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Douglas Wilson, Editor

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MY FIRST YEAR PLAYING TRUMPET

BY MACKENZIE SHEEHAN, NORWOOD, MASSACHUSETTS

Last year was a very special year for me because I got to join the band and start playing my favorite instrument, the trumpet. At sign-up night I was nervous because lots of my friends wanted to play the trumpet, so I got there early to make sure that I was one of the kids picked to play it. Before we even went to sign-up night, though, I had already started practicing at home playing notes and even some songs.

When I first started playing I thought the trumpet was hard to hold up because it hurt my shoulders. You have to have really good posture when you play and sometimes doing that was hard. It got easier as I practiced more—my dad said that the more I held the trumpet the easier it would get. He also said that if I practiced a little every day I would build strong muscles in my face and body, muscles I will need to be a good trumpet player.

Every week at school we have full band class on Thursdays for thirty minutes. My favorite part about band class is when everyone plays together. It really makes a great sound and the coolest beat! On Fridays, I also have group trumpet lessons for thirty minutes. The other trumpet players in my Friday class are my good friends, Chelsea and Kaitlyn, and Matthew. The best thing about the lessons is when we get to play by ourselves.

At home I practice almost everyday for about twenty minutes. I have a chart on



Mackenzie Sheehan

the back of the door of our playroom that I fill in to keep track of how much I practice. When I practice I work on band songs, scales, and a couple of my favorite songs I know by heart. I am even starting to work on playing jazz and improvising! My dad helps me practice and he talks to me a lot about what is a good trumpet sound and how to get one.

Last week my dad took me to a jazz concert and we saw a professional trumpet player. His name was John Allmark and I thought he was amazing! He could play really high C's and he also went about two minutes without taking a breath. It was so cool! We listen to a lot of jazz music at home. I really like to listen to trumpet players who can play the really high notes like Maynard Ferguson, Wayne Bergeron, and Bobby Shew.

My band teacher at school is Ms. Swardlick. She is very nice and helpful as we learn to play our instruments. Our first concert is next week and everyone is really excited because we've been working hard all year long and finally all our work will pay off when we have a great concert. I am really looking forward to being in Advanced Band next year. Ms. Swardlick said that if I keep practicing I could be in Fifth Grade Honor Band. That would be great because we get to travel with the Band to a competition and maybe earn a gold medal. I'm definitely going to practice a lot this summer!

"My dad helps me practice and he talks to me a lot about what is a good trumpet sound and how to get one."



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STUDYING TRUMPET IN CHINA: A PORTRAIT OF PROFESSOR ZHONGHUI DAI

BY DOUGLAS WILSON, LEESBURG, VIRGINIA

China has emerged as a major industrial power in the 21st century. Hardly a day goes by when it is not mentioned in the news. A formidable player in the arts as well, China is producing world-class musicians on every instrument. Recently, *journal jr.* had the opportunity to visit with Zhonghui Dai, professor of trumpet at the Central Conservatory of Music, to learn more about studying trumpet in China.

jr: Were your parents musical? How supportive were they of your musical study?

Dai: My father played a Chinese instrument and was very supportive of my musical studies. He bought me my first trumpet.

jr: How and when did you learn to play the trumpet?

Dai: I started the trumpet when I was 13. At the time I was in the school orchestra and played a Chinese instrument called the Er-Hu. The Er-Hu is like a two-stringed bowed violin and it dates back more than a thousand years to the Tang Dynasty. I was a little big for my age and I played the natural trumpet in the marching band at the school, so the teacher chose me to play the trumpet. My main Chinese teacher was Huang Mao Lin, who was first trumpet in a province opera house orchestra.

jr: Where did you go to specifically study the trumpet?

Dai: I received my undergraduate degree from the Shenyang Conservatory of Music located in Shenyang, China. I came to America, where I received a graduate degree from the International University in San Diego and studied further at the University of Southern California School of Music.

jr: Who were your trumpet teachers in America?

Dai: I studied with Boyd Hood, Thomas Stevens, Charles Schlueter, Susan Slaughter, and Rob Roy McGregor.

jr: What are your professional duties in China?

Dai: I have been the principal trumpet of the National Symphony Orchestra of China (Beijing). In 2002, I joined the faculty of the Central Conservatory of Music as Professor of Trumpet and Head of Brass. I also serve as Vice President of the Chinese Association for Symphonic Bands and Ensembles and as a member of the International Trumpet Guild Board of Directors.

jr: How many trumpet students are in your studio?

Dai: There are 15 students in my class at the Central Conservatory, but more than 20 private students or pre-professionals. We have about 700 total music students in the Conservatory. They come from all over China.

jr: Is there a typical background or experience level of the incoming trumpet student?

Dai: There is no "typical student," and I imagine it is the same in the United States and elsewhere. Most are from 17 to 22 years of age. Some of them are my private students, while others are from high schools in China. They all have had private trumpet study prior to attending the conservatory. In addition to studying western music history, theory, and performance practices, they also study Chinese music history and folk music.

jr: When do Chinese students begin to study the trumpet?

Dai: In China, they start in the elementary school. There is not

a perfect age to start playing the trumpet. Most start by age eight or nine. We use the same literature as they do in the U.S. and Europe. Students play on Bach, Yamaha, Schilke... the same instruments employed elsewhere.

jr: What is the state of music education in China?

Dai: For a time, China was behind other countries in our concept of sound. But now, with the influence of western conductors and others, we are sounding more like groups found in other parts of the world. In 1994 I hosted the first Chinese trumpet conference in Beijing and introduced materials such as Clarke's *Technical Studies* and other studies which were unfamiliar to our people. Trumpet playing in China is rapidly catching up to the rest of the world... we have made great strides.

jr: It was obvious to many members of ITG that you have had a great influence on trumpet and brass playing in China. Many readers had the pleasure of hearing your Conservatory trumpet ensemble perform at the ITG conference in Bangkok and the playing was superb!

Dai: Thank you.

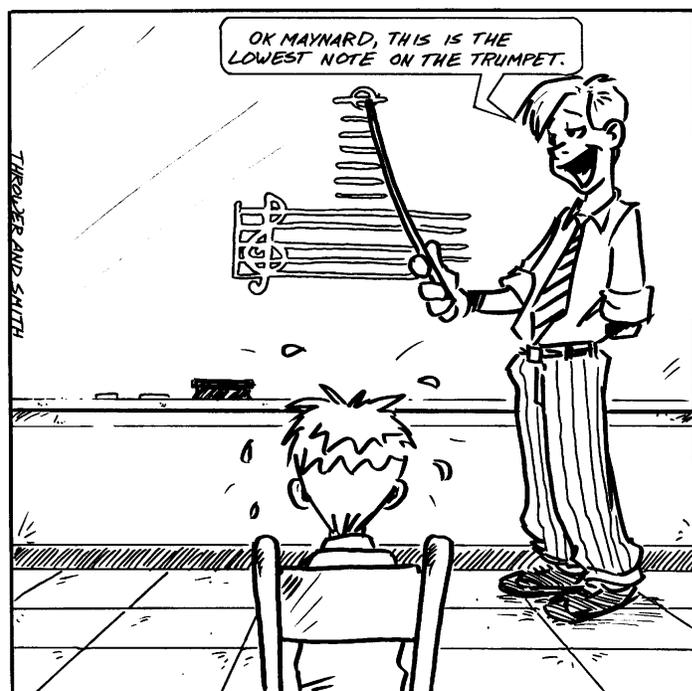
jr: What career opportunities exist for your students?

Dai: My students are getting jobs with symphony orchestras like the National Symphony of China, the Beijing Symphony, the China Philharmonic, and orchestras in Europe. There are also many different amateur and professional groups in China today. Even the Chinese Ballet uses some western instruments!

jr: Thank you Professor Dai for your time with us.

Dai: You are welcome!

Editor's Note: This is the first in a two-part series about trumpet playing in China.



TEN PRACTICE MYTHS

BY CHARLES DECKER, COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE

Myth #1: Everyone tells me I have musical talent, so I don't have to practice, right?

Reality: Depends on your objectives.

The question is, "To what level you want to develop your gift?" While you have musical aptitude for pitch recognition, rhythmic stability, and a seemingly natural sound on your instrument, it only means that progress for you may come faster than for others less "gifted." Developing sound consistency and sensitive musical interpretation will only mature with your willingness to develop this innate musical ability; in a word—practice. The musicians you admire have invested significant time and effort developing their talent.

Myth #2: Buying a professional model instrument or different mouthpiece will dramatically improve my performance capabilities without the need for any more practice.

Reality: Partially true.

Equipment can make a difference. However, most musicians feel performance success is based largely on individual effort (practice) and to a much lesser extent on owning good equipment. Professional models are superior in construction and design to student-line instruments; however the price difference can be significant. Regardless of equipment, you must dedicate yourself to practicing *and* properly maintain your equipment (instrument interior and exterior clean, no dents, freely moving slides, etc.). Regularly use a cleaning kit including a mouthpiece brush, flexible cleaning brush, valve casing cleaning rod or brush, polishing cloth, valve oil, and slide lubricant.

Myth #3: My teacher says to practice an hour daily. Since I play in band each day for an hour, isn't this practicing?

Reality: No.

Ensemble participation and rehearsals are essential to developing our musical capabilities, but they are not the same as personal practice. Personal practice refines our essential performance skills and allows us to explore solo repertoire. Ensemble rehearsals are for working with other musicians on intonation matching, balance sensitivity, rhythmic interaction, and exploring a limited amount of repertoire. Relative to developing endurance, an hour of ensemble rehearsal is equivalent to half that time (or less) of personal practice.

Myth #4: Since I am paying my private instructor for lessons, he should provide me free music and recordings.

Reality: You are expecting too much.

Private instructors usually provide students some music (typically warm-up exercises), but to expect a constant gift of free music, illegal photocopies, or recordings is unrealistic. Your instructor invested money to accumulate materials in their quest to learn the repertoire; now it is your turn to invest in your musical future by purchasing published copies. When we take an automobile in for repairs we pay for both the mechanic's knowledge (labor) and replacement parts. We don't get free parts!

Myth #5: Practicing should be fun.

Reality: Depends on your definition of "fun."

Some may consider practicing "fun" but for most the intensive work to overcome physical and musical challenges produces

more a sense of personal satisfaction and achievement. If you consider these experiences gratifying, then daily practicing truly can be "fun."

Myth #6: The more hours I practice, the better musician I will become.

Reality: Not necessarily.

Consistent progress is not based solely on total hours of practice. You should develop a weekly plan that accumulates as much time as you are willing to spend spread out as evenly as possible on a daily basis. Once this is in place, how efficiently you practice becomes the determining factor in how much can be accomplished in a session. Thoughtful, accurate and consistent practice is more important than amassing hours of mediocre work. Never start a session before deciding what you want to accomplish.

Myth #7: To build endurance, I should practice to the point of pain.

Reality: Wrong.

"No pain, no gain," right? Wrong! Practicing to the point of pain will not build endurance but most likely diminish it. Musicians with extended endurance capabilities have developed not only superior breath and embouchure control but also sensible approaches to improve the physical ability and mental concentration to play longer periods. Finding a proper balance between playing and resting in a practice session, knowing where to exert less physical effort while still meeting the demands of the music, and incorporating sensible approaches to increase endurance are all essential to consistent progress.

Myth #8: To master a challenging passage, I only have to be willing to practice it many times.

Reality: Partially true.

Willingness to repeat a difficult passage in order to master it does not by itself guarantee conquering the problem. Rather, how accurately and how many different ways you practice it ensures true performance consistency and confidence. Can you analyze the note pattern, sing the passage accurately on pitch using rhythmic syllables, play it different tempos, incorporate using different rhythms, transpose it, etc.? Practicing a passage fifteen times with ten inaccurate results only reinforces inconsistency. Efficient practice where you methodically and accurately practice difficult passages a variety of ways moves you forward to true accuracy.

Myth #9: If I am comfortable playing my solo in the practice room, then I will be comfortable in its performance.

Reality: Maybe and maybe not.

Regardless of how comfortable you are in the practice room, it is important to create solo opportunities prior to the actual performance. You can ask others to listen to your solo, record the entire solo without stopping, perform the solo as a church service prelude or postlude if it is appropriate in that setting, etc. Proper preparation and numerous practice performances will reduce stressful anxiety and contribute to a more confident solo appearance.

Continues on next page

TWO TIPS FOR BETTER TRUMPET PLAYING: PRACTICE HABITS AND SCALES

BY BRYAN GOFF, TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

Practice Habits:

We often characterize one's daily practice rituals as either being "good practice habits" or "poor practice habits," and in doing so we imply that the person usually has efficient practice methods or perhaps that the person simply has a high work ethic and simply maintains a regular practice routine. Habits, however, are simply actions or behavior patterns often performed unconsciously because of the reinforcement brought about by numerous repetitions of that pattern.

Playing a chromatic scale is a good example of a habit; once you've determined that a passage is a true chromatic scale you simply look for the beginning and ending note and you can play the entire melodic line without thinking about each individual note.

Excessive embouchure tension is another example of a habit. I once had a student who (initially) could play quite relaxed up to a high G, but attempting any note above the staff caused such incredible tension that it was impossible for him to get his tone to respond. This "phobia" of high notes was, in effect, a habit. It was an action reinforced by years of "tensing-up" every time he was required to play a high note. This habit was a formidable challenge to overcome.

A "bad" habit will result if you accidentally make repetitions of 1) a wrong note, 2) an incorrect rhythm, 3) excessive mouthpiece pressure, 4) sloppy tonguing... I'm sure that you get my point: anything that you repeat will become ingrained.

Your body (or your mind) does not distinguish between good and bad habits. Be certain that in your practice session you are not careless in repeating and reinforcing bad habits. Habits are formed by numerous repetitions of an action. Therefore, make sure that the habits which you are forming are the ones you want to keep!

Scales:

Scales, ugh! I'm certain that is how many of my students feel about playing their scales. However, probably nobody (no, not even those students) will deny that the mastery of scales is one of the most important building blocks in the fundamentals of almost all of the music we play.

Scales are easy. Really! Learning scales is a simple motor skill where, with enough correct repetitions of an action, that action is stored in the brain as a habit. The keyword here is **correct repetitions**. The brain cannot tell the difference between correct and incorrect scales. When we play a scale with a couple of wrong notes, the brain simply stores that as another action we have performed, potentially building the beginning of a "bad habit." To store the correct scale pattern as a habit we might have to play the scale two or more times correctly to cancel out the one time when we played it with an error.

In tabulating the total number of correct repetitions, we

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might think of it as positive and negative numbers: a correct repetition counts as +1, whereas an incorrect repetition counts, not as a zero but as a -2. Therefore, it is extremely important to avoid making mistakes.

This seems like such a self-evident truth, yet how does one totally avoid making mistakes? First, play slowly enough that you don't outrun your ability to play perfectly. Start at a slow tempo and do not try to pick up the tempo until you are certain that you can do so without missing any notes. Use music at first. Ultimately your scales should be memorized. However, if you attempt to play by memory too soon you may be guessing at the notes and you will make mistakes, giving reinforcement to the wrong patterns. Try practicing short patterns derived from scales so that you can indirectly help reinforce the complete scale patterns. Clarke's *Technical Studies* are good for reinforcing scale patterns. The example below is an exercise I call *half-scale patterns*. I find that it helps my students. Remember, the total number of **correct repetitions** is the key to reinforcing the accurate performance of the scale patterns.



These exercises are notated in their entirety and are available on the web in PDF format for you to download and print (<http://mailer.fsu.edu/~bgoff/tpt-tips/tipjggs/HalfScales.PDF>).



Ten Practice Myths *Continued from Page 3*

Myth #10: My practice warm-up should always be exactly the same.

Reality: You are pointed in the right direction, but...

While warm-up contributes significantly to performance consistency, rote repetition of exactly the same material for a fixed time period is unrealistically inflexible. Most advanced performers are flexible in their choice of specific warm-up exercises but typically review excises for breathing, lip buzzing or mouthpiece tones, long tone control, and technical studies. Avoid fixing the length of warm-up to a specific period of time. Instead, evaluate when to move on to other material by how the embouchure is responding and how much time you have to practice for a particular session.

You can contact Charles Decker directly by EMail (cdecker@tntech.edu).



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