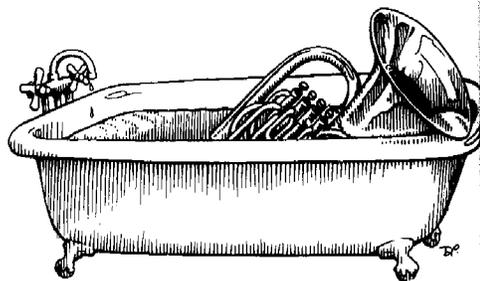


Tuba in the Tub

A Guide to Cleaning

by Guinevere Healy



Professional musicians and music instructors alike recognize the value of a clean instrument and subscribe to the old cliché, cleanliness is next to godliness. However, many students are reluctant to clean horns, offering such excuses as inadequate time or concern about damaging the horn.

A quick and damage proof solution, appropriate for everyone from students to professionals, involves spending just 45 minutes and is not only useful for tuba players, but will leave any brass instrument clean and well-oiled. If an instrument has not been cleaned recently it could take longer, but with regular maintenance, future cleanings will take only 45 minutes and less than 30 minutes for smaller instruments such as trumpets, or those with few slides, like trombones.

Before beginning several items are necessary: a bathtub, laundry basin, or sink; water; small, medium, and large pipe cleaners; several soft, absorbent, clean rags; lanolin or commercial slide grease; commercial cork grease; a test-tube rack or dish-draining tray; a soft-bristled toothbrush; commercial valve oil for rotary or piston valves; a small saucepan or cup; and access to a stove or microwave. Measure the instrument to determine what size basin to use. A family bathtub usually works best for tubas, trombones, or baritones, and the kitchen sink does the job for trumpets and bugles, depending on the sink's size and the instrument's bell length. Washtubs are not recommended for any instrument because they do not have a water hook-up and tend to move. Water can also splash out creating another mess to clean. With all supplies ready begin by putting an inch of room-temperature water in the basin. Make sure the water temperature is comfortable for your hands because water that is too hot or cold could damage the instru-

ment's finish. Pull out all the slides except for the one with the water key, and let them soak.

While the slides are soaking, take the water-key slide, turn it upside-down, and put the open ends into the water; no water should touch the water key cork. Rub the unfinished parts of the slide edges with wet fingers; the unfinished parts are dull and do not have a shiny appearance. If the slide is too long to effectively soak without getting the cork wet, use a water-soaked rag and swab it inside and out. This is a good method for very long or very short slides because it makes cleaning easier and accidental submersion of the water-key impossible.

The slides in the basin should now be finished soaking and can be cleaned the same way the water-key slide was, using either your fingers or a rag to lightly rub off the grit. To clean inside the slides, use plenty of water by submerging them, then dumping the water out. For dirty slides, swab the inside of the openings with a pipe cleaner or soft bristled toothbrush making sure the pipe cleaner or toothbrush is the appropriate size. Never force objects that may get stuck into the slides. Do not scrub too hard, as that can damage the slide and never scrub the finished area; use only soft rags because they are easier on the plating. The slides are clean when the drops of water falling off the edges are clear. Slides are U-shaped, so remember to clean both straight halves.

Sometimes green or rust-colored spots remain on the unfinished parts of the slides. If this happens, use a wet terrycloth rag to remove any lingering sediment. Never use abrasive cleanser or detergent to clean any part of the instrument as they can cause damaging scratches.

Do not be alarmed if your hands and the water turn black or green during slide cleaning. This is a good sign

and means the sediment is coming off. Sometimes the water may even turn brown or blue-green. That's all right too and just means the water is extra dirty.

When all the slides are clean, dry them with a clean, soft rag. Old t-shirts work better than terrycloth because terrycloth flakes off into tiny pieces that can get inside the slide. Dry the insides by first swabbing with a rolled up rag and then shaking them down as if you were shaking down a thermometer; this removes any excess water the rag did not reach. Finally, dry the outside of the slide remembering to dry both sides of the U, inside and out.

Turn the slides so that the open ends face down. An upside-down milk crate with a towel underneath works nicely for tuba slides, but a test-tube rack or dish drainer is more appropriate for smaller slides. The slats of the milk crate support the curved edges and because the slides are suspended, air gets to them and they dry faster; a towel under the crate will catch the water drops. Do not lay slides on their sides or with the open ends pointing up because it will take hours for them to dry.

As the slides dry, drain the tub and run another inch of fresh water. If the instrument has piston valves, remove the valves and valve springs before submerging the horn and balance them upright in the water so they will not tip over, being careful not to get the felt wet on the top of the shank. A cup or test-tube rack works well for this, depending on the size of the valve-shank. Do not remove the

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valves from rotary valve instruments; take off only the valve-caps from the base of the valve shanks.

While the valves soak, put the horn gently in the water without striking the instrument against the basin sides. A tuba is long, wide, and heavy so you may want to wear shorts and hop in the bathtub with it, sitting on the edge of the tub and bracing the back of the tuba with your left leg. Tubas often do not fit all the way in the tub and are cumbersome, so when water is involved, it pays to have all the leverage you can get.

Piston-valved horns should soak with the valves removed, but take a different approach for those with rotary valves. Partially submerge the horn, taking care the entire valve system remains above water, as water can weaken or rot the corks and strings causing them to break. Then take a soft rag and clean the valve frames and metal areas around the valves, again taking care not to wet the corks or strings, bump the valve stems, or push the valve in an opposing direction. When cleaning instruments such as rotary-valve trumpets, rotary-valve or trigger trombones, or horns, it is better not to soak them at all, because the valve mechanism is a large part of these instruments; just wash the whole horn with a rag. Do not forget the bell. Wash it with a rag as if cleaning a punchbowl or other rounded or tapered dish.

To clean the inside and slide-insert ends use an appropriately-sized pipe cleaner with enough fuzz covering the wire, a rolled rag, or a soft-bristled toothbrush, and swab the ends as you did with the slides. Be careful not to push the end of the pipe cleaner or toothbrush against the valve on rotary valve instruments as that can cause serious damage.

Next remove the horn from the water and turn it end-over-end in the direction opposite the way the lead-pipe coils into the connecting pipes. Any excess water will drip out of the slide openings or the bell. If the water is discolored, repeat the bathing procedure. If clear, dry all easy to reach areas then set the horn upright on the bell or put it in a stand to dry.

As the horn is drying, boil some water and pour it into a cup or saucepan. While it cools for two minutes, take the valves and valve-caps out of the basin. They should be smooth and sediment-free but can be scrubbed lightly with a wet rag or soft toothbrush if any debris remains. Dry

them, put the mouthpiece into the cooling water, and swab it with a pipe cleaner long enough that your hands do not touch the hot water. Let the water cool completely, remove the mouthpiece, and let it air-dry. By now, about 25-35 minutes have passed.

When the horn slides and valves are dry, begin to re-assemble it. If you are impatient and the horn isn't completely dry, use a fan to speed the process, provided the fan is clean and will not blow dust and other debris into the instrument.

It is a matter of preference whether to put the slides or valves in first, but the fact that there are many more slides than valves often enters into the decision to clear the work area faster. With your index finger, cover the unfinished ends of the slides with a thin coating of lanolin or commercial slide grease, and rub away the excess with a paper towel or rag. Never use Vaseline, soap, WD 40, or anything other than lanolin or slide grease, as these products can dry and create a crusty build-up causing the slides to stick.

When the slides are greased, gently slide them in, making sure they are in the correct position. If the slides do not line up right, do not pound on them or force them in. Sometimes they just need more grease, but they may be in backwards or in the wrong place. If you are unsure about placement consult a music book with a diagram of the instrument.

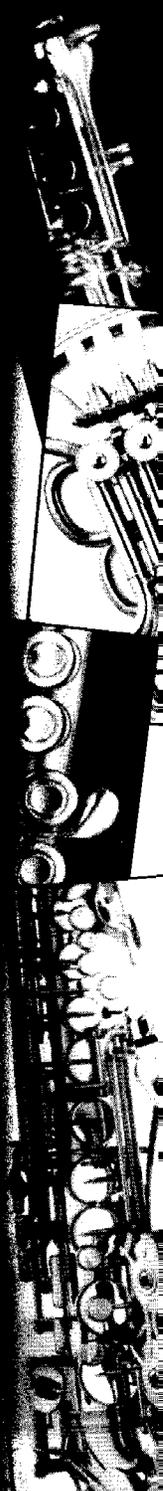
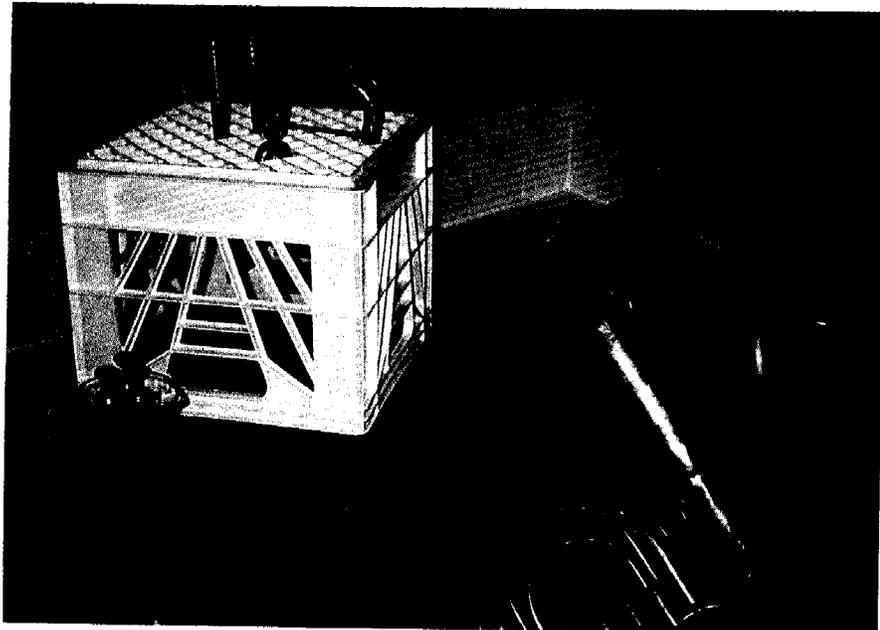
When the slides are all back in place, move on to the valves. If the instrument has piston valves, drop the springs into the casing first, then put a few drops of piston valve oil in the shank, align the ridge on the top with

the notch on the valve chamber, slide the valve in, and screw the valve cap on. Most instrument companies engrave numbers on the valve stems so mix-ups are unlikely if you remember that number one is the valve where your index finger rests. After the valves are all in place, depress them as if playing a fast chromatic scale to assure even distribution of oil and check valve action. In between cleanings, oil piston valves every other day by unscrewing the valve cap, lifting the valve part-way out of its chamber, dropping some oil on, and screwing it back in. It is not necessary to remove the whole shank.

On instruments with rotary valves, put one drop of oil in the dent of the valve cap, one drop on the raised end of the cylinder and the base of the valve, and screw the cap back on. Again, most companies label the caps. Work the valves to distribute oil and check action, then put a drop of oil at the base of each valve-arm and where the valve-arm meets each connection.

If the rotaries have cork stoppers, apply some cork grease to keep them moist and supple. Do not substitute Vaseline, slide grease, lanolin, or Chap-stick for cork grease as these and other similar products can rot or dry the cork causing it to flake off or split. Rotary valves and corks need daily care. Unscrew the valve cap and repeat the entire procedure.

You can avoid oil and grease build-up on either instrument by periodically wiping valves and caps with a soft rag before oiling and using oil specific to the valve type. Rotary oil is lighter than piston oil, and if you interchange them, rotary oil may not do



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the job on pistons and piston oil can build up on rotaries, causing them to stick or clog.

At this point you have reached the finale, but before this final step, clean up any disorder, especially if you used the family bathtub; most family members do not appreciate green rings in the tub. When all is as you found it, use a soft flannel rag to polish the horn, removing all fingerprints, smudges, and waterspots, leaving you with a completely clean and well-oiled instrument. □

F.E. Olds Catalog

F.E. Olds and Sons, Inc. released a new 16-page full-color catalog showcasing its line of 122 instruments. Olds manufactures instruments in Elkhart, Indiana and distributes them through their facility in Mountainside, New Jersey (F.E. Olds and Sons, Inc., Distribution and Warranty Center, P.O. Box 1130, Mountainside, New Jersey.)

What Goes Around Comes Around

If you have a 1966 Beatles recording of "Yesterday and Today" with the cover featuring the group in butcher smocks, it can fetch \$15,000 if it is in mint condition. Although most old albums depreciate in value, some collectible records are worth record sums. The best prices are for rare rock, country and western, rhythm and blues, and jazz albums from the 1950s and 1960s, but the records should be in near-mint condition. Among classical recordings some late 1950s Fritz Reiner with the Chicago Symphony or Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops command more than \$300.

The advent of the compact disc has not altered the value of collectible records. More valuable than the record itself, however, are single sleeves and album covers. Jerry Osborne publishes *Discoveries* (P.O. Box 255, Port Townsend, Washington), a monthly magazine for record collectors, and *Goldmine* magazine prints 26 issues annually (700 E. State Street, Iola, Wisconsin). Collectors often record albums on tape for listening to preserve the recording in fine condition. The most ever paid for a single was \$18,000 for the 1952 "I Can't Believe" by the Hornets, but a German collector offered \$20,000 for Elvis Presley's rare 1961 single, "Can't Help Falling in Love," issued in 33 r.p.m. format. Among compact discs Prince's "Black Album" brought \$13,000 at a recent auction.