

69th Annual Midwest Clinic

Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2015 | 1:15-2:15pm | Room: W184

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Brass Tactics: Building Virtuosity in the Brass Section

Brass Fundamentals

The practice of using technical exercises with its musical equivalent has been a common practice for many years. Herbert L. Clarke, in his famous *Technical Studies* book, has an etude at the end of each study that reflects the technical aspects of the study that it accompanies. The Arban book has solos at the end of the book that can be played once all the preceding technical work has been mastered. Applied teachers utilize this practice as well, in main part to assist with motivation. For example, if a student is deficient in double tonguing the teacher might assign Goedicke's *Concert Etude* with additional supplemental multiple tonguing exercises. This gives the student a more tactile experience and makes it more rewarding than just simply working on the supplemental exercises alone.

Air

- How does one know how to take a good breath if they don't know what it is supposed to feel like? We can say things like breathe "OH-HO", keep the oral cavity open, the breath should be audible and unrestricted, and you should feel a coolness in the back of your throat. I am a visual learner but I am also the type of learner that needs to be allowed to do a particular task in order to learn. The famous Chinese proverb comes to mind:
"Tell me, I'll forget
Show me, I'll remember
Involve me, I'll understand"
- Utilizing external breathing exercises give students sensory processing of what a good breath and blow need to feel like. Breathing gym and/or breathing exercises away from the horn can provide the valuable and crucial lessons on what a good breath should feel like. (Examples)
- Tools: Bubbles, Pin Wheel, breathing apparatus.

Sound

- Establish a good sound initially in the practice session. One must develop a good concept of sound. Flow studies are an excellent source to focus on breath, air support, and proper vibration (buzz). Practicing *Long Tone Studies* by Cichowicz can give one freedom from the physical aspects of playing a brass instrument. Ideally, one just needs to listen and create a good sound. Always be aware of intonation (use drones or tuner).
- Play mouthpiece exercises (simple tunes). Be aware of constant air stream and the quality of sound.

- Lip bend exercises are a great source in which to strengthen chops and assist in intonation.
- “Turn-of-the-century” solo excerpt demonstration.

Flexibility

- Flexibility exercises are one of the hardest things to practice for students. Students hate to practice something they sound terrible on as it lowers their morale.
- The definition of a slur is getting from one note to another without the use of the fingers or tongue. So how do we get from one note to another? Higher notes are faster air and lower notes are slower air: it’s not more air! (Soft high notes). How do we get faster air? Engage the tummy (diaphragm) intercostal muscles, which in turn accelerates the air. (Balloon demonstration). “Support” keeps the blow going.
- The lips only respond to the air you give it, they do not dictate what the air is going to be! Students get in trouble when they set the embouchure before going for a higher or lower note; if the vibrating membrane of the lips is too tight, the resulting sounds will be tense and airy.
- The aperture gets smaller for higher notes and larger for lower notes. What controls the aperture? Orbicularis oris muscles. We have muscles on the corners and on top/bottom of the lips. We get into trouble when we use one more than the other, we have to find a balance. Brass players may have a pucker or smile embouchure type. The ideal embouchure is one that uses both of these in harmony. Because we are using opposing forces, pulling and pushing at the same time, this can put players out of balance. The best way to fix this is to practice flexibility exercises.
- The oral cavity also plays a role to a certain extent especially in the upper register. The tongue needs to arch (Irons Book), “Ahhh-EEEEEE” (jaw harp demonstration)
- Things to avoid include tensing the lips before moving from one note to another and stopping the air before moving from one note to another.
- Time is crucial when practicing slurs; you are teaching the muscles to give you a response when you want it. What can a muscle do? It can contract and release essentially. You never want to practice slurs with bad time/tempo. You need to train the muscles.
- Initially, smooth contour slurs are ideal (Irons, Scholssberg, Colin). Later, more advanced slurs can increase flexibility. These include those with wider interval switches (Vizzutti Book 1, Laurie Frink “Flexus”, Bai Lin)
- “Turn-of-the-century” solo excerpt demonstration.

Fingers

- With the invention of the valve in c. 1816 (Perinet in 1839), brass players were given a new technique that had to be practiced, finger dexterity.
- Hand position is important (Backward C), tips of fingers on valves.
- Careful not to have slow fingers on lyrical playing (demonstrate); sometimes students try to sounds lyrical with their fingers. Always slam fingers down when you depress a valve because a new passageway opens in the trumpet.
- Some great books to use are the Clarke as well as chromatic and major/minor scales.
- “Turn-of-the-century” solo excerpt demonstration

Articulation

- When you bring the tongue into the “mix” it can create many issues. Keep it very simple, just say “TU” and that is where the tongue strikes. The sides of the tongue are already touching the teeth (Gary Wurtz) and it is simply the tip of the tongue that moves. Air never stops when articulating (Water faucet analogy).
- Begin with legato tonguing, then just add space. ***One can give the illusion of shortness by adding space.*** The tongue interrupts the air, it doesn’t stop the air. The tongue also doesn’t strike “harder” for shorter notes, but rather, uses more space and compression (if needed). (compression demonstration)
- Start multiple tonguing as early as possible (middle school) as students don’t know it’s hard. “Kitty Cat” and “Ticky Torch”
- Some great books to use are the Arbans and Eric Swisher’s *Basic Skills for Developing Trumpeters* books.
- Start from a place of greatness and increase speed.
- “Turn-of-the-century” solo excerpt demonstration

Range

- A systematic approach is beneficial, be patient!
- “Turn-of-the-century” solo excerpt demonstration.

Advanced Techniques

- Musicality: Tools to assist in musicality include dynamics, articulation, and finding the phrases in the musical lines. If possible, knowing the historical implications to the piece is beneficial.
- Rhythmic Integrity: Establish a counting system.
- Ensemble Techniques (piano, duet, trios)
- “Turn-of-the-century” duet excerpt demonstration.

Closing Remarks and Opportunity for Questions

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About the Presenter:

Raquel Rodriquez is the Associate Professor of Trumpet at Northern Kentucky University School of the Arts. At NKU, Raquel teaches applied trumpet and is the director of the Trumpet Ensemble and Concert Band. Raquel is a versatile musician having appeared as a clinician, soloist, and chamber musician throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and China. Raquel free-lances frequently with many regional orchestras in Kentucky and Ohio, is the principal cornet with the Lexington Brass Band, and is a member of the Cincinnati-based ensemble, The Ohio River Brass Quintet. Raquel is also an associate member with Seraph Brass, a brass quintet comprised of top female brass players in North America. Other past performing credits include the Sunflower Music Festival Orchestra, Aspen Festival Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, Fountain City Brass Band, Athena Brass Band, Brass Theater with the Canadian Brass, and the Tony Award winning show, Blast!. She was a performing member of the internationally known Synergy Brass Quintet in their 2008-09 national tour and performed in over 200 concerts and clinics across the nation. Dr. Rodriquez is a clinician for the Conn-Selmer and Denis Wick Companies.

Raquel has been praised for her performances on trumpet and cornet. She has been a trumpet/cornet prize-winner at NABBA (North American Brass Band Association), the US Open Brass Band Championships, the National Trumpet Competition, and the International Women's Brass Conference. As a soloist, Raquel has performed with the Topeka Symphony Orchestra, NKU Symphonic Winds and Chamber Orchestra, Fountain City Brass Band, Lexington Brass Band, Lima Area Band, Fillmore Wind Band and Frank Simon Band. In 2012, Raquel was awarded an NKU Faculty Project Grant and recorded "Cincinnati Virtuosity - The Cornet Solos of Frank Simon and Herman Bellstedt" in 2013. The CD is available on iTunes, Amazon, and CD Baby.

Active in her discipline, Raquel served as Co-Host of the 2014 International Women's Brass Conference on the campus of NKU. Raquel is the Editor of the Trumpet Technology Column in the International Trumpet Guild Journal and Co-Editor of the ITG Video Page. Raquel's scholarly activities have resulted in articles published in the Instrumentalist Magazine and ITG Journal. An active clinician, Raquel has recently presented master classes and recitals at Michigan State University, Luther College, University of Kentucky, University of Florida, University of Louisville, and the University of North Carolina-Pembroke. In 2015-16, Raquel will serve as a clinician/presenter at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago, TMEA (TX), OMEA (OH), KMEA (KY), and the International Trumpet Guild Conference in Anaheim, CA.

Dr. Rodriquez holds the DMA in Trumpet Performance from The University of North Texas where she studied with renowned trumpet pedagogue, Keith Johnson. She earned the MA and Bachelor's degree in Music Education from West Texas A&M University where she studied with Mr. David Ritter.

For more information about Dr. Rodriquez please visit her personal website:
www.solotromba.com

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