

## Thoughts On Excerpts

A huge problem that I have encountered, both in my own development as an orchestral player and in my teaching, is that students are trying to learn excerpts far too soon in their development. Learning excerpts too early causes huge problems to creep into one's playing. One such problem is that the player may develop a fear of certain excerpts since the fundamental addressed in that excerpt probably was not strong enough in their playing when the excerpt was learned. This problem appeared in my playing of the Mahler 5 opening fanfare, Pictures Promenade, and Parsifal especially and has taken me years to break old habits of missed attacks, bad rhythm and flexibility, and a complete lack of ability to play in a sweet, singing manner.

Learning orchestral excerpts is both very difficult and very simple all at the same time. Especially on the trumpet, the technical demands placed on the player are normally not severe. Our standard excerpts are pretty much no-brainers. Pictures at an Exhibition is mostly quarter notes. The off-stage solo in Pines of Rome sings a beautiful and slow melody with only an octave range. Petrouchka is a very easy to understand dance. So where do all of our problems come in? Through the second problem that arises when working on excerpts too soon in one's development: practicing over and over with no goal or concept of style and simply focusing on the notes rather than the music.

How many times have you heard a pitch perfect performance of, say, Pictures at an Exhibition that was boring, stale, stagnant, and mundane? My answer is "quite often." The notes can be beautiful, in tune, and in rhythm and sound completely out of character with the music (see "Be An Actor" below). So this brings us to the first step in learning any excerpt: we need to get a frame of reference for each and every excerpt we practice, play, and perform. Buy a recording (or hopefully multiple recordings) of each work to be prepared. Listen to them actively. Hear everything going on in the orchestra and how the trumpet parts fit into the overall fabric of the music. Listen to how the first and second parts fit together. If the parts are chords, listen to what scale degree you are playing and know the tendencies of each. Then sing the parts until you can hear distinctly what you want the excerpt to say. Exaggerate during your practice to solidify the character in your brain and ears. If you cannot convince yourself, you certainly will not be able to convince an audition committee or an educated audience.

You should make note that these exercises could and should be accomplished without the trumpet. Because of this fact, I encourage everyone to simultaneously work on all of the technical demands of playing. David Bilger first presented this concept to me, and I think it is a great audition preparation idea. If we work the excerpts from a completely musical and not technical angle and work the technique of the trumpet separately, putting them together will not be problematic; it will be enjoyable and easy. The sense of confidence you will have from being totally in shape on the trumpet will make you play the excerpts well. The sense of musicality you will have instilled from listening and gaining a solid concept of sound and style in your brain will naturally seep into your playing. Success is the only option when you are prepared on this level. It certainly worked for Mr. Bilger!

In addition to recordings (which are valuable resources), go to live orchestra concerts. Watch the trumpet section intensely. Watch the other sections too. Get an idea of how the players communicate with each other during the performance. Watch the principal trumpeter to get an idea of how confident you need to be to perform well. Listen to the direction of the notes. When I watch the best players, I can almost see the intensity and drive of each note come out the bell. Nothing should be still. Music does not stop until the final cut. Through listening to and watching great orchestras, young players begin to understand what makes these amazing trumpeters the artists that they are. Also, we've probably all had the feeling of going to a great concert and wanting to run home to practice for hours. This level of inspiration is invaluable. Since tickets can normally be purchased for \$20-30, I would say that's a great investment.