

Eric Berlin's Workshop

Many clinicians used to come for masterclasses armed with a sheet of whole notes and arpeggios to distribute. The “Bob Smith” warmup works for Bob and may work for you if you are thinking with “Bob’s brain”. My teacher Vince Penzerella used to respond to the question: “What do you do for a warm-up?” with this reply: “**What does my warm-up have to do with you?**”

The notes of my warm-up may have some similarities from day to day, but what remains constant is the intent behind them. What any given person needs to be ready to perform on a given day will vary. Which notes you play is not nearly important as what you are thinking and whether you are intellectually engaged in the process. You will see that I will not give you any specific notes to play, but an insight into what motivates my choice of what and how to play. Use this as an outline to suit your own needs. Make sure to keep it fluid and flexible to address problems that arise from one day to the next. Beware of a “routine” as it can become just that, routine.

What is a warm up? The purpose of a warm up is to get your body and mind ready to perform. A good warm up will make the physical machine of your body work smoothly and efficiently and will strengthen connections from the mind to that machine. Both are important! My mentor, Charlie Schlueter used to call his warm up “checking the templates”. Hearing him warm up backstage at Symphony Hall was very enlightening.

When I watch athletes of just about any sport before they play, I see common elements:

- Stretching and form (posture)
- Easy isolated function
- Calibration (for this we need a constant)

I believe that these three elements also apply to us as brass players.

Stretching

Anyone who has observed a sporting event would have seen athletes slowly stretching the different muscle groups needed for their specific sport. This is of course to gently prepare for activity and prevent injury. What are those muscles for a brass



Eric Berlin.

player? Immediately most people would think of the small facial muscles, however there is a much more basic function earlier in the chain. Before the lips can produce a vibration, there must be fuel provided to them. Delivering air to the lips in the most efficient way should be your first order of business.

During one of my first lessons, Charlie drew the diagram (which appears at the foot of this page) in the front of my Arutunian Concerto.

With this diagram, Charlie shows the inverse relationship between how much air we inhale and the effort it takes to exhale. We can be anywhere along this scale from left to right, but we all know that feeling of having to push on an almost empty tank (panic zone). The point of this is to show that the most efficient way to move more air is to take more air in!

When most people hear “use more air” they assume that it means to use more effort and blow harder. With a full breath, we create much more power by allowing the fully expanded torso muscles to simply come back to rest. Charlie’s solution to nearly every difficulty you encounter is TAKE A BIGGER BREATH! It always works for me...

There is no way to expand your lungs’ capacity as they could already expand well

beyond the boundaries of our bodies. However, we can make sure that they expand to their maximum by reducing muscular tension and using proper posture.

The easiest and most *helpful stretch* is simply bending over at the waist and trying to touch your toes. (Object of this stretch is not to touch your toes, but to relax and stretch the muscles of your back. Even if you cannot touch your toes, you will receive much benefit from this exercise.) Make sure to let your head hang so that your chin touches your chest. See how far your fingertips are from your toes. Now begin breathing slowly with the sound OH and release when you are at capacity by saying TOH. Imagine the air filling the spaces between your ribs, the kidneys and the area under your arms. Do this for a few minutes and be aware of the tension that you feel in your neck, back and shoulders etc. Direct the focus of the air to those places and see if you can feel them expand and release. You may notice that your fingers have moved closer to your toes as a result of this. This is an exercise that you should do every day and often throughout the day. Incorporate other stretches for the rest of your torso into this part of your warmup as well.

With your body prepared to expand, you will want to take full advantage of this added capacity. *Proper posture* is vital to allowing you to breathe with maximum efficiency and to allow your body to resonate fully while playing. The goal is to allow your skeleton to support itself so that the muscles of your body can relax. Think long and tall with little to no muscular tension.

While standing, place your feet shoulder width apart with the outsides parallel. Unlock your knees and move your hips forward and back until you feel your weight evenly distributed between the balls and heels of your feet. Now allow your head to gently lift off your shoulders with your chin remaining down closer to your chest. While sitting, strive for this standing posture above. Your feet should be parallel and your knees should be directly above the feet.

I recommend studying Alexander Technique as a way to improve your muscular function in all aspects of your



life. It has been extremely helpful to me. You can also find similar benefits with most types of yoga as well.

After all of that, we are ready to build good breathing habits for your day. Keep track of your body tension and stretch throughout your practice session. Also be vigilant about your posture. With proper posture, you will find an immediate increase in the size and resonance of your sound. These are new habits that must be reinforced with repetition.

Isolated Function

One of the best things that I learned from Vince Penzerella was the concept of isolating the different components of playing to more efficiently address issues. I break them up into these three:

a) Air - causes vibration

There is no shortage of discussion of breathing in brass pedagogy. I would recommend studying the teachings of Arnold Jacobs as the most influential teacher of wind instruments of the 20th century. There is a lot of great information on the website devoted to his teaching www.windsongpress.com. Check out the videos and try some of the breathing devices. You may also wish to check out a wonderful series called The Breathing Gym with Patrick Sheridan and Sam Pilafian.

Simple breathing exercises such as ladder breathing to a metronome are helpful and doing ANYTHING represents a significant advantage over NOTHING. Regardless how you get there, the goal of this part of your warm up is to get free flowing efficient air movement. Using the simple syllables "OH" for inhalation and "TOH" for exhalation is a great start. Remember that the inhalation is a mirror image of what you wish to exhale.

b) Tongue - defines the duration of the vibration (articulation)

I gained quite a bit of speed and clarity in my articulation merely by practicing in the car. This revelation was first given to me by Frank Kaderabek who told me that my two hour drive to my lesson was two hours of multiple tonguing practice time. No, I did not have my horn on my face, but just doing "wind patterns". I believe that this term originated with Vincent Cichowicz and it is great practice for airflow and to practice different types of articulation. My own priority with articulation is to make it as simple as possible. I want the vowel sound from a sustained pitch to always remain, even in notes of shortest duration. And I want the consonant T or D in the articulation to be clear and firm, and release to that vowel as quickly as possible.

With a full breath, just begin to articulate one of your favourite excerpts or etudes (without the instrument). For me, Ravel

Piano Concerto in G or Charlier Etude #1 are two good examples. Remember that we are now isolating the articulation from pitch. Avoid trying to producing an audible contour, but rather make each note sound the same. Slurred and repeated pitches should sound like one longer note. This will encourage a consistent articulation when you bring it back to the horn.

c) Lips - change the pitch of the vibration

My approach to pitch is that we play a fretless string instrument. Our instrument is simply singing with the vocal chords on the wrong side of the mouth! As with a string instrument or the voice, we can produce every small microtone between pitches as we buzz the mouthpiece.

This part of my warm-up can start a variety of ways, but usually I do the opposite of what most of us have learned. I start high and work low. This may take a moment of explanation.

The low and middle registers of the trumpet have the largest margin for error to still allow successful tone production. (I illustrate this playing off to the side or using my tongue as my bottom lip.) As we learned as children to play a low C or G and then filled in the gaps and ascended, we often play in the lower register with a less refined embouchure and less attention to pitch. This also sets us up to make the upper register difficult for young players to attain.

Some players even develop a second set to play in the upper register. This is usually a smaller aperture than the low set. Using two sets often gives a break between registers, which is difficult to traverse. With my own practice and what I advocate for my students, I use a high register set and bring it into the low register.

Buzzing the mouthpiece is the best way to isolate pitch production from the rest of the functions and also addresses the final part of the total warm up process - calibration. To calibrate anything, we need to have one fixed constant. In this case, I want absolutely constant air flow to fuel the pitch mechanism.

Beginning on any easily produced higher register pitch, buzz slowly down two octaves (for example High G to Low G) in a glissando at a MP dynamic. The slower that you perform the glissando the better, as you will feel the "breaks" and be able to connect through them. One of my former colleagues and good friend Matt Gaunt called this "the stupid exercise". It is important to be able to again re-ascend to your starting pitch so take a big breath. If you find that you are unable, it is likely that the intensity of your air stream has decreased as you descended or that your embouchure has

shifted to a more open set along the way. Stretch each end of the scale a bit but don't worry too much about buzzing up to high C. A little above the staff, the mouthpiece shank begins to act as its' own bugle and tries to force you into a fundamental, making buzzing up here very difficult.

Once we have connected high and low registers with glissando, we can begin to calibrate by using real tunes. This is the purpose of all of this work anyway!

Calibration

Taking simple tunes from the Arban such as the art of phrasing, buzz them without articulation. Be expressive and connect across the rests to keep constant air. Remember, this is isolating the pitch part of the process, so continue to glissando and don't worry about articulations. Think of a great singer as you do this.

What we are doing here is calibrating the muscles to move precisely in response to the pitch signal in our heads. Just as we sing with the voice, we need nothing more than the picture of a sound in our heads to sing with the lips. Once we put the trumpet on, most of us become less concerned with that primary image and worry about all of the physical feelings and external judgement. The more time we spend buzzing the string instrument without the "frets" of the horn, the more we reinforce a strong connection from song in the head to an automatic body response to it. Then the trumpet doesn't have to bully us into a slot, but rather merely amplify a pure signal. This results in faster response and a sound which is more pure in all registers.

These principles should be revisited throughout your session and will become problem solving tools as you work.

Best wishes and happy practicing!

Yamaha Performing Artist Eric Berlin is Principal Trumpet of the Albany Symphony Orchestra and Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, Associate Principal Trumpet of the Colorado Music Festival Orchestra, a member of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Artist/Teacher of Trumpet at the University of Massachusetts and member of the Board of Directors for the International Trumpet Guild. In addition to his titled positions, he has performed with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic and Los Angeles Philharmonic and has commissioned, premièred and recorded numerous works for trumpet and can be heard as soloist on MSR Classics and Albany Records.
www.americantrumpeter