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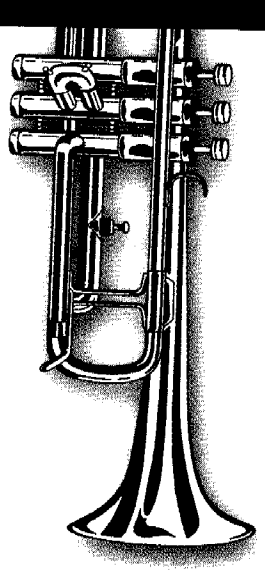
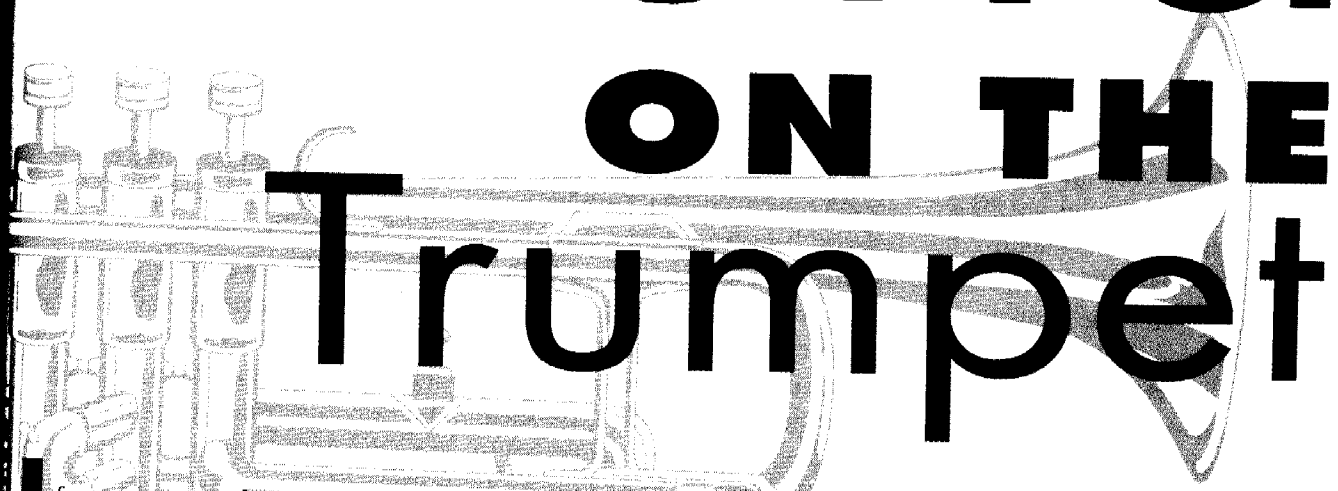


ng A Good Sound on the Trumpet

By Thomas Dust



If your trumpet players are having difficulty playing in tune, the problem may be related to tone. A shrill or nasal tone is easily confused with playing sharp, and a dull tone can be confused with playing flat. A properly resonant tone is important for developing the concept of intonation—in-tune playing—and for the student's aesthetic satisfaction. A poor tone must be remedied so the student can play in tune and progress satisfactorily with all aspects of playing the trumpet. To develop a good tone, students need a good embouchure, sufficient breath support, and familiarity with a high-quality model tone.

Embouchure Tips

First, the student must position the trumpet mouthpiece correctly, not in the pink of the upper lip. To ensure that the student has placed the mouthpiece correctly, do the following:

Working with just the mouthpiece, insert a small straw (a round, hollow coffee-stir stick is ideal) through the mouthpiece so that it protrudes about one inch at each end of the mouthpiece. Have the student hold the mouthpiece

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Resources for **Making a Good Sound** on the Trumpet

Recordings

- *ITG Presents Terry Everson* (available at www.trumpetguild.org/products/recordings/index.htm
- Anything by Doc Severinsen
- Anything by Maurice André
- Anything by Henry James

Visual/Audio Media

- *The Beginning Trumpeter* by Grant Manhart (CD-ROM), available at www. northern.edu/manhartg/order/order.htm
- *The Breathing Gym* by Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan (DVD), available at www.breathinggym.com/site/indes.cfm

Reading

- *The End Result* by Robert Baca, www.keynotesmagazine.com/article.php?uid=88
- 1975 Clinic Address by Professor William A. Adam, transcription by Mark Minasian, www.everythingtrumpet.com/Bill-Adam/articles/ClinicAddress.html
- *Manhart's Selected Quotes*, compiled by Grant Manhart, www.northern.edu/manhartg/index.htm
- *Maximizing Practice*, Volumes 1 and 2, by Mark Van Cleave, available at www.markvancleave.com/mvcmethodbooks.html

in one hand and the end of the straw that protrudes from the mouthpiece shank with the other hand. Have the student grasp the other end of the straw with the center of the lips while saying "Mmmmm" and *slightly* rolling the pink flesh of the lips inward. The student will then slide the mouthpiece along the straw until it makes contact with the lips. The position of the mouthpiece on the lips is the correct one for this student.

The mouthpiece may seem to be centered or slightly off-center. Whichever it is, it's the correct placement for this student's lips and dental configuration. In *all* cases, the inside rim of the mouthpiece will make contact above the pink flesh of the upper lip where it cannot restrict the vibrating action of the lips. Once the mouthpiece is in contact with the lips, have the student blow air through the straw while pulling the straw out from between the lips and out of the shank end of the mouthpiece. You and the student may be surprised by the solid, resonant buzz that's produced.

If the mouthpiece is properly situated but the tone is still poor, a common cause is an improper balance between embouchure tension and breath support. Directors often focus remedial instruction on either the embouchure or on breath support, without considering the interplay between these two critical components. A better approach is to provide instruction that develops the embouchure and breath support in tandem.

A good embouchure results from achieving the correct balance between breath support and tension in the embouchure muscles. A faulty embouchure is a symptom of an underlying problem, usually with breath support or playing posture (the two are closely related). Readers who are avid golfers will understand the analogy that a good golf swing results from a correct stance and grip. For golfers to focus remedial work on the swing arc without concern for stance and grip would result in the development of an unusual swing. Such golfers often play "pretty well" but never see their game progress to the next level of accomplishment. With the trumpet, focusing on faulty embouchure without addressing playing posture and breath support will not produce the desired result of a beautiful, resonant tone. Like high-handicap golfers, trumpet players with faulty embouchures that compensate for incorrect breath support will not progress to the next level of accomplishment in their performance.

Breath Support

Trumpet students who lack a resonant tone quality or who have an obviously faulty embouchure will benefit from improved breath support. My experience with students is that too much instruction on "how to breathe" only causes students to become more analytical of the breathing process and results in a tension-filled, laborious breath that translates into a tension-filled tone, poor endurance, and limited range. Explanations of the working of the breathing muscles are not required. Such explanations work no better for teaching breathing than explaining the action of the limbs and muscles involved in walking when teaching someone to walk.

The use of metaphors to assist students with achieving a relaxed, full breath is recommended; for example, tell students to "breathe as if there's an umbrella opening inside your rib cage," "breathe as if you are about to jump into the deep end of the swimming pool," and so on.

Fundamental to achieving a full, relaxed breath is the concept of good posture. Students should practice while standing, chest raised, shoulders comfortably back, head erect with eyes looking straight ahead, feet shoulder-width apart with the weight of the body balanced evenly between both feet, and knees not locked. If seated to play the trumpet, students must maintain the same upper-body posture as when standing. When the proper playing posture is maintained,

relaxed breathing (the key to good breath support) will follow.

A Model of Good Tone

To develop a resonant tone on the trumpet, the player must have an auditory "image" of a resonant tone. Having a model sound is important. Live performances by skilled artists are the best way to expose student trumpet players to good trumpet tone. If attending a live performance is not possible, listening to a high-quality sound recording is a reasonable substitute. (See the Resources for Making a Good Sound on the Trumpet sidebar.) Recordings of players such as Maurice André or Doc Severinsen should be available for trumpet students to listen to at school or at home. Sometimes recordings can be purchased through a school's library budget, saving your music budget for other needs.

As students strive to copy the model tone, they need help learning to interpret the auditory and kinesthetic feedback they receive while playing their instruments. The goal is to have the ear guide the body when students must make adjustments to the embouchure and breath support to produce a resonant tone. They will then learn to make these physical adjustments subconsciously. What must occur is a continuous feedback-adjustment loop, with the students always maintaining a mental model of good sound, listening to the sound produced, and responding with various muscles to make the needed adjustments to embouchure tension and breath support—all at a subconscious level.

The following exercise will help students find the correct balance between embouchure tension and breath support by linking the physical sensations of playing to the sounds they're producing.

Tone-Development Exercise

Have the student play a second-line G (written, which will sound as concert F) at *mezzo forte*. As the student plays, have him or her slowly pull the mouthpiece out of the trumpet. Do not insert the mouthpiece too tightly prior to doing this exercise. If the breath pressure (controlled by the breathing muscles and the level of the tongue) is in proper balance with the embouchure tension, the student will be buzzing the mouthpiece at the same pitch that the trumpet was playing. If the buzz is a different pitch than that played on the instrument, have the student note this and repeat the exercise with the goal of matching the pitches.

A few attempts should be all that are needed for the student to find the right balance between breath support and embouchure tension. You do not need to say any more than this! Lengthy and complicated explanations about how the muscles of the embouchure or the breathing mechanism work will likely result in the student attempting to manipulate the breathing or embouchure without being attentive to the sound produced. Only if the student can't discover the right balance after repeated attempts should you suggest a physical solution.

If the buzzed pitch is higher than the instrument pitch, it is likely that the student is not supporting the air column and is pinching the embouchure. If the buzz is lower or nonexistent, the student may need more air support, or may need to firm the embouchure. Do not provide these explanations or remedies to the student if you don't have to—let the student's ear guide the response of the body.

The precise balance of breath support and embouchure tension will change with each pitch and with changes in volume. The subtle differences from pitch to pitch and throughout the dynamic range can only be learned through attention to the quality of sound produced and sufficient practice so that the body learns to respond automatically to the auditory and kinesthetic feedback.

Moving Forward

Once the student is capable of performing on second-line G the mouthpiece exercise just described at *mezzo forte* with correct and consistent results, it's time to develop the correct breath support and embouchure tension for other pitches and volumes. Have the student practice whole notes starting on second-line G. Hold each note for eight counts (♩ = 60). Start each note *piano,* then crescendo to *forte* over four beats, and, finally, decrescendo back to *piano* over four beats. Rest for eight counts. Play the same exercise one semitone down on F♯, followed by an eight-count rest. Play the exercise up one semitone from G, on G♯, followed by an eight-count rest.

Continue the exercise by alternating one semitone down and one semitone up until the student reaches the G at the top of the staff and the F♯ below middle C. (The pattern would be G, F♯, G♯, F, A, E, B♭, etc., up to the G at the top of the staff.) Students must listen at all times to the quality of the tone they're producing and strive for a centered, resonant sound.

Small Investment, Big Return

Student trumpeters who spend even a minute a day doing the mouthpiece exercise will notice an improvement in tone quality. The ability to produce a centered resonant tone will better enable students to play with good intonation. Students who spend an additional ten minutes doing the long-tone exercise will notice an improvement in range and endurance as well as an improvement in tone. Student trumpeters who play with a good tone and good intonation are more likely to find satisfaction in their school ensemble experiences and remain in the school music program.