

Reprints from the

International Trumpet Guild® Journal

to promote communications among trumpet players around the world and to improve the artistic level of performance, teaching, and literature associated with the trumpet

PEDAGOGICAL TOPICS

JON BURGESS, COLUMN EDITOR

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BY BRIAN SHOOK

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PEDAGOGICAL TOPICS

JON BURGESS, COLUMN EDITOR

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MAXIMIZING DAILY PRACTICE

BY BRIAN SHOOK

Several years ago a friend of mine handed me a practice routine developed by Ray Mase, who teaches trumpet at The Juilliard School. After working through the routine for several months, I decided to contact Mase to learn more about his concept of splitting daily practice time into maintenance, technical, and musical sessions. What followed was a correspondence that has lasted for over two years. This article summarizes our collaboration and offers an easy-to-follow practice plan for players and teachers alike.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges we face as musicians is determining exactly what to practice and how to practice it. We frequently rely on our teachers to do this for us, but unfortunately they cannot coach every practice session. Instead, we usually resort to mindlessly running through exercises, etudes, and solos. This approach is inefficient and usually encourages bad habits. It is vitally important to take our teachers' instructions and apply them to our practice sessions—ultimately becoming our own practice coach.

In addition to the warmup, Mase's routine contains three primary divisions of practice that are to be spread throughout the day: maintenance (20%), technical (40%), and musical (40%). Each of the three sections includes an approximate percentage of daily practice time to avoid a lopsided routine. While there is a certain structure to this plan, a great deal of variety can be found by using the practice materials suggested below. Avoid the temptation to gravitate toward music or techniques that are easy for you. Instead, be specific about what challenges you the most (*e.g.*, finger-tongue coordination, wide lip slurs, interval accuracy, soft dynamics, etc.) and make them a priority. This will level out your extremes and enable you to be a well-rounded musician.

Setting Goals

In order to stay focused, it is important to write down specific short-term and long-term goals that are both manageable and attainable. The short-term goals are to be accomplished daily or weekly and include things like sight-reading an etude a day, learning a lyrical solo by ear, or working on intonation with a drone. The long-term goals will take more time, like learning a major concerto, developing cleaner multiple articu-

lation, or winning a particular audition. Focus on the short-term goals and the long-term goals will be reached more naturally.

Practice Journal

Create a very basic practice journal so you can list your goals and track your progress on specific concepts. The journal entries for each exercise, etude, or solo do not need to be elaborate or comprehensive, but they should contain one or two key ideas of what you did well and what you would like to improve. For example, you might be working on Charlier Etude No. 2 and notice that your tone is good, but each entrance is hesitant. Write those comments down along with a suggested practice method (*e.g.*, singing, buzzing, etc.) to help you isolate the problem and narrow your focus.

Warmup

The initial warmup of the day is the first and most important practice session because it gradually loosens up the embouchure and prepares the muscles, brain, and ears for practice and performance. The warmup consists of seven basic components and is to be approached musically, not mindlessly: 1) ear training—sing easy melodies and scales while playing them on the piano, 2) airflow—see *The Breathing Gym* to develop proper and consistent use of airflow that results in efficient playing and better endurance, 3) mouthpiece buzzing—buzz slow and soft scales in the medium-to-low register to facilitate blood flow to the lips and connect the ear to the buzz, 4) long tones and slow flow studies, 5) finger dexterity—play low scales, chromatics, and arpeggios at soft dynamic levels and gradually increase range, 6) basic lip slurs, and 7) articulation—begin with soft articulations in the middle register and comfortably increase range, dynamics, speed, and style (*legato*, *staccato*, *marcato*, etc.).

Throughout the warmup and all other practice sessions, rest as much as you play to allow the muscles to repair themselves. It is not necessary to play the exact same exercises every day and in the same order, but it is important to include all of these components in the warmup.

Resist the urge to rush through the warmup, especially when the demands of lessons, performances, and gigs are at their peak. A consistent warmup and steady practice of fundamen-

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RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

General

Hickman—*100 Progressive Lessons for Trumpet* (Hickman Music Editions)
Arban—*Complete Conservatory Method* (Carl Fischer)
Gordon—*Systematic Approach to Daily Practice* (Carl Fischer)
Pilafian/Sheridan—*The Brass Gym* (Focus on Excellence)

Warmup

Pilafian/Sheridan—*The Breathing Gym* (Focus on Excellence)
Vincent Cichowicz—*Long Tone Studies* (Balquhider)
Stamp—*WarmUps and Studies* (Editions Bim)
Irons—*27 Groups of Exercises* (Southern Music)

Maintenance

Schlossberg—*Daily Drills and Technical Studies* (M. Baron)
Shuebruk—*The Complete Shuebruk Lip Trainers* (Carl Fischer)
Bai Lin—*Lip Flexibilities* (Balquhider)
McGregor—*Daily Scale Builder* (Balquhider)
Gekker—*Articulation Studies* (Charles Colin)
Goldman—*Practical Studies* (Carl Fischer)

Nagel—*Rhythmic Studies* (Belwin)
Sachs—*Daily Fundamentals for Trumpet* (International)

Technical

Clarke—*Technical Studies* (Carl Fisher)
Vizzutti—*Trumpet Method Book 1, Technical Studies* (Alfred)
Shuebruk—*The Complete Shuebruk Tongue Trainers* (Carl Fischer)
Nagel—*Speed Studies* (Mentor Music)
Vacchiano—*Orchestral Rhythms for Bflat Trumpet* (Balquhider)
Small—*27 Melodious and Rhythmical Exercises* (Carl Fischer)
Smith—*Top Tones for the Trumpeter* (Carl Fischer)

Musical

Getchell—*First and Second Books of Practical Studies* (Belwin)
Concone—*The Complete Solfeggi* (Balquhider)
Snedecor—*Lyrical Etudes* (PAS Music)
Bordogni/Porret—*24 Vocalises* (Alphonse Leduc)
Petit—*25 Melodic Etudes* (Editions E. Gaudet)

tals will greatly enhance the quality of time you spend in private rehearsal. It is much better to learn how to slur an octave in all registers and at all dynamics rather than to learn just a single octave slur because it is in one piece. This proactive approach takes time and patience, but the rewards are exponential. Use your practice journal to track your progress of the materials you are working on and the technical challenges that need individual practice.

Maintenance (20%)

After properly warming up, you can begin focusing on the mechanics of playing the trumpet without pushing anything to the extreme—play only what is comfortable. The goal of maintenance practice is to briefly touch a variety of fundamentals (e.g., tone quality, articulation, slurring, rhythm, finger-tongue coordination, interval accuracy, lip bends, pedal tones, etc.) and then determine what needs specific attention later. For example, to work on finger dexterity open Clarke's *Technical Studies* and play through one of the studies with a metronome. You may find that a particular scale or finger combination is troublesome. Make note of this in your practice journal and then revisit it specifically in your next segment of practice. Using this approach with a variety of materials will keep you engaged and prevent you from falling into a rut. When you turn to technical practice next, you will have a unique list of items that give structure and purpose to your practice.

Technical (40%)

At the beginning of this session you will want to review whatever gave you trouble during your maintenance practice and develop a reasonable approach to each challenge. To continue our finger dexterity example, go back to the Clarke exer-

cise and isolate the specific measures that need work. Finger them slowly and memorize the passage so that it feels easy. Once you have thoroughly given attention to those items, choose other techniques that you want to improve and practice them in a similar manner. As you progress, find other method books or exercises that incorporate the same challenges but in a different way (see Suggested Materials below).

After revisiting all of the items from your list, begin working on one or two specific techniques that you want to develop (e.g., multiple articulation and interval accuracy). Approach each technique with a specific objective in mind (e.g., increase tempo by two clicks and gain 100% accuracy of a Shuebruk exercise). With steady practice, these techniques will be mastered and can then move into the maintenance category because they only need minimal attention to keep them fresh.

For advanced players:

Maybe your finger dexterity is good, but now you want to focus on finger-tongue coordination. First, locate some technical exercises that expose this technique (e.g., Arban's p. 177 or Vacchiano's *The Art of Double Tonguing*) and work on them for a week or two. Then assign yourself an etude that is based on this idea (e.g., Brandt's *Orchestral Etude No. 26*) while keeping a log of your progress. After seven to ten days, find some new exercises and etudes. Follow this same model for every type of technique. If you get bored with the materials you own or if you have trouble finding relevant exercises and etudes, compose your own studies. Your only limitation is the extent of your creativity.

Musical (40%)

Begin your musical practice session with very easy melodies,

"Your only limitation is the extent of your creativity."

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such as nursery rhymes, hymn tunes, or selections from “The Art of Phrasing” in Arban’s *Complete Method* (p. 191). These will enable you to concentrate on a good sound without having to consider technique or range. Once you are happy with your tone, then move on to material that you need to learn for performances or lessons. If you are working on a technical passage, slow it down and play it like an opera singer would sing it.

Once you grasp the notes and rhythms you can begin to speed it up, but always try to imitate that singer. If you are working on a solo that has some high notes, write those phrases out in a lower, more comfortable range where you can play them without any strain. After a couple of days you can try to play those passages a half step higher. Continue that process over several weeks and the high notes will not seem so high and you will be singing through your horn with ease.

For advanced players:

If you are getting ready for an audition or solo performance, utilize the musical practice session to record yourself regularly (at least once a week or more). To evaluate the in-the-moment perception of your performance, listen back immediately. You can also listen to the recording a day later to gain a more objective awareness of your playing. With both types of listening, write down comments as if you were a judge on the panel and use this information to guide future practice sessions.

Conclusion

Everything you play (long tones, scales, technical studies, etudes, solos, etc.) must always be approached with a good tone—imagine yourself as Maurice André or Phil Smith. Never allow yourself to sacrifice a good sound for technique or range. Concentrating too intently on every muscle can create mental and physical obstacles that stifle improvement.

Throughout every practice session remember to stay loose and relaxed—physically and mentally—to help balance your focused practice. Keep the lips and mind fresh by resting as much as you play. While resting, you can sing the music, work on airflow, listen to a recording, or physically stretch to keep the body free of tension.

“Keep the lips and mind fresh by resting as much as you play.”

It is easy to get discouraged and distracted by your own expectations and the abilities of those around you. Remember that your primary competition is with yourself. Approach every practice session, rehearsal, and performance with the purpose of becoming fractionally better than the previous day. On those days that you feel discouraged, open up your practice journal and you will be able to see the progress you have made over the last few weeks, months, and years.

About the author: Brian Shook is currently assistant professor of trumpet at Lamar University and the author of *Carnegie Hall, Last Stop: New York Philharmonic Trumpeter William Vacchiano*. For more information, you can contact him directly (brian.a.shook@gmail.com).

