

Random Notes

A note on equipment: don't choose a mouthpiece or trumpet that is not standard, at least at first. If you walk into one of the best music schools with an eight-pound odd looking C trumpet, chances are the people on the committee will not be impressed. In fact, they will be inclined not to like your playing from the start (unless they are representing that company). If your playing is still great it generally will not matter what you are playing, but sound is normally compromised on instruments outside the norm. Remember that peoples' eyes can sometimes dictate what they hear. Also, chose a mouthpiece that isn't so big you lose control and center in your sound. If you listen to the greatest orchestral trumpeters, they do not have hard, fuzzy, unfocused sounds. They have strong, brilliant, resonant, and direct sounds. This is not achieved by playing a mouthpiece that is too big for them individually. Do not play a Bach 1B because that's what you heard Phil Smith plays and you want to sound like him. Go for the sound and fit the equipment around the sound concept. You might sound the best playing a 5C with standard throat and back bore. That's not a problem! As long as you sound great, people (that matter) will love you. It took me a long time to realize that the audience cannot see and does not care if you are playing a 1C, 3C, or 7C.

As far as horn selection, I have been exposed to both schools of thought. One side dictates that the orchestral principal play everything on C trumpet with the occasional switch to Bb (for low range issues) or piccolo (for baroque, Pictures, and Petrouchka ending). The other side suggests using Eb, D, F, and G trumpet often, either for sound or ease of play. The reason, as I've been told, for not switching to anything else is that the sound is thin and edgy and intonation becomes a problem for your section player to match. The reason for switching often is that the chances of successful performance will increase, giving you more confidence and better job security. While these are both legitimate arguments, I think a compromise is best.

I always profess to choose a horn based on the sound that is in my head. If you are working on Ballerina's Dance from Petrouchka and you want a light, compact, buoyant sound, I would lean toward an Eb trumpet simply because that trumpet possess those characteristics. If I wanted a more projecting, full, rich sound, I would play the same excerpt on C trumpet. Same with Ravel Piano Concerto on a D trumpet versus a C trumpet. So, do not choose a horn simply by what is easiest. This method just covers problems and does not help to actually learn the trumpet. I also do not think that playing a small trumpet improves the odds that you will play well. It is still a trumpet with a mouthpiece. If you are good, you are good on any trumpet (proven by watching countless professional trumpeters sound as great on a Bundy as a Bach). But, if you want to play certain excerpts on higher trumpets, you must work out all aspects of playing well on those horns, and maintain that level. You need to practice on those horns often. Also, you will need to work on switching horns, because in an audition you will only have seconds to a minute to make the change. Know have to redefine your target for each keyed instrument.

A note on general music making: Certain aspects of trumpet playing always come up in lessons and master classes from the great players. I will try to summarize them here:

Intensity--Every part of playing the trumpet is made easier through the use of intensity of the air stream. When ascending, gaining intensity and volume normally fits the musical fabric of the piece. When descending, however, you might diminuendo the volume, but do not decrease the intensity. This must continue relentlessly, whether ascending, descending, or remaining on the same pitch. Also, do not break the intensity from note to note. Maintain it always, regardless of technical demands.

Rhythm--The maturing musician should notice a change in rhythmic thought. What used to be good is now not acceptable. Each note must be placed in the exact spot in time where it belongs. This sometimes leads to playing becoming careful and "notey." But remember to blow through with intensity. Also, rhythm adds intensity (what I call rhythmic intensity). The more exact we are with rhythm, the more driven the music becomes. Sloppy rhythm is like an unwinding clock or an out-of-control train.

Listening--Earlier we talked about listening to concerts and recordings, and I mentioned one should listen actively. What I mean is that listening can take many forms. One can listen to music in the background of conversations, in the foreground for pleasure, or actively listen in an analytical mindset. When we listen in the later, we are completely invested, blocking out all distraction (the

reason I stopped listening to classical music in my car). We should try to hear every single line of the piece, how they fit together, what is in the foreground and what is in the background. Also analyze the performances. Were all of the attacks together? Was intonation sound? Did you like the tone of the players? The more we question while listening the more we get from listening. The more we get from listening, the stronger our internal sound and playing concept becomes.

Be educated--Some question the importance of educating yourself on each piece you study, practice, and perform. This, I think, is of the utmost importance. Great works of music come alive when reading about the composer and the period in his life and in history in general, that the work was written. Mahler's Third Symphony post-horn solo makes more sense when we find out that it is about the interaction of man in nature. The programmatic nature of Strauss' Don Juan and Don Quixote can easily be heard and understood after educating yourself that there indeed is a programme.

Be an actor--In addition to understanding the piece, composer, and period when the piece was written, we must understand and artistically create a style for our performance. I like to call this "acting the part." If you are playing Mahler's Fifth Symphony opening fanfare, you must become a funeral drum, or whatever you envision the music to represent. If you are playing Don Juan, you must become a carefree spirit to play the ascending octaves convincingly. Copland is about American dance and cowboys; Beethoven is certainly not. So, be sure to have completely different styles and sound concepts for both. Be an actor and change quickly for each mood of a piece. The difference (according to Michael Caine) between good actors and great actors is that with a good actor you watch their performance and think to yourself "what a good actor", but with a great actor you look at their performance and feel what they want you to feel for their character with no thought to the actor himself. The same concept applies to good versus great musicians. The great ones are the ones that make you feel emotion about the character of a piece or solo or line rather than make you think "wow, that's great playing." Ok, maybe it can do both!