

Teaching Trombone Tone...

from the podium

prepared by

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for

Florida Bandmaster's Association
Summer Convention

Thursday, July 11, 2013

Hilton Hotel
Altamonte Springs, Florida

Teaching Trombone Tone...from the Podium

- I. Understand the Nature of the Trombone and its Implications for Teaching
- II. Understand the “Myelin Effect”: The Real Story behind the Acquisition of Skill
- III. Understand the Brass “Triangle” and its Implications for Teaching Tone
- IV. Understand the Importance and Necessity of Building a Tonal Concept
- V. Understand the Importance of Wind as the Basis of Tone
- VI. Understand the Influence of Embouchure on Tone
- VII. Understand the Influence of Articulation on Tone
- VIII. Brass Resources for the Music Educator

Myelin and the Necessity of Practicing Correctly

Myelin is a brain chemical whose job is to “insulate” and, therefore, strengthen specific nerve fibers running from the brain to various parts of the human body. Myelin is created through physical action whether it is athletic or musical. As a person repeats a specific action, such as playing the trombone, the brain responds by producing more myelin. This increased flow of myelin results in a stronger and thicker bonding to the specific nerve fiber being “fired” or stimulated by the action. The stronger and thicker the insulation of this nerve fiber, the more accurate, rapid, and consistent the response of the action will be.

The purpose of practicing is not only to create the flow of myelin from the brain but, more importantly, to get it to wrap itself around the **correct** nerve fiber being stimulated by the action of practicing. Myelin can insulate either the **correct** neural pathway insuring a consistent, accurate and dependable performance of that action. If the wrong nerve fiber is insulated, then the player’s performing will be marked by inaccuracy and unpredictability.

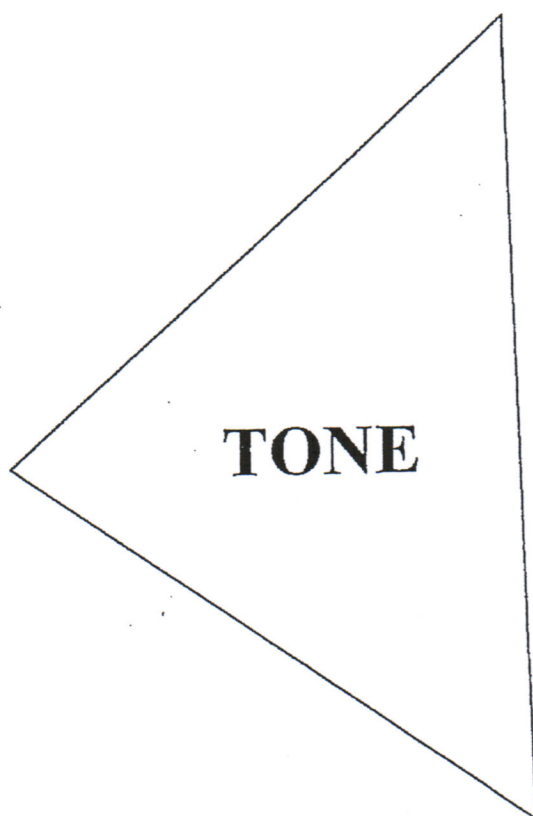
Therefore, practicing **must** be approached, focused, and organized to produce **correct** results. Techniques aiding the production of **correctness** are those that focus on **simplicity** and **repetition**. **Long tones**, **lip slurs** and **scales** are ideal examples of this concept because they allow the brain to focus on specific aspects of playing **correctly**. **Correctness** is the key in practicing because

Correctness = Consistency = Confidence!!!

Unfortunately, the opposite is also true.

Coyle, Daniel. The Talent Code: Greatness Isn’t Born. It’s Grown. Here’s How. New York: Bantam Books, 2009.

WIND



Embouchure

Articulation

The Importance of Wind as the Basis of Tone

Place emphasis on exhalation (Eastern Asia Approach)!

- I. Words:
 - a. BLOW!!!! Notice the "OH" in the word BLOHW!!!!
 - b. OPEN the teeth wider!!! Notice the "OH" in the word OHPEN!!!
 - one finger width
 - width of the mouthpiece shank (be careful)
 - c. Notice the "OH" in the word TOHNE!!!!
 - d. OPEN the teeth and LET more air escape. More air = more sound!
 - e. BLOW across the room at a "bullseye".
 - f. BLOW me off the podium! (Be careful with this one)
 - g. PROJECT ("throw forward") the wind through the nine-foot long trombone (in first position) and out into the audience!
 - h. AIR is free, so WASTE it on the sound!
 - i. Blow WARM (slow, large) air for low, middle range notes and COOL (fast, small) air for higher register notes.
- II. Gestures
 - a. Look at the trombones and form a fist to denote strength.
 - b. Open the left hand and move towards the body to denote movement of air and sound towards the audience
 - c. Hold palm in front of hand and blow it away from the body.
 - d. Imitate the changing length of the trombone and blow at the hand where it is located.
 - e. Point forcefully in the direction which the air should be moving.
- III. Actions: Notice **ALL** (except e and f) are practiced **AWAY** from the instrument!)
 - a. Blow freely **without** the instrument on the face. Listen for a free, OPEN, HOH, HAH, or WHO. Emphasize little resistance! (**NO** sizzle!)
 - b. Use pinwheels, if possible, to see the result of air moving!
 - c. Blow a piece of paper (piece of music) straight out from face.
 - d. Use breathing devices to help "visualize" concepts
 - Breath Builder, Voldyne, Wind Master, Incentive Spirometer
 - e. Use long tones, lip slurs, scales to get air moving steadily.
 - f. Play entire passages with a glissando (no articulation)!!!!
 - g. Put a balloon over the shank of the mouthpiece and blow it up through the mouthpiece for 4/8/12 etc. counts.
 - h. Blow through an orange Gatorade cap to hear (feel) movement of wind.

Influence of Embouchure on Tone

Key Concepts are **NATURAL** and **FOCUS**.

I. Words:

- a. Keep a natural facial appearance.
- b. Keep teeth open the width of one finger (also relates to air)
- c. Focus the center of the lips inside the mouthpiece.
- d. Hold the corners firmly in their normal position on the face.
- e. Hold cheeks flat against the teeth at all times.
- f. Point chin forward and down.
- g. Open the inside of the mouth for more resonance and control over the speed of the air at loud volumes.

II. Gestures:

- a. Open the thumb and middle finger (letter C) to illustrate opening the teeth
- b. Use both hands as if holding a beach ball and move north-south or east-west to simulate openness of inside of the mouth.
- c. Using right and left index fingers, place on corners and gently squeeze inwards towards teeth.
- d. Form an "oo" syllable like a gentle whistle
- e. Focus air at the tip of your index finger or little finger if more focus is needed.
- f. Point left/right index fingers inwards towards center of body to simulate focus and corner movement.
- g. Open the mouth as in saying the doctor's office "AH"
- h. Hold hand in a horizontal letter "C" while saying AH

III. Actions (Again, notice that **ALL** actions are done **AWAY** from the trombone)

- a. Blow through a straw to increase air focus.
- b. Blow at a pinwheel
- c. Place a dot (or small circle) in the palm of the hand and blow air at it.
- d. Blow through a Gatorade cap.
- e. Blow soap bubbles to increase focus and keep naturalness of face.
- f. BUZZ melodies on the mouthpiece alone!!!!

Effect of Articulation on Tone

Key Concept: Articulation literally means correct speech!

I. Words:

- a. Clear
- b. Defined
- c. Artic'ulate (say "kitty" not "kiddy")
- d. Precise
- e. SAY "too" (for staccato, marcato and tenuto styles)
- f. SAY "doo" (for legato style **ONLY!**)
- g. Relax your tongue because it is (in the words of Trivial Pursuit) the strongest muscle in the body
- h. Imagine you are speaking into a nine-foot long brass megaphone.
- i. Use as little tongue movement possible.
- j. Move LOTS of WIND as you "speak" the passage (More wind = clearer articulation)
- k. Say "tWHO" not "Twho" (visually means more air and less tongue)
- l. Think 80% air and 20% tongue instead of vice versa
- m. Interrupt (not stop) the air with the tongue
- n. "Bounce" the tongue off the roof of the mouth like the tip of a snare drum stick bounces off the head of the drum.
- o. Tongue LIGHTLY like whispering
- p. Use the "fingernail" of the tongue

II. Gestures:

- a. Move the fingers up and down as if waving gently while saying too/doo
- b. Drop the fingers downward for note starts while saying "too"
- c. Release the fingernail of the right index finger from the pad of the left index finger while saying "too"
- d. Wiggle the "baby's" pinky finger to simulate fast articulations
- e. Touch shoulder quickly while saying "too" and notice lack of movement

III. Actions:

- a. Say or, even better, sing problematic articulated passages out loud and listen for correct syllable (too/doo)
- b. Practice passage on a single pitch!!!! If cannot articulate clearly on a single note, then changing pitches will be impossible.
- c. Blow air while saying the too/doo syllable out loud. (NO sizzle please!)

Brass Resources for the Music Educator

- Campos, Frank. Trumpet Technique. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- a very comprehensive book but tends to be a bit over-detailed and long-winded
- Farkas, Phillip. The Art of Brass Playing. Atlanta: Wind Music Inc., 1989.
- the "bible" to some but a bit too detailed and analytical at times
- Johnson, Keith. Brass Performance and Pedagogy. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., 2002.
- a good, solid pedagogical text with relatively short, but thorough, chapters
- Nelson, Bruce. Also Sprach Arnold Jacobs. Mindelheim, Germany: Polymnia Press, 2006.
- a collection of "sayings" from Arnold Jacobs whom many brass players consider to a "god" when it comes to brass playing and pedagogy. GREAT source of metaphor and simile!
- Loubriel, Louis. Back to Basics for Trumpeters: The Teaching of Vincent Cichowicz. Chicago: Scholar Publications, 2009.
- excellent pedagogical ideas from a master teacher
- Mendez, Rafael. Prelude to Brass Playing. New York: Carl Fischer, 2005.
- more simplistic ideas, but very true and easily understood
- Haynie, John. Inside John Haynie's Studio. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2007.
- excellent pedagogical ideas; very easy to understand
- Griffiths, John. The Low Brass Guide. Roswell, GA: E. Williams Publishing Company, 1999.
- well-written and easily understood book
- Stewart, Dee. Arnold Jacobs – The Legacy of a Master. Northfield, ILL: Instrumentalist Publishing Company, 1987.
- a compilation of various brass playing problems as related by 31 players and the solutions proposed by Arnold Jacobs
- Frederickson, Brian. Song and Wind. Chicago: Wind Song Press, 1996.
- an in-depth look at the philosophy and pedagogy of the Arnold Jacobs.
 - a life-changing book for many people.
 - A must read for brass players!

David Schmidt

David Schmidt is an Associate Professor of Music at Stetson University where he teaches Applied Trombone, Brass Music Education Methods, and conducts the Stetson Trombone Choir. In addition, he also coaches chamber music, serves as the Coordinator of the Brass and Percussion Department, and is the Director of the Stetson Brass Camp. Prior to his appointment at Stetson, he also taught low brass and conducted bands, orchestras and jazz bands at various institutions, including the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Northern Colorado, the University of Texas – Arlington, Brevard Community College, Daytona Beach Community College and Bethune-Cookman College.

Mr. Schmidt received the Bachelor of Music Education and Bachelor of Music Performance degrees from Baylor University and the Master of Music degree in Performance from the University of Northern Colorado. His past teachers include Gordon Sweeney, Andrew Russell, and Buddy Baker. As a trombonist, he was a founding member of the Dallas Wind Symphony and has performed with numerous regional bands and orchestras in the United States and Canada.

A respected pedagogue, Mr. Schmidt is a frequent clinician and adjudicator at regional and state levels. He has been awarded Teacher of the Year by the Music Advisory Council at Stetson University on three separate occasions. Many of his students have won awards at local, regional and international solo competitions including those sponsored by the International Trombone Association, the International Tuba and Euphonium Association, the Leonard Falcone International Euphonium and Tuba Festival, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and the Eastern Trombone Workshop. Many of his former students are currently successful music educators, members of military bands, while others are students at prestigious graduate institutions.

Stetson University Trombone Choir

Formed in 1995, the Stetson Trombone Choir is comprised of all undergraduate trombone music majors, minors and non-majors. The ensemble rehearses one hour per week and plays a concert in both the fall and spring semesters. In 2009, the ensemble was featured on the Stetson University's Homecoming Showcase Concert with Stetson alumnus and former Los Angeles studio trombonist, Don Waldrop, as the guest soloist. This year, the fifteen-member ensemble was selected to perform two concerts at the International Trombone Festival which was held this year at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia.