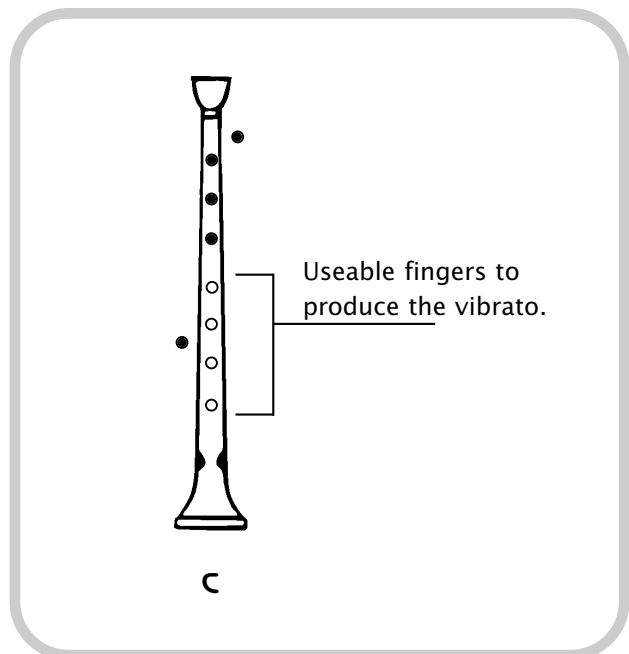
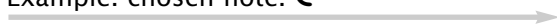


In this precise case, as soon as the F is sounded, the third finger of the right hand will start beating regularly for the whole normal duration of the 'bare' note (without vibrato).

It is then possible to understand several things:

- A. The finger or fingers that will be used to produce the vibrato will always be below those that are used to produce the note requiring the vibrato.

Example: chosen note: **C**



- B. For any given note there is a large number of different vibratos in relation to:

- 1) The finger or fingers used as well as their position on the chanter fingerholes.
- 2) The relative duration of the two notes constituting the vibrato, and this during the whole duration of the latter.
- 3) The speed of execution of the whole.