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CLINIC

FRANK GABRIEL CAMPOS, COLUMN EDITOR

KITCHEN MUSIC

BY FRANK GABRIEL CAMPOS

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CLINIC

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Clinic addresses a wide variety of teaching and playing issues. Ideas and suggestions should be directed to: Frank Gabriel Campos, Clinic Editor, Whalen Center for Music, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY 14850 USA; clinic@trumpetguild.org

KITCHEN MUSIC

BY FRANK GABRIEL CAMPOS

If all your friends and loved ones were gathered in the kitchen to hear you play your trumpet, what would you choose? Visual artists have portfolios of their works that they display upon request. A singer can sing a song, a dancer can dance, and an architect can point to a building. What would you play?

Each year, I ask my students to work up a piece that they can perform for anyone, anytime, anywhere. It could be any kind of music at all, but it needs to be good. We call this “kitchen music,” and when you play it, it represents you at your very best.

What music do you love to play? If you were playing your trumpet just for fun, with no one around to hear you, what would give you the most pleasure? You could choose a solo from the classical trumpet repertoire that you love, but for this assignment, I ask my students to leave the standard literature and think about music they may not normally consider playing on their instrument.

It doesn't matter if it is pop or rock tunes, songs from a show or movie, jazz tunes, standards, opera arias, folk songs, or anything else, but choose something you really like. What melodies were your favorites many years ago, especially during your childhood? Look again at hymns and patriotic songs. Consider music written for other instruments or for voice.

Traditional songs like *Amazing Grace*, *Simple Gifts*, and *Shenandoah* are great choices for kitchen music because they are relatively easy to play, they sound good unaccompanied, and most people have strong positive feelings about these songs. Certain material lends itself well to solo treatment and some does not. You just have to try it and see what works.

One of the most important requirements of the kitchen music assignment is to choose music that evokes good feelings in you. When the music means something to you, it will mean something to your listeners. That is the key to a performance that touches your audience: You must invest the performance with real feeling, and that is easy to do with music that you love.

One year, a student chose William Billings's *When Jesus Wept*. It had deep significance for him, and he spent a lot of time carefully working on the piece to make it as beautiful as he could. When he played it for us, he became caught up in the emotion, and tears formed at his closed eyes. He did not fear

what anyone thought, but played with his whole self, completely committed. It was one of the most moving performances I can remember and an act of great personal bravery. As he played, he overcame his usual fear of performance and experienced the pure exhilaration of being free to play from his heart. All present were greatly affected and inspired by his performance.

When was the last time you heard a concert with a trumpeter playing completely alone? In Western culture, it is rare to hear a single line instrument without accompaniment. Other than the national anthem before a ball game, we don't hear unaccompanied trumpet at all.

In the United States, students play for six to eight years in public school ensembles that are primarily composed of instruments that play one note at a time. After graduation, many of those students put their instruments away because they have no ensemble to play in.

For a single-line instrumentalist like a trumpeter, practicing year after year without a performance outlet of some kind can be boring and eventually make you weary. A local concert band or orchestra, a big band or combo, a brass quintet, weddings, and church work are some of the usual

playing possibilities, but what if there is little of that? I suggest that there is a wonderful playing project awaiting you with many fun possibilities to consider. You may not have an ensemble to play in, but if you really want to keep the trumpet in your life, even in a small way, consider playing kitchen music for your own pleasure.

Music with only a single voice has an important place in the musical history of the world. Monophony, or the appreciation of a single musical line, was the preferred mode of musical expression of 13th- and 14th-century secular Europe, and monophonic plainsong or chant has been the preferred expression of the Christian church throughout much of its history. In Japan, India, the Arab world, and many other cultures, the single melodic line, like beautiful calligraphy, is appreciated for color, tone, shape, form, perfection of execution, and more than anything else, expression of emotion.

Similarly, visual art consisting of only a few strokes has the power to convey deep feelings and unspoken images. Pen and ink drawings by great masters evoke as much as art that is busy with color and form as long as the viewer's imagination plays its important part in the equation. In Zen calligraphy, expres-

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sion echoes the sensibility of haiku poetry, where the least expresses the most. It is easy to imagine that Japanese shakuhachi flute music is the analogue of Zen calligraphy in sound.

Single line music is a simple narrative. One note follows the next in line, one after another, telling a story. But after you have played the melody, now what do you do?

You could play the melody through again, but why not try some variations? For example, you could play part of the melody, then switch to some background figures, then melody, then background figures, and so on, like two lines woven together. You could even slightly change the timbre or dynamic in one voice to emphasize the idea of two voices. This is very much like the way we might hum along while listening to a song we know. First we hum the melody, then switch to the background singers, and then to the catchy guitar riff. In a sense, we are accompanying ourselves.

Arpeggiating chord tones between sections of melody is another device that gives the effect of harmony and adds interest and variety to your arrangement. Since music unfolds note by note through time, switching back and forth through different voices is our only option to create harmony if we are playing alone. This can work very well; choosing the right note at any given moment is the art of it. With this technique, we can give the listener a glimpse of the harmony here and there and we are not limited to playing only the melody.

When you decide to work on a piece and make it your own, realize that you can do anything with it. The key, the feel, the form—anything can be changed, and that is a large part of the fun. Once it is yours, it is a new thing, unrelated to what it was in a former life. There are no rules and nobody to tell you what to do. If I play variations on *Simple Gifts*, it means anything I play after the melody is a variation, no matter what comes out!

Many musicians would like to be able to learn to “play by ear” but don’t know how to go about it. The ability to hear a pitch and reproduce it instantly on the instrument without written notation is one of the most valuable and satisfying skills any musician can have, not just for those interested in jazz. A great way to get started learning to play by ear is to playfully noodle around on the instrument, making tunes up, and trying out musical ideas for fun. It is not necessary to learn a lot about music theory or adopt a system of improvisation to learn to play by ear. These might be helpful, but nothing can compare to the simple daily exercise of sitting by yourself, perhaps in the dark or with your eyes closed, and playing what pleases you. If you would like your session to be more private, use a practice mute.

Some people think they cannot learn to play by ear, but that is probably because they haven’t practiced it very much. Five minutes a day of working out melodies is all it takes. Go for the note you hear in your head and try to make it come out of the instrument. At first it may take several tries to locate the note you want. There should be no thinking about key or any reference to musical symbols in this practice. The focus of the exercise is on finding the tone you want quickly.

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Pick a melody, choose a starting note, and figure it out. With regular practice, the notes that you hear in your head will instantly come out of the bell, just like that. Learning to play by ear is not a matter of talent or special ability; it is a matter of desiring this skill so badly that you will work on it every day from now on. Work is the wrong word for this process; it is truly play.

I like the image of a shepherd with a flute, alone on a sunny hillside in some ancient time. The shepherd enjoys creating beautiful melodies, note by note. The shepherd uses trial and error, a natural process that all of us know intimately and intuitively. There is no right or wrong on the hillside, just the process. The shepherd plays for the pleasure of it and no other reason.

If you were playing whatever came into your head, we might call it a soliloquy. The most famous soliloquy in written literature is “To be or not to be...” in which Shakespeare’s Hamlet speaks his thoughts aloud. A soliloquy differs from a speech or monologue because no one in the drama can hear Hamlet thinking but the audience. A soliloquy is the outward expression of the flow of thought.

If you were to create a musical soliloquy with your instrument, what would it be like? A voicing of your thoughts and feelings in tones? A musical reflection on the state of you at this moment? It could be a stream of consciousness expression in sound that could freely go anywhere, take any form, and allow any sounds. A soliloquy is one of the most intimate modes of personal expression because each of us defines what it is for ourselves. There is no form. Just pick up your instrument and start playing.

J.S. Bach wrote magnificent music for single line instruments, and while he didn’t actually write it for the trumpet, there are many fine transcriptions that work well for our instrument. Michael J. Gisondi’s *Bach for the Trumpet* (McGinnis & Marx) is a favorite, and David Cooper’s transcription of the Bach Cello Suites (Roger Dean Music) has two CDs of Cooper’s beautiful performances enclosed for reference. Our thanks to Jay Lichtmann, who has, for so many years, freely provided us all with some wonderful transcriptions at his web site (<http://uhaweb.hartford.edu/lichtmann>).

And don’t worry about those people who think it is inappropriate to transcribe and arrange music written for other instruments. Bach approved of this kind of thing and he did it all the time.

Jazz musicians know the value of learning a transcribed solo—it is one of the most efficient and effective ways to learn to play jazz, but you don’t have to limit it to jazz solos. Pick any solo you love, one that sounds like the way you want to sound. The goal is to play the solo exactly like the original artist, at the same tempo, with the same inflection and sound, and the same emotion and feel, all from memory. There are hundreds of transcribed solos available on the web, but you will get much more from the experience if you transcribe it yourself. Better yet, learn it on your instrument directly from the recording, bypassing notation altogether, by picking each note out by ear and testing it on the trumpet. This work takes

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lots of time but the payoff is huge. Do just a little bit each day.

Unaccompanied solo performance is very personal. There is no place to hide. You need to have a beautiful sound. The level of your accuracy and consistency needs to be extremely high all the way to the end of the piece. Your listeners will hear every breath, every attack, every tone, and every release. Every blemish will seem amplified and exaggerated. You will need enough endurance to play for one or two minutes without stopping, maybe longer. Your level of focus and concentration will have to be very high.

But don't worry about all of that now. The way we accomplish things is by trying to do them. So pick something you love, practice it over the months and years, and craft it into a beautiful thing.

And when you play it, play it with all of yourself. Play it as if it is the last time you will ever play, every time.

About the author: Frank Gabriel Campos is professor of trumpet at Ithaca College's Whalen Center of Music. For many years he served as a member of the ITG Board of Directors. Campos is the author of *Trumpet Technique* (2005), published by Oxford University Press.

