

Sing Through the Trumpet

By Dr. Michael H. Tunnell

As I continue to play, teach and study the trumpet, I realize the importance of making the musical aspect of playing more important than the technical aspect. Learning and practicing the various technical exercises on a daily basis is certainly fundamental to progress as a player, but musical considerations cannot be made secondary. Lyricism, phrasing, beauty of tone and communication through the musical line is too often neglected for the sake of "higher, faster and louder chops". Frequently the young player is deficient in the softer and more introspective areas of brass playing; the entire spectrum of dynamics and range should be developed with equal care, which will then equip the player with the ability to effectively communicate any musical idea, whether it be a fortissimo, declamatory fanfare or a pianissimo, sustained legato line.

Music can be thought of as a language, which must be learned much in the same manner as early speech patterns are developed. In training young players, one suggestion is to integrate rote practice (playing solely by ear) into the daily practice routine. Begin by playing simple songs on the mouthpiece alone. This method will effectively involve the listening skills of the player, as well as the utilization of good airflow, since the mouthpiece obviously has less resistance than the trumpet. The tunes can be changed daily: seasonal songs, popular tunes, children's melodies, jazz lines. The next step is to play the same tune on the trumpet, and an additional exercise involves transposing the tune into all possible keys; the transposition "chops" get a workout as well! Take this idea one step further by attempting to play from memory (again, the ear will be put to work) any solo or etude currently being studied. Trust your aural sense to lead you in the right direction.

Playing by ear and from memory are good supplements to the traditional practice of etudes, solos, excerpts and specific mechanics such as long tones, lip slurs, double and triple tonguing, single tonguing, legato, marcato and staccato tonguing, lyrical sustained playing, and flexibility. It is imperative that we never forget the "song" when playing the instrument. Keeping matters simple by focusing on singing through the horn even during the most complex passagework, just as one does when playing a simple tune in daily practice, will help the player communicate his ideas through his instrument. **If you can hear it, you can play it.**

Michael Tunnell has been Professor of Trumpet at the University of Louisville School of Music since 1988 where he is a Distinguished Teaching Professor. Tunnell performs with the Louisville Brass and as Principal Trumpet and Principal Corno da Caccia with the Louisville Bach Society and as Auxiliary Trumpet with the Louisville Orchestra. A founding member of the brass quintet Sonus Brass, Tunnell has toured the Far East and South America with this group and as a soloist. As a member of Sonus Brass and individually, Tunnell has been a teacher and clinician for the Youth Orchestra System in Venezuela, and a soloist with the Simon Bolivar Orquesta Sinfonica in Caracas. Tunnell can be reached at: mhtunn01@louisville.edu