

A method for brass musicians to practise and improve their stamina and upper register

Many brass instrumentalists know the feeling of being completely "flattened" after a concert. On bad days this sensation may appear long before the end of the show. Until quite recently I had to deal with that problem, too. As the lead trumpet player in a Big Band there always came a point where I felt that I had to pluck the mouthpiece from my lips and rearrange my incisors. The day after, my lips used to be swollen and the last thing I fancied doing was practising or playing again. How did that happen? The unfortunate condition is a result of the soft lips being under pressure from the teeth on the one side and the hard mouthpiece on the other. Yet, brass musicians cannot do without the certain amount pressure needed to seal the lips and the mouthpiece. The louder you play and the higher your register, the higher that pressure will have to be.

How then to avoid that problem?

You ought to try to contract the orbicular muscle round your mouth, which will then absorb the pressure of the mouthpiece on the lips. Furthermore the corners of your mouth can be of use, as the orbicularis oris is not attached to any bone. You should never forget, though, that even the best lip muscles depend on their co-operation with breathing and tongue. This correlation can be compared with a race car, which depends equally much on its tyres, engine and undercarriage: if one factor fails, the race is lost.

Thus the exercises in this book aim not only at building strength and extending the motor activity of your lip muscles, but also at the optimizing of your breathing apparatus and your tongue. It is important to practice without the trumpet as well as your regular sessions with your instrument. For further reading I recommend Malte Burba's book Brass Master Class.

Playing the most high-pitched notes should never be the foremost aim of a trumpet player. However, augmented high tones are a pleasant side-effect of an optimized individual technique. Moreover you should be aware that a better control of the instrument gives the player more freedom of playing. I do not only mean the technique of playing your instrument but also of conserving your power. Therefore, your practice sessions should comprise exercises specially designed to building stamina as well as technical and other exercises.

This booklet is not an entirely new method for brass players, yet it differs from other instructions in its methodical proceeding. The exercises are designed to build stamina, strength and co-ordination, thereby improving the player's overall performance.

As mentioned above, you should practice without your instrument, as well. Parts of the units can be practised by "buzzing" or using a BERP or a MACK. Then it is

useful, however, to check your pitch using a piano, keyboard or tuner.

Teaching at trumpet workshops I have often been asked if there are any particular exercises to help people improve their stamina and high pitch. I have written this book in response to those questions and to make the exercises available to as many brass musicians as possible. All exercises printed here have been intensively tested and for years have been part of my daily practice sessions. Playing them has given my stamina and upper register an important boost and they have helped sustain and further improve my co-ordination, power and stamina.

Finally I would like to recommend regular, but not excessive, practice. The exercises in this book should not take up more than one quarter of your daily practice programme. Only musicians who take great care of playing accurately can profit from this book.

Practice Method

I have derived my practice method from long distance running, which however depends, much more than trumpet playing, also on other factors, such as your heart and circulation. Yet, many training patterns and exercises can be transferred onto trumpet practice.

By optimizing your movements in long distance running you can keep up your speed with less effort or, using the same amount of power, achieve higher speeds. Since trumpet playing also demands a co-ordinated movement of tongue, lips and chest, you can improve your stamina not only by investing more strength but also by optimizing these movements. As a side effect you can play higher-pitched tones, too.

On the other hand you also have to exercise your muscles to enable them to perform the necessary movements for as long as possible. When the muscles are exhausted a loss of sensitivity precedes the final fading of strength.

One simple example: when holding an object with your arms extended, they will begin to tremble before you finally have to put the object down, as all your strength has been spent. Similarly, when playing the trumpet you cannot play a clear tone anymore, even if, using force, you might still produce one or two higher notes.

Thus we trumpet players can be described as a cross between 100m sprinter and marathon runner as we have to be able to play for a long time as well as perform short high note passages. Therefore our practice patterns must be structured and aimed at preparing our body for the demands of the concert.

We should take care not to spend all our practice time on improving the stamina. Similar to a marathon runner, you exercise playing long licks of low intensity to prepare your body for the endurance demanded in con-

cert. To practice high notes you need to practise short peaks. The runner improves his speed doing mid-distance sprints. The trumpet player can achieve higher pitch by repeatedly playing beyond his/her personal limits during practice.

Like a bodybuilder, you should always do your exercises in sets, leaving time in between for the muscles of the lips, chest and tongue to recover. The breaks should get successively shorter and the exercises longer, as routine and strength develop.

As a general rule you can say that a muscle develops or "grows" when it is stimulated, i.e. when it is exercised beyond its limits. Accordingly you can only use the full volume of your breath after having exercised regularly.

The exercises need not be played in any particular order. You should vary and discuss with your instructor which ones you will profit from the most at your current level.

I have classified the exercises into three categories:

1. Co-ordination

2. Building Strength

3. Practising Staying Power

Under **1. Co-ordination** you find exercises to practise your movements. Playing them, you do not only exercise your lips but also your tongue and chest muscles. You should play the various exercises at different volu-

mes, keeping in mind to employ a steady force of breath, no matter how loudly you are playing. Before you get tired, have a break. When playing higher notes your lips contract and your tongue moves forward. When moving down the scale again, make sure you do not relax your lips more than necessary and let your tongue move backwards.

Under **2. Building Strength** you find exercises to take you to your upper limits, there by training the muscles as well as the co-operation of breathing, tongue and lips. Play them in sets, each as long as your strength lasts. Take a short break then play the next set. Take care to never play till you are completely exhausted.

Under **3. Staying Power** you will find tasks to practise your stamina at a medium level. Alternatively you could simply play some long midrange tones. I do find it more profitable, however, to simultaneously exercise the fingers and the tongue. Therefore these exercises are to be played slowly. You should pay attention to apply accurate finger pressure, to use steady breath and to the movements of your tongue.

Each musician should try and find out in which sequence the exercises are most convenient or useful and compile a practice programme for him- or herself.

Keep blowing

Joachim Kunze

Joachim Kunze (*1966) - Trompete, Flügelhorn, Didgeridoo, Komponist und Arrangeur

Joachim Kunze studierte bei Malte Burba. Warme, gefühlvolle Töne bis hin zu messerscharfen Highnotes im viergestrichenen Bereich, sein Klangspektrum füllt die ganze Bandbreite der Trompete aus. Sein umfassendes Studium der Trompete ist Grund dafür, dass er als einer der Wenigen die Fähigkeit besitzt, bis zum "c5" zu spielen.

Die Leser der Internetplattform blasmusik.de wählten Joachim Kunze in der Kategorie Solist auf den 1. Platz. In der Kategorie Ensemble belegt er mit den „Firehorns“ vor German Brass den 2. Platz.

Als Endorser der Firma Jupiter er gibt er Workshops für Blechbläser und Big Bands in ganz Deutschland. „Gäbe es hierzulande einen Preis für „the most underrated trumpet player“, hätte Joachim Kunze Aussichten auf diesen Preis....“. Rainer Bratfisch (Jazzpodium). „Joachim Kunze zählt mit seiner Soundvielfalt und seinem Tonumfang zu den außergewöhnlichsten europäischen Trompetern.“ (Sonic)

Sein Können belegen zahlreiche CDs → jo-kunze.de

Joachim Kunze (b. 1966) - Trumpet, flugelhorn, didgeridoo, songwriting: composer and arranger

J. K. was taught by Malte Burba. His sound covers the entire range of the trumpet, reaching from warm, expressive tones up to the sharp high notes four octaves above middle C. Thorough studies of the trumpet and untiring practice form the basis of Kunze's exceptional skill of blowing up to c5.

The readers of German website www.blasmusik.de voted Kunze on first place in the top ten list of solo performers. In the category of ensemble players he ranks second with his group, the Firehorns.

Endorsing trumpet manufacturer Jupiter, Joachim Kunze teaches brass and big band workshops and clinics all over Germany. He has released several CDs displaying the wide variety of his styles and skills.

"If there was an award for "most underrated trumpet player", Joachim Kunze would be among the favourite candidates for it." (Jazz Podium). „Due to the variety of his sound and the width of his register J.K. belongs to the most outstanding European trumpet players.“ (Sonic Jazz Magazine) Translation: Wolf Stumm