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TRUMPET CARE AND REPAIR

BY TERRY ROUSH

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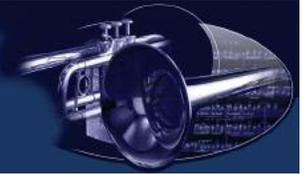
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TRUMPET CARE AND REPAIR

BY TERRY ROUSH

I started repairing brass instruments in 1973 at a music store that wanted someone to clean up used horns. While there I was able to observe two craftsmen doing their work, and it was during that time that I fell in love with musical instrument repair. I became educated in not only the skill of repair, but also with the love of it. After repairing musical instruments for over 35 years, I have seen practically every repair scenario from valves that had the wrong number on them to dead mice in trumpet bells.

There are certain problems I see time and time again. One common problem I see is in the area of frozen slides or frozen valves. Valves become frozen over the summer when calcium that is left on the valves hardens and freezes everything. My shop has a special acid to remove the “gunk,” but the better solution is to keep the horn in shape by cleaning and lubing it every once in a while. That being said, it is not a bad idea to have the horn “chemically cleaned” once a year to keep the calcium buildup to a minimum.

Many of the problems with valves have to do with fixing 2nd valves on trumpets, and could be avoided if players wouldn't put books and other larger objects in the case with the trumpet, causing the 2nd valve casing to become oval shaped. The second valve is also in the middle of the cluster of valves. If the bell becomes bent, it sometimes takes the three-valve cluster and bends it slightly; once again you've created an oval casing. Also, the second valve slide sticks out and cries, “Hit me!” When you open a case packed with music or books, notice which slide is being crushed—the 2nd valve slide. Finally, before yanking any valve out that seems frozen, check for debris in the slides going into valve ports. I have found many objects that inhibit movement such as paper clips, pencils, and other fragments. Once the valve is out, if you take it apart, make sure that the valve guides and springs are put back together properly. If the guides are upside down or backwards, this can cause sticky valves or cause the valves not to line up with the ports when depressed.

Concerning the slides on the trumpet, a simple weekly coating of slide grease or Vaseline on the slide will suffice to keep the slides moving. In middle school, I had a friend who used Vick's VapoRub instead... not a great idea! Particularly problematic is the third valve slide of the trumpet. Remember that the fingering for low D is not 1&3, but 1&3 with slide extended. The third slide should be lubed with lightweight grease, such as Vaseline or slide grease, and then thinned out with a

little valve oil applied.

Other suggestions to keep your trumpet at optimum playing level include:

1. “Simple Green” is a great cleaner for brass instruments.
2. When the spring goes out on the water key, using a rubber band on a silver instrument will discolor it by eating through the plating. Get this fixed soon.
3. It is not a bad idea to have a bore cleaner. Pulling the main slide and looking down the leadpipe can be a revelation. Using this device on the pipe and main tuning slide can cure a multitude of problems.
4. Make sure the mouthpiece has a place to rest in the case so that it doesn't bang on the valve casing. The smallest dent will cause a valve to freeze.
5. Mouthpiece pullers are cheap compared to the cost of replacing a leadpipe. I still make a good living thanks to the use of vice grips or door jams in place of using a mouthpiece puller to remove a stuck mouthpiece!

By following these simple steps, you can keep your trumpet functioning and give more years of life to your instrument. Remember that your trumpet is an investment toward your enjoyment of making music. All trumpets are made to certain specifications with some tolerances that are less than the width of a human hair. If you don't take care of your trumpet, it won't work the way it is intended!

About the author: Terry Roush is currently a repairman at Kerr's Music World in West Virginia.

