

A Brief Philosophy of Teaching and Playing the Trumpet

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I. Tone Production

Producing a beautiful resonant sound is the most important aspect of trumpet playing. All other areas of playing, including range, articulation, dynamic contrast, as well as more physical aspects such as breathing and embouchure should derive from the sound that the player hears in his or her head. If the sound that is produced is not musically acceptable then others issues such as the ones listed above will become more difficult. This is not to say that a player should expect his articulation to be fast just because he has a nice sound when playing long tones. But it does mean that without a clear concept of sound the results will not reach the desired level of achievement. The same holds true for intonation. For a player to be perceived as playing in tune, a rich, ringing sound is of the utmost importance.

Where does the sound concept come from?

Listening to recordings and live performances helps develop our imagination and concept. This sound concept directly affects what comes out of our instrument. This is a process that is constantly being refined. It is important to seek out the highest levels of musicianship and listen constantly. This applies to listening to other trumpet players as well as listening to vocalists, string players and other wind players. The more one listens, the more the aural imagination will grow. As a player's sound concept is refined their ability to distinguish what aspects they wish to make a part of their own playing, and which they choose not to imitate. Many times I have heard conductors or teachers say to approach a passage in a way that imitates a singer or a string instrument. Without a wide palate of aural concepts to choose from the analogy is lost. One cannot play an accurate performance of the Haydn trumpet concerto without some aural knowledge of music of that period. The same holds true in jazz music. It is an aural tradition that depends upon imitation of past musical ideas for the growth of new ones. Phrasing, articulation and tone color all derive from imitation.

II. How and what to practice

The physical and mental make up of every player is different. Practice schedules and what materials are used may change from day to day depending on performance demands. Because of these factors a player must be organized and efficient to produce the maximum results from personal practice. It is my belief that a player benefits most from three to four practice sessions per day. Each session should last somewhere between forty-five minutes to an hour. Sufficient rest should follow each session. Each session should have specific goals. It is important that these goals are clearly defined and the player has the flexibility to alter them accordingly. The following is a suggested outline for a practice day.

- I. Daily fundamentals
- II. Etudes and specific fundamental practice
- III. Repertoire-both solo and ensemble
- IV. Additional repertoire or specific technical practice

The first session of daily fundamentals is a crucial part in the make up of a successful player. Typically the session should cover the following basic aspects.

1. Tone production
2. Articulation
3. Flexibility
4. Scales and technical exercises

As a player begins this session it is important to start with a clear idea of the sound one desires to achieve. I suggest two things should take place before a mouthpiece is placed on the face. The first is listening to some music that one wishes to imitate. This will serve as a stimulus and give the player a clear goal. It is amazing how much this can influence the product one is producing right away.

The second is to take a minute or two to sit quietly and let the mind focus on the task at hand. So many mistakes are avoided if there is a high level of concentration. The fundamental session should not lack intensity. The player is preparing for a wide range of daily tasks and having the fundamentals working is imperative.

Mouthpiece buzzing is a subject of some controversy among trumpet players. My personal feeling is if it helps the player it should be used. If not, it is fine to start the day out without it. If one chooses to start by buzzing the mouthpiece it is important that it is done in a way that will translate as close as possible to playing the trumpet. Holding the mouthpiece in one hand, while playing the notes being buzzed on the piano with the other hand is one way to achieve this.

Some type of long tone or sustained tone exercise is recommended to start the first part of the session. The three methods I suggest are the *Long Tone Studies* by Vincent Chicowicz, the long tone exercises in Michael Sachs's *Daily Fundamentals for Trumpet*, or the patterns in the beginning of James Stamps *Warm-Ups for Trumpet*. All of these studies should be played in a smooth lyrical style. The player should decide how far to take these and what methods should be used based on how he or she feels on a given day. It is important to keep in mind that brass playing uses a combination of sound and feel.

The next area to address in this fundamental session is articulation. Articulation should be clear and fluid. I prefer to use the syllables Tu or Tah. Either of these will work and the player should decide what feels and works best for them. All types of articulations and styles of articulation should be practiced here. This should include multiple tonguing as well. The primary methods used in this session are the Arban *Complete Conservatory Method*, Clarke *Technical Studies*, Gekker *Articulation Studies*, and Vizzuti *Technical Studies*.

Lip flexibility or "lip slurs" are critical to brass playing. This type of practice will strengthen one's facility through the overtone series. It is important to approach these types of exercises from a musical point of view. If work in this area becomes too physical then bad habits will develop and the exercise will do more harm than good. Players should try to keep a vocal approach. Flexibility practice should start slow and gradually add speed and extended ranges. Suggested methods for this area of practice are: Bai-Lin Lip *Flexibilities for Brass Instruments*, Charles Colin's *Lip Flexibilities*, and Earl Irons *27 Groups of Exercises*.

A brief set of technical studies and scale practice should be used to complete the fundamental session. Students should use methods from Clarke *Technical Studies*, Vizzuti *Technical Studies* or Gekker *Articulation Studies*. It is a good idea to play through several keys of technical studies and scales. Players should also work in modes other than major to enhance technique and keep this part of practice fresh and engaging.

One way to do this is to assign one set of exercises per week and then change them the following week. For example, play Clarke's Second Study using the odd numbers for week one then change to even numbers the next week. The following two weeks use the same concept this time in minor. Varying articulation and rhythmic patterns should also be used. Much of this can be left up to the creativity of the player. Players should always use a metronome to mark progress and ensure steady rhythm.

The second session will address additional technical practice and etudes. Within this session players should use some of the same methods (i.e. Arban, Clarke etc) to work on areas of technique. Additionally players should try to work on one to three etudes per week. Etudes should address not only advanced technique but lyrical playing as well. This session should be one of short-term goals. By this I mean players should assign themselves specific items to practice for a period of time and try to achieve the best possible results in that specified time frame. Then the player should select new exercises that cover similar skills. This type of well-planned practice will maximize results and prevent boredom and mindless playing which often leads to detrimental practice habits.

Etude practice will be more enjoyable and beneficial if one approaches it in a methodical way. First, play through the etude. Find spots that are playable right away and focus on what can be improved in them. Then isolate the difficult areas and find ways to work out the passages. These methods may include practicing out of rhythm, changing the rhythm, singing the music to check intonation, playing the passage in different keys, or outlining the passage to find the shape and key notes within each phrase. It is also important to start work on etudes (as well as other repertoire) from various spots and not always from the beginning. The reason for this is that often etudes are practiced from the top down. If one always starts from the beginning of the study a player never knows what it is like to play the end of a piece with a fresh feel. If the study is approached from the end and gradually worked backwards the player gains confidence and endurance and is also more likely to think musically rather than physically.

Etudes covered in this session should also cater to the style of playing one wishes to focus on. For a jazz player this is the time to work on practicing transcriptions, for a player who desires to grow as an orchestral musician, transposition studies and etudes that focus on orchestral style should be used. Also etudes that are played in a lyrical manner should be employed during this session.

For advanced players the beginning of the second session is a good time to practice the piccolo trumpet. This is because swelling in the lips will occur throughout the day and it is most beneficial to do this practice early on. I will discuss the piccolo trumpet more in depth later.

The third (and possibly forth) session should focus on specific performance repertoire that needs to be mastered. This may include ensemble (including orchestral excerpts) and solo repertoire. Recording one's self can be very beneficial in this session. Many things become more apparent while listening to a play back of one's performance than they do in the moment of the performance. As in every session using a tuner and metronome are essential. Also having access to recorded examples of the repertoire that is in progress during this session can prove to be an advantage. Many points in style, including tempos, phrasing, and musical context can be learned this way.

III. Specific areas dealing with trumpet playing

Playing trumpets in different keys

The Bb trumpet should serve as the foundation for any trumpet player no matter what the specialty of the player is. It has the largest sound and the least resistance of any keyed trumpet. The next instrument to be learned should be the C trumpet because not only is it close in key to the Bb trumpet, it is also used as much or more as the Bb. Players should only approach the smaller instruments like the piccolo and Eb trumpets after they have become comfortable on the Bb and C. If this happens before the player is skilled on the Bb and C trumpet, difficult habits may form that will eventually lead the player to feel these instruments are more of a hindrance than an asset.

Breathing and Posture

Breathing and posture are two interrelated areas that profoundly affect a musician's ability to play the trumpet. Many theories about just how to breathe and how to sit or stand have been brought forth in countless books, articles, and lectures. The truth of the matter is the simpler this aspect of playing is treated, the better. It is not necessary focus on anatomy when trying to play with a beautiful sound. The breath should fit whatever sound the player wishes to produce. The breath should be "conversational". It does not take a huge amount of air to play. In fact, many players over blow the trumpet and play with a flat, tubby sound. Trying to fill up too much will create a negative tension that will cause every conceivable problem from poor sound and bad pitch to unclear articulation. Use a warm, natural air stream and let

the musical concept serve as a guide for the amount of air used and the speed at which it travels.

Good posture allows the breathing apparatus to function properly. A slightly elevated chest and straight back will aid breathing and consequently aid the sound that is produced. The position should be comfortable, but still allow the player to sit in a posture that gives them every chance to produce a musically acceptable sound.

Listening to music

As I have previously mentioned, listening to other musicians, both live and on recordings, is paramount to forming a concept of musical sound. It is also important because, other than performance, it is how we as musicians become familiar with repertoire. There is no reason for a musician to come out of a university or conservatory with a music degree (of any kind) and not know the standard solo and ensemble repertoire for his or her instrument. A player in the classical field one must know as many pieces as possible from Beethoven to Webern as well as the standard concerti, sonatas, and chamber music (including brass quintets as well as standard jazz compositions). If one intends to be a performer, they may play thousands of compositions over a career. Additionally, players should be versed in music for other musical instruments and voices. Musicians should be familiar with Beethoven string quartets, Mozart piano sonatas and Schubert lieder and many other styles and genres. The same holds true in jazz as well. It is as important to know Sarah Vaughn and Horace Silver as it is Miles Davis and Clifford Brown. Listening helps keep us inspired. It is one of the great joys of being a musician and it should be a part of everyone's musical diet.

Ear training

Keeping ones aural skills sharp is another area that is often overlooked by players after they have completed the required courses in their school of music curriculum. Ear training is a life long endeavor. It helps in all areas of music performance including sight-reading, sound and intonation. Starting before the first session a few minutes everyday of working on singing scales, chords and melodies will help focus ones ear to a higher level of precision, and this in turn will produce a more satisfying musical result. Singing saves time and physical effort. Phrasing issues can be solved by singing through a passage. Many technical difficulties are overcome when a player hears where the pitches they are playing truly belong. Singing is one of the most beneficial tools in one's musical arsenal.

Peers and motivation

Musical colleagues will greatly influence a player's growth and motivation. Players should seek colleagues that are positive and passionate about music. Often many musicians become negative and cynical quite easily. When a player comes in contact with this failure prone type of personality it is infectious, and can slow their musical growth and passion. A positive personality can also be infectious and inspiring. It is important to be surrounded by the most positive influences possible. Students often learn more from each other than they do from their teachers simply because they spend less time with an applied teacher than they do with their peers. Often valuable ideas and information are learned from one's colleagues. They can also provide a motivational force and support base. Studying successful colleagues and how they conduct themselves can aid us in learning ways in which we can conduct ourselves and achieve more. When we are looking at peers as role models, it is important to look at specific traits that make that person successful. It may be the kind of self-discipline and organizational skills they have. It may be the way they carry themselves. When it comes to the trumpet, it may be what and how they practice. Studying those players who are having more success than we are is a valuable tool.

This kind of study of other players can also help us learn what not to do. People who are late, disrespectful and have poor work ethic illustrate traits to avoid. We are also not looking to those individuals who are blessed with great talent but make nothing of it by their lack of discipline. We should be looking to our colleagues who show positive traits of discipline and solid work ethic we would like to embody.

Goals

Goals are our motivating factor. They keep us going. It is important to establish both short and long term goals, and have the flexibility to adjust them as we progress through our careers. Writing down what to accomplish will help players find a strategy to reach their goals. Being honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses will aid in the goals we set and how we go about the task of making those goals become a reality. It is important to realize that being a musician is a never ending process and being goal oriented makes this process all the more enjoyable. The long-term goal of obtaining a position in a symphony orchestra is a result of the many short-term goals that have been set along the way. The goals include all of the etudes, exercises, solo recitals and concerts that occur before the dream is realized. It is helpful to set short-term expectations that are appropriate for where one's level is as a player currently. Do not set the bar too low. Be

demanding and confident. This will give a sense of purpose to the time spent practicing.

Goals may be broken down into many different time frames. For example, one may decide on weekly goals such as learning a certain etude or passage or a two-month goal of learning and performing a certain composition. It is this kind of specific goal setting that is of the greatest benefit. To just say "In three months I want to be a better trumpet player" is not helpful. It is the specifics of the short-term goals, and the clear vision of the end result that makes progress possible.

Being a Professional

A professional is a person who approaches his or her craft with high standards and discipline on a daily basis. A professional conducts his or her self in a respectful manner that reflects positively on themselves and on those with whom they work. For students, being a professional should start on the first day of college. It is during these formative years that one establishes a reputation, which will stay with them throughout their professional lives. Students should learn that being a professional right away will greatly influence their ability to work and survive in a very competitive field. The student who understands this also understands that appearance, punctuality, positive attitude and personal preparation, all play a key role in their success.

The Role of a Teacher

A teacher's role should be to guide a student in a way that will help to give the student the best possible chance at success in a musical career as well as in life. A teacher cannot practice for a student. Studying with a certain teacher does not guarantee success. It is only when the student uses the information that is communicated by the teacher in a thoughtful manner does improvement occur. It is important to realize that positive traits, just like those that are desired of great students, are important to the success of all parties involved. Teachers must continue to grow as musicians by having a genuine musical curiosity and desire for achievement. Often a teacher's cynicism can be seen in their students. One must be on guard not to fall into this type of trap. Maintaining a positive attitude will go far in promoting confidence and success in one's students.

