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CORRECTING COMMON MISTAKES

BY BECKI RONEN WALENZ

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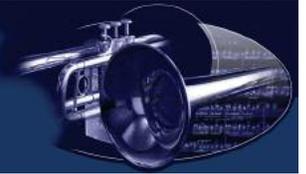
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CORRECTING COMMON MISTAKES

BY BECKI RONEN WALENZ

During the year that I spent serving as Miss Kansas much of my day was spent in band rooms with thousands of students from all across the state eager to learn and play their instrument more efficiently. It's through my travels over 45,000 miles of Kansas roads that I picked up on some common mistakes from young trumpet players. Below is a list and description of small adjustments developing trumpet players can make that lead to big improvement.

- **Breathing too frequently:** Many wind players make the easy mistake of taking a breath whenever they see a rest in their music, no matter how long or short the rest may be. This often causes musicians to “back up” in their air because they're not sufficiently using all the air in their lungs, and taking more air when they don't need it! To fix this problem, seek to understand the shape of each musical phrase, which rests indicate that a breath is needed (both musically *and* physically), and where it is best to continue a musical line uninterrupted by a breath. By learning where to breathe and where it is best to continue a line without breathing in additional air, we use our air more efficiently and produce a better sound.
- **“Tut” tonguing:** Abruptly cutting the sound short with the tongue is another common mistake among developing musicians. When being taught to start each note with the syllable “tah,” many brass players think they're being more accurate and clean by ending the note with the “t” sound, creating a “tut.” This creates a very spiky, short sound, making musicality and phrasing difficult. Instead, play a simple scale-like exercise to focus on the desired “tah” syllable, and the quality of the initial response, sustained tone quality, and overall musical product will greatly improve.
- **Poor posture:** Poor posture can lead to a couple of issues that are common among young trumpet players—lack of discipline and poor breath support. With a lack of discipline, there will be no drive to get any better, or keep playing at all. When the player can acknowledge the importance of sitting up straight, not just to improve breath support but to be disciplined in their practicing and performing, improvement will come as a byproduct of these positive habits. Proper posture includes holding the instrument at the appropriate angle and keeping the arms away from the body. Most trumpet players have a slight overbite and as a result the angle of the instrument will be slightly downward. For most young

players this means that the trumpet will be angled so that a straight line from the bell of the instrument to the floor will hit a spot approximately ten feet in front of a seated player. Holding the instrument at an angle that is too high or too low will bring the angle of the neck and head to a position that will create tension and close the throat. Experiment to find the right angle for the trumpet and the right position of the arms away from the body. Doing these things really helps the young musician develop a natural approach to the physicality of playing the trumpet.

- **Lack of confidence:** It is no secret that confidence is an important ingredient for great trumpet playing. The last quirk I picked up on during my travels is the playing of a “first note” quietly during rehearsal just “to get the first pitch” before performing a piece or an exercise, or playing the first note and then humming it until it is their turn to play. This sort of activity doesn't help and just leads to a heightened sense of insecurity. Encourage young musicians to be accountable for a good first attack, without the safety net of hearing it before attempting to play “for real.” Developing the ability to pre-hear pitches will give young musicians more confidence in performance, and will ultimately make them more accurate and sure of themselves as brass players.

Although I have only listed a few issues, I believe that fixing these common problems in developing trumpet players will ensure stronger, more efficient musicians in the end. By establishing good playing and practicing habits, we can give ourselves the best chance of success and have a lot more fun along the way as well!

About the author: Becki Ronen Walenz completed the MM degree in trumpet performance from the Crane School of Music at the State University of New York at Potsdam where she studied trumpet with John Ellis. In the fall of 2013 she will be teaching trumpet at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.



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