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Playing Duets is Fun (and good for your playing)

By John Irish, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas

Some of the most fun I've had playing trumpet is getting together with another player and reading duets. One of the benefits of playing duets is that it helps many aspects of our trumpet playing; our performance can really improve while we're having a good time playing with a friend. You can rest assured your band director and private lesson teachers love to hear you playing duets—they know how important it can be to developing skills and techniques needed by the best players.

Some of the benefits of playing duets include ensemble skills (attacks and releases, playing together), intonation, blend/balance, sight reading, and of course, teamwork. Let's briefly discuss each one of these points and see how they apply to the student.

Ensemble skills Whenever we play with others, we must pay special attention to starting and stopping together; this is something we don't have to worry about when we play by ourselves. Always be aware of starting the duet perfectly together. Also, watch when both of you move from note to note; make sure that it is really together—without one going faster than the other. These simple aspects of good ensemble playing will be a big help when you play in your other groups.

Intonation Playing in tune with other instruments is a crucial part of anyone's musical training. Work on playing octaves and unisons in tune, as well as good pitch on different intervals such as 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths. Using a tuner can be helpful in this process, but you will soon develop better hearing on your own without one. Know which notes on your instrument tend to be out of tune and then be very conscious to play them in tune. The end result will be much more pleasing to you both.

Blend and Balance Our goal here is to not stick out from the

context of the duet. Listen carefully so that both parts sound equal in loudness (that's the balance) and that the tone quality is consistent (that's the blend).

Sight-Reading The ability to quickly grasp notes, rhythms, dynamics, and other markings is very important. Playing duets that you've not practiced before is an excellent way to



improve your reading ability. When you first learned to read stories and books at home and school, with practice you were able to read faster and tackle more difficult material. It is the same when reading music; the more you do, the faster and better you become. Sight-reading will help you get better at recognizing rhythms; you will also start to hear various styles much better. Remember always to keep the key signature in mind!

Teamwork This is an essential skill to learn that will help you throughout your life. Learning to give and take for the common goal of a successful outcome is the basis of teamwork. Having the capacity to work well with others is rewarding and will make playing duets that much more enjoyable.

A Short List of Duet Books

The Arban Method {published by Carl Fischer}
Start with the many duets found in the Arban Method. These duets range from easy to difficult and include many different keys, rhythms, styles—even double and triple tonguing!

Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets (or Cornets) {published by Carl Fischer}
Transcribed by Sigmund Hering, this book is compilation of 32 works by J.S. Bach, Handel, Purcell, and other great composers. These duets are easy and very accessible for younger players.

Continues on next page

More Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets (or Cornets) {published by Carl Fischer}

32 more duets of the same type found in the first book. Another good resource for young players.

Selected Duets, Vol 1 and Vol. 2 {published by Rubank}

These are duets from a variety of composers, culled from different collections of duets. Volume 1 is rated Easy to Medium in difficulty; Volume 2 is rated Advanced.

Trumpet for 2 {published by Carl Fischer}

This is collection of Early Classics arranged by Sigmund Hering for young players. These are a bit more challenging than the two previous Hering books. The pieces in this book are longer and

contain keys and rhythms that are more advanced. However, they are more fun to play when worked up.

Amsden's Celebrated Practice Duets {published by C. L. Barnhouse}

This collection of 70 duets begins at a very easy level, short and with easy key signatures and rhythms. It progresses through to challenging, two-page duets in a wide array of rhythms and keys. This book is a standard in the libraries of most advanced players. Many trumpeters have spent hours playing through these duets. See how much fun you can have (and how your playing will improve) by playing duets with one of your friends. It's a great way to spend time!



Four Hints for Ensemble Playing

By Tim Jerram, West Yorks, United Kingdom

The trumpet is an excellent instrument for the adult, whether you are returning to music after a gap or are wishing to start from scratch, as it is possible with good teaching and diligent practice to achieve a reasonable standard within two or three years. However, psychologists tell us that the most satisfying activities are those which are shared with other people and have an end product, so sooner or later any player will want to join a group or band of some sort, and here the adult player is at a disadvantage. While the school or college learner can join a group of peers with varying abilities and learn the basics of ensemble playing, there are few such openings for the adult and you will usually have to join an established group of some sort. This can be a nerve-racking experience – everybody seems to play very fast and to use all sorts of “strange words,” but there are some steps you can take to prepare yourself better.

1. **LEARN TO PLAY RESTS!** This sounds silly, but the first essential element of ensemble playing is to be in step with everybody else. So the message is that you have to concentrate just as hard when you are not playing as when you are, and always to keep counting. It is better to play a wrong note at the right time than the other way around. For instance, if you have several bars' rest followed by a 2nd line G, you will probably get away with it if you mis-pitch and play 3rd space C. Even if you play the most tuneful G, but do it a beat or half a beat before or afterwards it will probably be very obvious!

2. **LEARN TO MAKE MISTAKES!** It is inevitable that you will make some mistakes - the question is what you do about it. In individual practice, if you play a wrong note it is instinctive to

correct it, even stopping and starting again or at best suspending the pulse of the music if only for a fraction of a second. You have to learn how to play through a mistake, making sure that the next note is accurate and in the right place. If you want confirmation of this, go to a live performance and listen very carefully to one of the instruments: you are likely to hear one or two mistakes but will see that they do not derail the performer.

3. **LEARN TO PLAY UPSIDE DOWN!** All teachers and tutor books emphasize the value of scales and are right to do so. But it is very easy to get into the habit of always beginning a scale on the lowest note - such as C below the staff. Unfortunately, that is also the easiest note to find and, composers being who they are, they rarely write an entry beginning there. They often ask you to start around the middle of the staff or higher, where the harmonics are much closer together. To overcome this, you should play at least 50% of your practice scales beginning with the top note and playing down the scale and then back up.

4. **LEARN TO PLAY BACKWARDS!** When faced with a tricky little section, it is tempting to rush at it until you break down and then to repeat it many times hoping to get a little further each time, like the tide coming up the beach. The result of this is that your confidence declines as you go through the passage. As your breath, and probably also your lip, are giving out, disaster is almost inevitable. So, play the last note several times. When you have mastered that, play the last two notes, then the last three and so forth. There are two advantages to this. First, as most of your attempts end in success rather than failure, practice is a lot more fun. Second, when it comes to a performance, you will be moving all the time to more familiar ground so you will be more relaxed (always a good thing!) and will have more attention to give to your breathing and lip.

Playing the trumpet is enormous fun, made even better by playing in a group with other musicians. Give it a try!



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How Much Thought Do You Give to Your Posture When You Practice?

By Jon Burgess, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas

“Stand up straight!” “Please sit up in that chair!” “Don’t slouch!” I imagine you have heard these statements from your parents and teachers since kindergarten. But these statements are not to be taken lightly when it comes to playing the trumpet. The primary step to better trumpet performance begins with your posture when you play. Slumping or slouching when you play or playing with your head down (whether standing or sitting), will result in other bad playing habits that may not be as easy to correct. When we play, the spine should be straight and the neck and head must be a continuation of this line. Keep your head straight, your chin up, and imagine you are playing to the farthest corner of the room. This will help promote good airflow and promotes better sound projection. The arms should be away from the body, so the torso is free to expand for the most efficient use of air. Resting your arms against your body only restricts the airflow and support. Good posture allows good breathing to happen without interference and should prevent excess tension when you play.

Try these two exercises to see how important posture can be to the sound you produce:

In a sitting or standing position sustain a note in the middle register and slowly raise and lower your bell. If you go too high or too low the sound will be dull or restricted; you are looking for the angle of the bell where your sound is resonant and full. For most people the best position will be for the bell to be tilted so it is approximately 15 degrees below a line parallel with the floor. Tilting the bell down too much will result in dropping the chin, which restricts the throat and negatively affects proper airflow.

Play a scale or short melodic passage in your normal playing position. Now try placing your heels and head against a wall and play the same passage. Did it sound significantly better? Most students usually find they sound better – this is because they are playing with a straight spine and the head is straight allowing for better airflow.

These are good exercises to make you more aware of your play-

ing posture and how it affects your sound. We are all creatures of habit. Just because we feel comfortable when we play doesn’t mean we are standing or sitting with the best possible posture to make us better trumpet players. Make sure you check your playing posture in front of the mirror frequently (both sitting and standing). If you spend most of your practice time sitting, make sure when you sit down to play, you are able to stand right back

up without adjusting your feet or upper body. This means that your legs should not be crossed underneath your chair, or sprawled out in front of you. Your back should also be straight and not touching the back of the chair. Don’t ever practice sitting on the edge of your bed, as that only encourages slouching.

The trumpet is a very directional instrument so where we point the bell greatly affects the sound. Be very aware when you practice not to play into the music stand. Adjust the stand so that your bell is pointing slightly off to the left or right of the stand. If you don’t practice making this a habit, it probably won’t happen at your next band

concert or solo contest. One of the most frequent comments I make when judging solo and ensemble contests to trumpet students is “get your bell out of the stand”. It is such an easy thing to correct, but if you don’t think about “getting the bell out of the stand” when you practice, it probably will not happen at your next rehearsal or performance.

Take notice of how great soloists stand on stage when they perform. Their stance usually exudes a feeling of confidence. This is the feeling you want to portray, whether you are standing or sitting, in your performance. It has been proven scientifically that correct posture affects not only the body but the mind as well. Good posture causes us to be more alert and we are able to concentrate better. Think how much more productive you can be in your practice sessions if you begin with correct posture.

Now “stand up straight!” and happy practicing.



Last Chair can be Cool, Too!

By Jerry Ringo, Munich, Germany

Junior high, high school and college students often have differing ideas about what being cool is: in one town it is the brand of jeans, in another the brand of shoes. There do seem to be some universal ideas about what is un-cool: wearing white socks with a tuxedo is one example, and sitting last chair in a band or orchestra is another. My first contract in a professional orchestra was for third trumpet—last chair in the Spokane Symphony! At one of the first rehearsals, Chris Cook, the second trumpet confided to me: “Our job is to make the first player sound good.” Great news! As last chair, my job is to make everyone else in the

section sound as good as they can, so they can get even more praise and make it even worse to be last chair! In high school and college, I had worked hard to become first chair and enjoyed the feeling of having that seat, like being a star quarterback, with the pleasures of leading the section and sometimes the whole ensemble. Now, instead of being the quarterback, I was being asked to block. It took a while, but I did manage to get into the role of playing third trumpet and discovered the joys of this position. Not a quarterback role, to be sure, but rather that of a talented blocking-back, sometimes catching the ball, sometimes running

with it, and taking pleasure in setting up the big play, getting dirty, and putting some hurt on.

The third trumpet gets to do a lot of fun things. Depending on the composer, you are sometimes a lead trumpeter, sometimes first trombone or first horn, and the rest of the time you get to play louder than the principal player to compensate for the laws of perceived loudness. It took a while, but we molded a tight section together, that played rhythmically together, in tune, phrased the same way, and matched sounds and styles. Luckily, our first-chair, Larry Jess, was wonderfully consistent: we knew his high A's would be a bit too low, his low E-flats a bit too high. After learning to play together, we started to think together as well. During a Pops rehearsal we nailed the *solì* section in Leroy Anderson's *Sleigh Ride*, looked at each other and smiled. The conductor, however, wanted the last note shorter. We looked at

each other and frowned. During the concert we did a very evil thing – without talking about it beforehand, we all nailed a big fat long chord at the end. We looked at each other and smiled. The conductor frowned. (Please don't do this to your conductor!)

But praise started to flow from conductors who had big-time international experience (our principal conductor Bruce Ferden, and guest conductors such as Gunther Schuller, Bill Conti, and Elmer Bernstein.) about our section: "I wish we had you guys" was one example from a guest, or the best, before *Bugler's Holiday* at an outdoor pops concert Bruce told the audience "We have here one of the best trumpet sections in the country." That felt very good, but not as good as the knowledge that if you count and listen, and are willing to be a team player, willing to contribute to the whole, being last chair can really, truly be cool!



A Cornucopia of Cornetists!

By Patricia Backhaus, Waukesha, Wisconsin

I U H R N M G N A C I I E Y S
 R D D O O O E Y A R I V C R K
 S C M I L R A H O M B A N E N
 W I X D T T D N O M Y A R W W
 S I M B S I S M I T H F N O W
 C A L O F M Y B W E D O C L B
 N Y Q L N E B U Z E K P B P I
 S N D F I R P L U J E S E V G
 K K H K M A X R V U N M T F X
 T Y C G B E M I B A H Y G W H
 K L R X T V K S J J O S C M O
 R T Z Y K M M R W S R M S J S
 M J X X M T R A A G N I T S Q
 B E L L S T E D T L E X Y Q O
 L Q T V B W A M E T C B I W E

Find the names (last names, in bold) of these famous cornetists in the puzzle at left. Names appear in all directions.

Jean Baptiste **ARBAN** *This cornetist could be considered the first cornet soloist of international renown.*

Herman **BELLSTEDT** *Teacher of Frank Simon, as well as being a cornet soloist, bandmaster, and composer.*

Herbert L. **CLARKE** *This cornetist is perhaps the most famous of all American cornet soloists. He played solo cornet with Gilmore's band and John Philip Sousa's band.*

Percy **CODE** *Australian cornet virtuoso, composer, and band leader.*

Edwin Franko **GOLDMAN** *This one-time member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra was a conductor, teacher, composer, and author.*

Florence Louise **HORNE** *She was the cornet soloist in "The Female Sousa," Helen May Butler's band.*

Earl D. **IRONS** *This cornet soloist, composer, and teacher was known as "The Herbert L. Clarke of Texas."*

P.G. **LOWERY** *Scott Joplin's rag, "A Breeze from Alabama," was dedicated to this cornetist.*

Henry **MORTIMER** *Cornet soloist, recording artist, and composer in the British Brass Band tradition.*

Alice **RAYMOND** *Famous early recording artist who was advertised as "The World's Greatest Lady Cornetist."*

Frank **SIMON** *Solo cornet player of John Philip Sousa's band who taught at the Cincinnati Conservatory.*

Walter M. **SMITH** *Cornet soloist, teacher, bandleader, and co-editor of Arban's Complete Conservatory Method.*

Ernest S. **WILLIAMS** *This outstanding teacher, composer, and bandmaster was well known as a cornet soloist and Principal Trumpet of the Philadelphia Orchestra.*

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