

MCMASTER MUSIC EDUCATION *NOTEBOOK*

Number 7

Tips for playing the trumpet

Greg Bush

Warm-Up:

Here's a four part warm up that you can use to quickly get set for practicing and playing.

1. Stand really straight. Think of making your head touch the ceiling. Or think of standing at attention while "*O Canada*" is playing. Take a big breath in and blow out through the mouth as vigorously as you can. Remember to keep your chest up while exhaling. Do this a few times to get the breathing apparatus warmed up. Rest often so that you don't get light-headed!
2. Take a big breath and flutter your lips like a big "horse laugh". Or think about when you were a kid playing in the sand box and you made loud "truck" noises. Fluttering your lips gets the blood flowing to that part of the face and really does warm up the lip and mouth muscles used for playing the horn.
3. With your lips formed in the position of your embouchure, the same as when you play the horn, lightly blow air through them and get them to "buzz". What you're trying to achieve here is to train the lips to be more responsive. The easier the lips "buzz" the easier it is to play the horn! Just remember to blow from the lungs and not the cheeks. This might take a while, so don't force the lip, be patient.
4. Take only the mouthpiece and buzz it just as if you're playing the trumpet. Try and make a "siren" sound, buzzing back and forth from a low pitch to a high pitch. This is very similar to playing lip slurs on the trumpet. Next, try buzzing "tunes" on the mouthpiece. It's great ear training in addition to getting the chops going.

The preceding four steps should only take two or three minutes. The object is to warm up to play the trumpet, not to spend a half an hour buzzing!

Breathing:

The first, most important, thing in playing the trumpet or any "wind" instrument is breathing. Take a big breath and blow. Remember to keep your chest up when you blow out. It really doesn't have to be any more complicated than that! Keeping the chest up when you blow out will give the necessary support that you need to have a big sound and to play above the staff. Remember that the listeners are not inside the horn! Blow through the instrument, making the air go all the way to the back of the room. Imagine that the air in your lungs is blue or red or any other colour. As you blow *through* the horn, you can see a coloured plume travelling across the room. Make it go as far as possible!

A good exercise to get this going is to remove the mouthpiece from the horn, place the lead pipe *in* your mouth and blow through the pipe. Feel the lack of resistance and how easily the air just "whooshes" through the horn. Try and recreate the same sensation when actually playing the instrument.

Breathing and blowing is probably 90% of playing a brass instrument.

Embouchure:

The other 10% of playing a brass instrument is the lips. After taking a big breath the lips should be set in an "M" position. Think of that double chocolate ice cream sundae... Mmmmmmm!

Keeping the lips in an "m" setting means that you'll be rolling the red part of the lips in a little. This will insure that you're not playing "in the red". A student with the mouthpiece set too low on the lips and playing with the rim of the mouthpiece sitting on the red part of the top lip is probably the *only* time I'd suggest an embouchure change. The red part

is too sensitive and thin and not conducive to getting a big “phat” sound and having good endurance. Say “mmm” and make sure the mouthpiece is sitting high enough on the chops so that the red of the lips is *in* the cup of the mouthpiece.

Too often I see young players with the mouthpiece set too low with their chops spread too much. The result is an “airy” sound, lack of ability to play above the staff, and very little endurance. Thinking mmm also means that the corners will lock and you’ll have the necessary lip tension to play all over the horn. Just remember to blow!

Mouthpiece and Maintenance:

Play a medium size mouthpiece and keep your horn and mouthpiece clean. It’s kind of hard to blow through a clogged up instrument!

Practicing:

Although practicing scales is an important part of learning any instrument, a brass instrument requires the practice of lots of lip slurs; that is, the technique of slurring notes with the same fingering and usually slurring from low to high and back to low. As a brass player you should practice *lots* of lip slurs. (Then do the scales!)

Listening:

Remember that music is a language. The best way to learn any language is to listen and imitate. Listen to as much music as possible, especially music that features the trumpet. That means no Britney Spears or Eminem! Seek out as many trumpet players as you can find and listen! And don’t forget, hearing trumpet players live is even better!

Have Fun!:

Last but not least, music and playing a musical instrument should be fun! If you’re having fun the audience will too. Good luck.