

Maximizing Practice

Mark Van Cleave

The physical demands for trumpet players have evolved so quickly in the last forty years, that trumpet players have not been able to keep up. The range and endurance required to perform today's music has turned playing the trumpet into an athletic event. Trumpet players need to address these physical demands in the same systematic and focused approach as athletes. Understanding the physical skills needed to play the trumpet correctly can be a frustrating search for answers.

In my own search for these answers, I have studied with, and picked the brains of some great trumpet teachers and players. Some of these teachers are: Jerry Franks, Dominic Spera, Bill Adam, Claude Gordon, Jerome Callet, Don Jacoby, and Max Greer. My books: *Maximizing Practice Volume 1: A Daily Practice Routine for Developing Trumpet Skills* and *Maximizing Practice Volume 2: Developing Trumpet Range, Power, and Endurance*, are a combination of information on how the trumpet *machine* works, and exercises that are focused on individual skills. The exercises in these methods are designed to change and improve your *machine*. (In order for your *machine* to improve, it has to change). The exercises are focused in order to maximize results. There are many books with great exercises you can play, but how you practice them will determine your improvement. (A great exercise practiced wrong will not help you).

SMART PRACTICE

One of the biggest problems with developing trumpet players is the way they neglect to use all of the tools they have to accomplish their goals. The mind is the most powerful resource for learning or developing skills that any trumpet player has. Yet most players practice by playing through a prescribed set of exercises. When they are finished, they are done practicing for the day. No thought went into how or what they were trying to improve. Once programmed with the correct information, the brain can not only calculate how to best perform the desired task, but also has the ability to control the body and make necessary physical adjustments without having to consciously. It is important to remember that the brain is a very powerful computer, and is capable of tremendous feats. Although, the greatest computer is only as good as the software that you are running and is completely dependent upon the quantity and the quality of information programmed into it. Without this quantity and quality of information, even the most powerful computer is rendered completely useless. All the information in the world cannot help you if you are unable to recognize when you are producing the correct end results.

Without the necessary information (how the trumpet works), your brain has no idea how to make the correct calculations or physical adjustments in order to help you. You would be playing a game of trial and error. Just aimless blowing. Not the most efficient way to develop a skill. Without a clear idea of the end result, if you were to achieve it, you might not even recognize it. And then, back to the drawing board. One of the most important aspects of developing as a trumpet player is to have a very clear idea of exactly how you want to sound. For this, you must listen very carefully to great players that you admire. Without a goal, it is impossible to reach one.

AVOIDING BAD HABITS

When you practice, you develop muscle memory or reflexes. These reflexes are what you draw from when performing or playing music. When you are playing music, you do not have enough time to think about all of the physical mechanics involved. You can only think about the music...what you sound like. The reflexes that you draw on while playing are developed during the practice session. Everything that you play builds reflexes...good ones and bad ones. While practicing, you must be careful not to build undesirable reflexes. Practicing while tired (mentally or physically) can lead to bad habits or reflexes being learned. Unlearning a bad habit takes much longer than learning a good habit.

Remember:

How you practice is how you will play. If you practice forcing the upper register because you are tired, you will only be learning how to force out high notes (not play them). When you are tired or distracted - **DO NOT PRACTICE!** Wait until you feel like practicing. Do not make your practice session a bad experience by forcing yourself to practice. When practicing something as difficult and challenging (mentally and physically) as range, the opportunity for developing bad habits is very good. You must concentrate even harder than with normal (safer) practice. Never practice past when you feel physically comfortable. If your chops need a break...take one. Know when to stop! There are many *Trumpet Jocks* out there that can play the trumpet well but cannot play any music that is worth hearing. It is easy to get caught up in the business of high notes or the higher, faster, louder syndrome. Try to remember that ultimately the trumpet is part of the MUSIC business (not the trumpet business). The creation of good music should be your ultimate goal.

Mark Van Cleave was born and raised in Indiana and is in demand as soloist, clinician, teacher, and show conductor. He has appeared as soloist with many high school and college bands. For ten years Mark traveled the globe conducting and playing lead trumpet with many traveling shows and circuses. Mark is currently playing lead trumpet with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra in Washington, D.C., and recording with his own group.