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1. Introduction

Two elderly gentlemen arrive at the Pearly Gates to be met by Peter, who, looking a little worried, explains to them that, owing to cut backs and economy drives, he can only allow one of the two into Heaven. Wanting to be fair he allows each to give reasons why he should be allowed in.

"Well," says the first, "I was the village priest and every Sunday I prayed for my entire congregation. Having led a virtuous life I feel I have earned my place in Heaven."

"Indeed," says Peter turning towards the other, "and what would be your reasons?"

"Well," says the other, "I can hardly have preference over a priest as I was only a horn player in the town orchestra."

"Well, well," says Peter, "so that was you? Come on in then!"

"But why?" asks the priest astonished.

"Simple," says Peter, "on Sunday you prayed for your congregation, but during every concert the whole audience prayed for the horn player!"

It is unfortunate, but true, that many horn players rely a good deal on luck. They prefer to ignore any problems that they may have, and just practise more in the hope that the problem will solve itself and simply go away. What is missing from both luck and extra practise is a basic understanding of the simple principles of horn playing which would provide the tools to solve problems, or prevent them from occurring in the first place. There are many books available containing studies of varying degrees of virtuosity, but there may come a point, for even the most talented player, where he or she may stop to think, "What do I actually do to hit a C sharp?" As most players with natural talent play instinctively, they probably will not know the answer. As long as the intuitive muscular memory keeps hitting the C sharps, he or she will not need to think about the hows and whys of playing. If, however, we start splitting our C sharps and the problem doesn't go away, we are faced with a crisis, and this will be obvious to our audience as well.

You may find, reading the following, that you will disagree with parts. If so, then you are probably already consciously aware of what you are doing and have formed your own ideas on technique. On the other hand if you find something that rings a bell and perhaps even solves a problem, then we can both be satisfied!

2. "Singing on the Wind"

"Singing on the Wind" epitomises our goal as horn players when playing our instrument. A good musician plays in such a way that the listener hears only the music. The listener is unaware of the musician's technique. A good musician "sings" with the instrument. The horn player "sings on the wind". In order to sing on the wind, the player must establish an efficient technique. An efficient technique is a perfect balance of embouchure and air, which allows the instrument to resonate optimally. When that happens it sounds effortless to the listener.

The quality of sound that a player produces on his instrument is dependent on the quality of his or her air support. Good quality air support allows the embouchure to function with optimum efficiency. Poor quality air support, be it either weak or forced, will cause the embouchure to work harder than necessary. This in turn cramps the air flow, which in turn causes the embouchure to work harder so creating physical tension. This will then become audibly obvious in the sound produced on the horn. To establish good quality air support we first need to breathe in...



7.4 The jaw

The lower lip is supported by the lower teeth and jaw. The movement of the jaw reflects and assists the shape and size of the aperture within the mouthpiece. When forming an embouchure, most players move the jaw forward so that when playing a pitch in mid-range the upper teeth are more or less above the lower teeth with a gap of a few millimetres between. When playing a lower pitch, the aperture is more open. This is assisted by moving the jaw downward and slightly outward. The lower the note the more pronounced the movement. When playing a higher pitch, the aperture is smaller. This also is assisted by moving

the jaw slightly upward and inward, although this movement is less obvious. An even and flexible movement of the jaw can greatly assist the embouchure in both accuracy and tone quality.

8. Other Embouchure Aspects

8.1 Mouthpiece pressure

Most players use some mouthpiece pressure, and most use more pressure for the higher pitches than for the lower. Some pressure is not detrimental, but too much is. The question is, what is "too much". When the upper and lower lips vibrate within the mouthpiece it should be possible to feel the "buzz" on both lips at all pitches. A useful rule of thumb is



18. Warming up

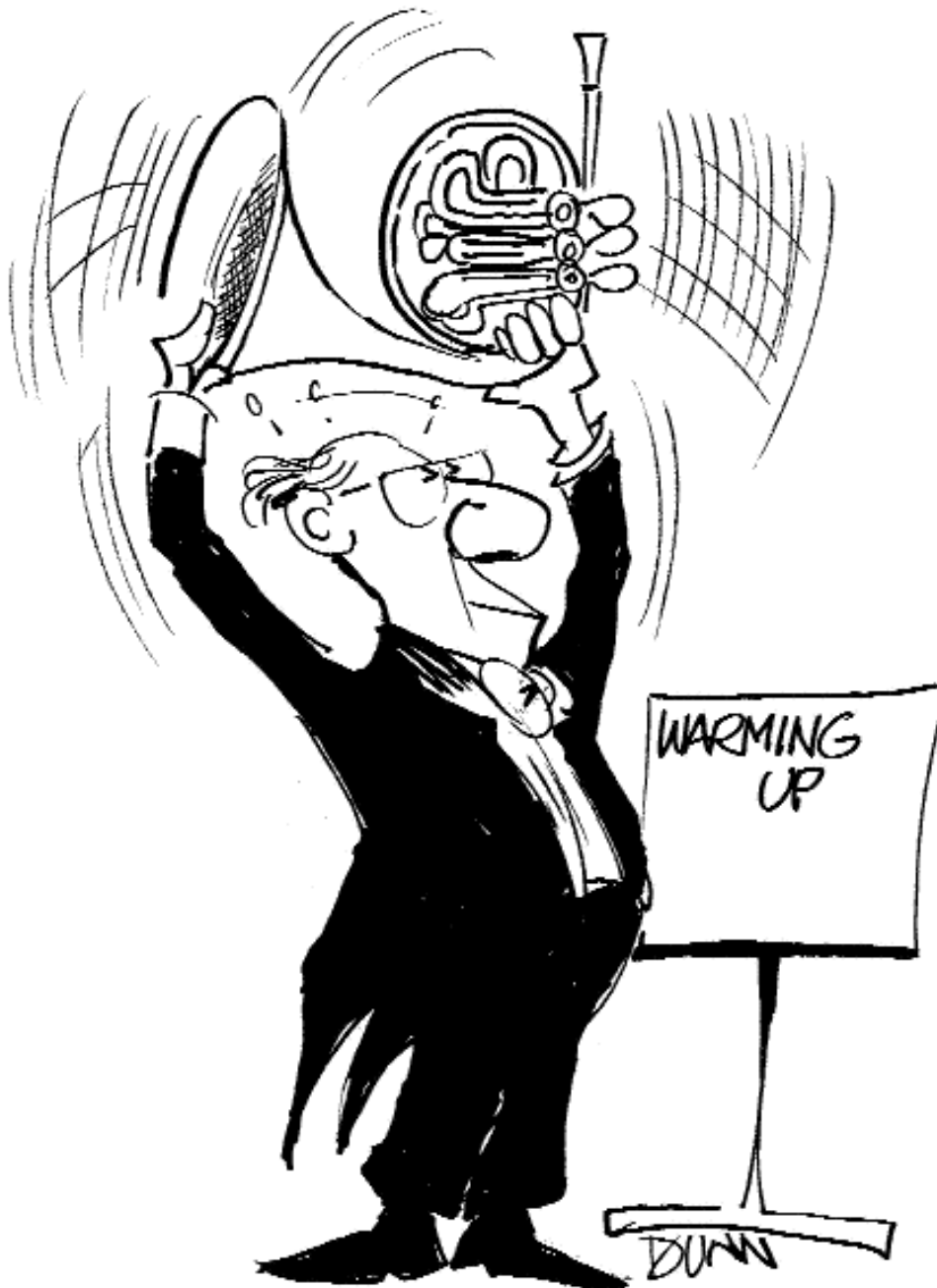
It is vitally important to warm up efficiently and conscientiously before any practise session, rehearsal or performance. The warm-up should be a routine which, as far as possible, does not vary either in content or time taken, and should serve as a means of preparing the breathing and the embouchure for the work ahead.

Only if the routine remains the same can the warm-up become efficient, so that a day-to-day comparison can be made. This comparison is important as it enables us to compare how the

embouchure feels on a "good day" with how it feels on a "not so good day". This experience through comparison enables us to consciously warm up the embouchure on a "not so good day" towards how it feels on a "good day".

As it is a means of preparation, the routine should be relatively simple, allowing observation of both breathing and embouchure.

After playing each exercise, rest for the same duration to allow a moment of reflection, and also to relax the embouchure.



Nigel Downing

Nigel Downing was born in England. At the age of ten he wanted to learn the trumpet, but the school didn't have any left. "Start on the horn, you can always change later!" was the response. He won a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London, and a year later was freelancing with some of the leading British orchestras. At age twenty-two he became co-principal horn at the State Opera in Darmstadt, Germany, before moving to the Tonhalle Orchestra, Zurich, Switzerland in 1987. For 5 years he played as utility player principal, second and third horns, and principal horn in the Zurich Chamber Orchestra. He now plays third horn in the Tonhalle Orchestra. Since 1992 he has been teaching horn and chamber music at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Zürich. (www.hmt.edu/musik)

