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Dr. Denson Paul Pollard, Warm Up Session
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Breathing

A thorough understanding of the breath and things that affect the breathing process is essential for playing a low brass instrument well. From the very beginning, young low- brass players must be aware of the important role that proper breathing plays in playing a brass instrument well. Tone, intonation, range (high and low) and technique are all affected by proper use of the air.

Expansion

1) The trombone is a "high air-volume" instrument. Conversation breath is not enough to play the trombone well. In most cases, a young player's idea about a large breath is under-estimated. Although most young players think that they are taking a big breath before they produce a sound on the instrument, they usually are not! "Trombonists must be athletes in breathing in that they must have large air capacity. One must inhale a large amount of air in a short period of time in a most relaxed manner." Ed Kleinhammer. In order to take a large breath in, all of the "stuff" (throat, tongue, etc…) that is between your lungs and lips has to get out of the way. Thinking about making the lips the point of entry for the air will open the throat. It also sets a precedence for the passageway when the air is leaving the body.

Deflation

2) Taking a large breath in is a "means to an end." Of the small percentage of young players that take a large breath in, most of them do not waste the air back out through the instrument. Most young players let their sound suffer by trying to play longer phrases by conserving the air. In order to have a resonant and full sound, trombonists have to waste the air back through instrument in a relaxed but focused way. It is important to remember not to force the air out, but imagine that the air wants to leave the body. A brittle or harsh sound in the middle register is a sign that there is too much force behind the exiting air; in other words, too much internal pressure. A "wah" sound at the beginning of notes is a sign that the player is conserving air at the beginnings of notes. Waste the air at the very beginning of the note. Don't control the air with the throat, chest or tongue. Don't hold the chest "up" as the air leaves the body, but let it drop or "deflate" as the air leaves the body.

The topics of posture and tension are directly related to the topic of breathing.

1) Posture- The correct posture for playing the trombone (and any other wind instrument) is the posture that ***inhibits the breathing process the least***. The characteristics of correct posture include the following.

-if sitting, both feet on the floor, shoulder width apart. The buttocks should be on outer part of the chair, with the back off of the chair back.
-the neck should be straight so that there are no "kinks" in the windpipe. Kinks in the windpipe make it harder for the air to enter and exit the body.
-the shoulders should be relaxed, especially when taking a breath.
-to maintain good posture, you bring the horn to your face, not vice versa.
-young players should make sure that their music stand placement does not cause them to have bad posture.

2) Tension- Tension will be defined for our purposes as extra work that is not needed, but that hinders the playing process. Tension is our enemy when playing the trombone. We play our best and are most efficient as players when we expend the least amount of energy that it takes to play well. When we expend more energy than we need while playing, it actually makes our playing worse in the short term and in the long term. Players that find that perfect balance between work and relaxation have better endurance, range, sound quality and have longer careers. I recommend an "Alexander Technique" seminar to anyone who has the chance to participate.

When the breathing apparatus is functioning properly, there is a visible expansion and deflation in the chest, like a fire bellow. The ribs outline where the lungs are located in the body. So…. that is where the expansion and deflation should be! But…..no extra energy should be expended to cause expansion and deflation. "Breath to expand, don't expand to breath," Arnold Jacobs. Be aware of the myth of "breathing from the diaphragm." The only reason why there is movement in the lower abdomen when we breathe is because the expanding lungs are displacing the internal organs.
Stretching and breathing exercises before playing will make sure that stiffness in the muscles of the upper torso does not hinder proper functioning of the breathing apparatus.

Ultimately, sound is the determiner of whether or not the breathing apparatus is functioning properly.

Air and the High Register

Several things have to happen physiologically if a player is to be successful at playing in the high register.

1. The higher we play, the more straight down the air is focused into the mouthpiece.
2. In order for our lips to maintain a buzz, but still focus the air downward, we have to strengthen them. We do that by contracting them, or by making the tissue of the embouchure move forward (an ugly kiss pucker), not backwards (the smile embouchure).
3. *Having a full tank of air in the lungs makes playing in the high register a lot easier* The higher we play, the more the air is pressurized inside our body. Think of when you were a kid and made high pitches with a balloon. You filled the balloon with lots of air, closed off the opening and squeezed the body of the balloon.
4. Expend the least amount of energy possible when playing in the high register. RELAX- although you do have to work a little harder!!

Air and the Low Register

We can think about several things that are air-related to be successful playing in the low range.

1. The lower we play, the more directly into the shank(opening) the air is focused.
2. Playing well in the low register requires that the tissue of the embouchure be more loose. The lips buzz at a lower speed when we play in the lower register.
3. Think about using a larger "air column" when playing in the low register. This requires more air but less internal pressure.
4. When playing in the low register, take big relaxed breaths and take them often!!

Air and Articulations-The higher we play, the further back on the roof of the mouth the tongue should hit. When playing low, the tongue should hit farther forward.

Sound quality-Besides making sure that the breathing apparatus is functioning properly, make sure that the slide is in the right place (sweet spot), and that the exact pitch is being buzzed.